

On Nutrition: Another look at the Dirty Dozen

April 15 2022, by Barbara Intermill



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Did you ever think that strawberries, spinach and kale would be called "filthy"? Or leafy green vegetables "repeat offenders"? That's exactly how these especially nutritious fruits and vegetables are described in a

recent article in USA Today.

What's the reason for this scandalous charge? A [nonprofit organization](#) called the Environmental Working Group has released their annual Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen lists that target what they say are the most and least pesticide-contaminated non-organic fresh fruits and vegetables.

Not so fast, says the Alliance for Food and Farming (SafeFruitsandVeggies.com), another nonprofit that represents both organic and conventional farmers. The organization says the conclusions reached by the EWG are not supported by science and may unnecessarily scare people from eating perfectly safe and [healthy food](#).

In fact, toxicologists (experts in the science of poisons) say the same data used by the EWG actually shows us how incredibly safe our food is from the effects of pesticides. In 2020, for example, the USDA's Pesticide Data Program found that over 99% of the samples tested had residues well below the tolerances established by the Environmental Protection Agency. And 30% of the samples had no detectable pesticide residue at all. That's pretty impressive, since technology can now detect as little as one part in a billion.

Why do we need pesticides at all? They protect valuable food crops from disease-causing pests. Even organic farmers use approved pesticides when needed.

As one expert said, we should all try to minimize the amount of pesticides on the food we eat. But we don't have to singularly avoid conventionally produced foods to meet that goal.

If this sounds like a plea to ignore the benefits of organically grown foods, it's not. It is simply to put the health benefits of all fruits and vegetables into perspective. Decades of studies continue to show that a

diet rich in fruits and vegetables (both organically and conventionally grown) prevents numerous diseases, improves our [mental abilities](#) and immune function and leads to a [longer life](#).

So the point seems not so much whether a fruit or vegetable is grown with the use of organic or conventional pesticides, but whether or not we are eating those fruits or vegetables. Even the EWG confirms that the health benefits of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables outweigh the risks of pesticide exposure.

Bottom line: We should eat more vegetables and fruit. And we can safely choose produce that has been grown organically or conventionally. It's been estimated, for example, that a woman could eat 774 servings of conventionally grown spinach and still have no [toxic effects](#) from pesticide residue.

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