



Briefing Room Q&As

2013 Pesticide Data Program (PDP) Annual Summary

Q: What are the main conclusions from the 2013 Pesticide Data Program annual summary?

A: The PDP summary shows that, overall, pesticide residues found on foods tested are at levels below the tolerances set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and do not pose risk to consumers' health.

Q: What is the purpose and value of this summary?

A: The pesticide data that USDA publishes each year provide regulators, scientists, farmers, processors, and consumers with important insights into the actual levels of pesticide residues found on widely consumed foods. EPA uses PDP data to conduct dietary risk assessments and to ensure that any pesticide residues in foods remain at safe levels.

USDA also uses the data to better understand the relationship of pesticide residues to agricultural practices and to enhance USDA's Integrated Pest Management objectives. USDA shares PDP data with our trading partners to demonstrate the safety of U.S. exports. The results indicate that many growers have successfully been able to incorporate the newer, safer pesticides as opposed to older pesticides in their integrated pest management programs.

Q: What were the results?

A: The 2013 data summary shows that when pesticide residues are found on foods, they are nearly always at levels below the tolerances set by the EPA. Excluding water, residues exceeding the established tolerance were detected in 0.23 percent (23 of 9,990) of the samples, and 3.0 percent (301 of 9,990) of the samples had residues with no established tolerance for the specific commodity tested. For baby food and infant formula, the data show that no residues were found that exceeded the tolerance levels. One residue on one baby food sample was found where no tolerance was established, but the extremely low level of this residue is not a food safety risk. The presence of such residues does not pose a safety concern.

Q: What is a tolerance level?

A: A tolerance is the maximum amount of a pesticide residue allowable on a raw agricultural commodity. If a pesticide is used on food crops, EPA sets a tolerance for the pesticide that can remain in or on foods. In setting the tolerance, EPA evaluates hazard and exposure data to assess risk to human health and the environment for requested uses. EPA is required to make a safety finding for the pesticide that accounts for exposure through various food items, water, and home environments. PDP data is a critical component of EPA's dietary assessments of pesticide exposure.



Q: How many samples were taken?

A: PDP tested a total of 10,104 samples. The products tested were fresh and processed fruit and vegetables (including 757 baby food samples), infant formula (356 samples), butter (756 samples), salmon (352 samples), potable groundwater (14 samples), and treated and untreated drinking water (100 samples). Data are collected in a variety of States and throughout the year such that the samples are representative of the entire United States.

Q: Is the food I buy safe for my child?

A: Based on the data from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and on EPA's assessment that the small amount of pesticides found in a few of the samples present no health risk, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has concluded that pesticide residues in baby foods pose no risk of concern.

Q: What happens when samples have residues but no tolerance has been set by EPA?

A: FDA considers samples that contain pesticide residues for which no tolerances have been established by EPA to be in violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. FDA uses this information to inform its future compliance activities, such as conducting targeted testing or implementing Import Alerts to flag future shipments for closer scrutiny. With the 2013 data, FDA evaluated the PDP data and, in consultation with EPA, determined there was no immediate health risk. It is important to remember that the samples for which no tolerance was established had extremely low levels of residues and were found in 3.0 percent of samples. These levels did not exceed tolerance levels for other commodities that have established tolerances for the pesticide residues detected.

Q: How else does EPA use the PDP data?

A: EPA uses PDP data for its ongoing evaluation of pesticide tolerances to ensure that the levels set by EPA meet the safety standards prescribed by the law. EPA has cancelled or modified uses for various pesticide registrations based on PDP data. Furthermore, the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) of 1996 mandated periodic review of all registered pesticides. Through the agency's registration review program, all pesticides distributed and sold in the United States must be registered by EPA based on scientific data showing that it will not cause unreasonable risks to human health, workers, or the environment when used as directed on product labeling. As the ability to assess risk evolves and as policies and practices change, the registration review program ensures that all registered pesticides continue to meet the statutory standard of no unreasonable adverse effects.