



Agricultural Marketing Service

2015 Pesticide Data Program (PDP) Annual Summary Q&A

Q: What are the main conclusions from the 2015 PDP annual summary?

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

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

A: The pesticide data that USDA publishes each year provide regulators, scientists, farmers, processors, manufacturers, 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 uses the data to work with growers to improve agricultural practices. 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 2015 data summary shows that when pesticide residues are found on foods, they are nearly always at levels below the tolerances set by the EPA. In 2015, 99 percent of the samples tested had residues well below the EPA established tolerances with 15 percent having no detectable pesticide residue. Residues exceeding the established tolerance were detected in 0.53 percent (54 of 10,187) of the samples, and 3.9 percent (394 of 10,187) of the samples had residues with no established tolerance for the specific commodity tested. For peanut butter, the data show that no residues were found that exceeded the tolerance levels, nor were there any residues with no established tolerance.



Q: How many samples were taken?

A: PDP tested a total of 10,187 samples. The products tested were fresh and processed fruit and vegetables (9,872 samples) and peanut butter (315 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: Yes, based on the PDP data and on EPA's assessment, 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 pose no risk of concern for infants and children.

Q: What is a tolerance level?

A: A tolerance is the maximum amount of a pesticide residue allowable on a raw agricultural commodity¹. 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: What happens when samples have residues but no tolerance 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 2015 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 3.9 percent of samples.

Q: What happens when samples have residues that exceed the EPA tolerance?

A: PDP provides FDA and EPA with monthly reports of pesticide residue testing and informs the FDA if residues detected exceed the EPA tolerance or have no EPA tolerance established. In instances where a PDP finding is extraordinary and may pose a safety risk, FDA and EPA are notified immediately.

¹ For processed commodities, the tolerance reported by PDP is for the raw agricultural commodity unless a specific tolerance for the processed commodity is established.



Q: Does PDP test water?

A: PDP tested raw and finished drinking water drawn from municipal systems from 2001 through 2013. Samples were collected from 29 States plus the District of Columbia. PDP also tested groundwater (2007 through 2013) and bottled water. PDP's water surveys were discontinued in 2013 due to funding constraints.

Q: Why doesn't PDP test for some pesticides, such as glyphosate?

A: USDA and EPA work together to identify foods to be tested based on EPA's data needs. EPA uses PDP data to conduct dietary risk assessments and to ensure that pesticide residues in foods are not a food safety risk. Glyphosate residue is not currently part of PDP sampled pesticides.

Currently, FDA is testing corn and soybean grains for glyphosate residues. The FDA glyphosate residues testing will provide results to help determine if EPA needs additional data. When FDA results become available, USDA will consult with EPA to ensure we continue to provide quality data to meet EPA's data needs.

Q: How else does EPA use the PDP data?

A: EPA uses PDP data for its ongoing evaluation of established 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 they 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.