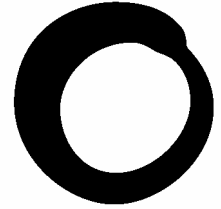


October 2002



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# Briefing

# Pesticides in supermarket food

Friends of the Earth believe that the food we buy in supermarkets should be safe to eat and produced in a way which safeguards the environment. For example, consumers should be able to buy food without having to worry about whether it contains pesticide residues. Yet recent Government figures show that about half of the fruit and vegetables sold in supermarkets contain pesticide residues.

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- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland**
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### What can supermarkets do about pesticides?

Supermarkets sell most of the food we eat in the UK. The top six supermarkets (Asda, Morrison, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Safeway and Somerfield) control about 80 per cent of the grocery market<sup>1</sup>. Supermarkets therefore have a high level of influence and control over the food chain. Farmers who supply the major supermarkets will normally be required to follow protocols which set out guidance on pesticide use and which may suggest some non-chemical ways of controlling pests and diseases. The most common of these are the 'Assured Produce' schemes. However there is so far little indication that these protocols have resulted in any notable decrease in pesticide use or the incidence of pesticide residues in supermarket food. The following list shows the incidence of residues in supermarket fruit and vegetables according to the last three annual reports published by the Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC)<sup>2</sup>.

#### Pesticide residues in supermarket food 1998-2001

Supermarket	% fruit and veg with residues	number of samples
Somerfield	60	109
Safeway	49	349
Marks & Spencer	49	94
Tesco	48	716
Sainsbury's	48	587
Asda	48	421
Waitrose	46	120
Co-op	43	109
Morrisons	42	173
Total	48	2678

Friends of the Earth consider that supermarkets should do more to reduce pesticide use. The codes of practice they set up with farmers should aim for a significant reduction in pesticide use and zero residues of pesticides in food. In practice this means that there should be no detectable residues even as technology develops and allows lower and lower levels to be found. Supermarkets should also prohibit the use of those pesticides which have the highest evidence of risk to the environment or health. This includes pesticides which have been shown to disrupt the hormone system like carbendazim, lindane and vinclozolin, and those that affect the nervous system like aldicarb and chlorpyrifos.

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<sup>1</sup>Competition Commission (2000) 'Supermarkets'

<sup>2</sup>Friends of the Earth analysed data in the Annual Report of the Working Party on Pesticide Residues 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 Brand Name Annex

Farmers will need support and advice in order to reduce pesticide use significantly and to find alternatives to the most dangerous pesticides. Supermarkets should help farmers by providing advice and information to them about alternatives and by paying farmers a fair price for the food they supply. Supermarkets, and their customers, will need to be more flexible about the cosmetic appearance of fruit and vegetables because farmers have to use pesticides to achieve blemish free produce.

Supermarkets will also need to check carefully that farmers are following good practice. However the Government must also play its part in finding alternatives to harmful pesticides, promoting and rewarding good practice and taking action where farmers flaunt the rules.

Friends of the Earth have found that most supermarkets have a policy to reduce the use of pesticides in producing their food, or to reduce the incidence of residues in the food they sell. However, there is a wide variation in the action that each of the supermarkets are taking and in how open they are prepared to be about their policies and about the pesticides which are found. Friends of the Earth regularly asks the supermarkets what they are doing to reduce pesticide use and residues - the table below gives our verdict.

### **Friends of the Earth's position**

Friends of the Earth want supermarkets to take the following action:

1. Prohibit the use of the most dangerous pesticides by farmers who supply them, including those that are proven to disrupt the hormone system;
2. Aim for residue-free food and make this clear in their codes of practice on pesticides;
3. Provide free advice and information to the farmers who supply them about alternative methods of controlling pests and diseases;
4. Be more flexible about cosmetic standards for fruit and vegetables to make it easier for farmers to cut down on pesticide use.
5. Lobby Government for more research into alternatives to pesticides;
6. Set up independent monitoring and verification schemes to check on pesticide usage by farmers; and
7. Publish the results of their own pesticide residue testing in a way which is accessible to their customers.

### **Ask your supermarket for real food!**

Have a look at the following table to see what the supermarkets are doing to get pesticides out of food. If you're not satisfied with your supermarket's response, let them know. You can visit our website (address below) and email your supermarket from our Real Food pages.

## Pesticides in supermarket food

Our Verdict	Supermarket	Steps in the right direction	Next steps
1. Leaders	Marks & Spencer	M&S has prohibited the use by its suppliers of 60 pesticides, although some of these are banned in the UK already the M&S prohibition will apply globally. 19 other pesticides can be used on a restricted basis only. M&S has committed to phasing out all pesticides which disrupt the hormone system. It has set targets for residue reduction in fresh produce and is aiming for zero residues in the long term. M&S publishes the results of its own testing on its website.	M&S has some way to go, since about half its fruit and veg contains residues, but this should improve as the effects of its new policies are felt. Some of the pesticides identified as hormone disrupters are restricted but not banned so M&S will need to work with its suppliers to find alternatives. M&S may need to be more flexible about the cosmetic appearance of its food in order to meet its residue targets.
2. Runners up	Co-op	Co-op has drawn up a list of 50 pesticides which are prohibited or restricted and gives practical advice to help farmers find alternatives. It is aiming for zero residues in all its food and has committed to phasing out all pesticides which disrupt the hormone system. Co-op also publishes its residue testing results - it was the first supermarket to do so.	Co-op has not included some of the most risky pesticides like carbendazim and vinclozolin on its prohibited list yet. It should work with farmers to find alternatives to these pesticides.
3. Getting there	Waitrose	Waitrose is working with its suppliers to eliminate the use of several pesticides including lindane. Others can only be used on a very restricted basis including all the organophosphates which are of concern due to the way they work on the nervous system. Waitrose has said it will phase out the use of hormone disrupting pesticides. It actively seeks alternatives to these pesticides.	Waitrose should make its testing results public and aim for zero residues. It needs to continue to find alternatives to the pesticides it restricts in order that they can be phased out completely.

## Pesticides in supermarket food

4. Work to do	Sainsbury's	Sainsbury's has made a commitment to pesticide reduction and to phasing out aldicarb, carbendazim and vinclozolin. It says that it will not allow the use by its suppliers in any country of any pesticide banned in the UK. But Sainsbury's has made misleading claims in adverts and even on its plastic bags about reducing residues in food despite the fact that almost half its fruit and veg contains pesticides.	Sainsbury's should be honest with consumers. It should publish a list of prohibited and restricted pesticides and make its testing results public. It should aim for zero residues in all its food. Sainsbury's should stop making claims about reducing pesticides until it can show some progress.
	Iceland	Iceland made a commitment to get lindane out of its food, including chocolate, and to aim for residue-free food. But Iceland has failed to respond to a recent Friends of the Earth survey on pesticides.	It should make its testing results public and extend its list of banned pesticides beyond lindane.
5. Struggling	Safeway	Safeway says that it aims to reduce residues in children's food ('Kid's Range') including apples and pears but does not set a target date for these foods to be residue free. It does not prohibit the use of any of the most risky pesticides nor has it made a commitment to do so. But Safeway does say that it will not allow the use in any country of pesticides which are banned in the UK or EU.	Safeway needs to set a date by which its 'Kid's Range' foods will be free of pesticides and should apply the same target to all foods popular with children. It should commit to phasing out the use of the most risky pesticides.
6. Falling behind	Asda	Asda claimed that it has prohibited the use of some pesticides including carbendazim, although this has turned up since in Asda fruit and vegetables. It does not appear to have a general policy of pesticide reduction and has failed to respond to a recent Friends of the Earth survey on pesticide policies.	If Asda has managed to eliminate the use of carbendazim it should share the information and if not it should stop telling lies. It should also publish its testing results, so consumers can make sure these pesticides are not still in Asda food, and aim for zero residues.

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	Tesco	Tesco has developed a scheme called Nature's Choice which encourages 'rational' pesticide use. Tesco says it works with suppliers to keep pesticide use to the minimum required, but details about the scheme are not available to the public.	Tesco should publish details of its Nature's Choice scheme. It should ban the most risky pesticides and make the results of its residue testing public.
7. Stuck in a rut	Aldi	Aldi and Somerfield indicate that they aim to reduce pesticide usage or residues but won't prohibit pesticides which are approved in the UK. Somerfield has one of the highest incidences of residues in its fruit and veg. Although Morrisons has the lowest incidence of residues, it has no stated policy to reduce pesticide residues and it failed to respond to a recent Friends of the Earth survey on pesticide policies.	Aldi, Morrisons and Somerfield should ban the most dangerous pesticides like hormone disrupters, they must do more to reduce overall residues and they should publish their testing results.
	Somerfield		
	Morrisons		
8. Slackers	Netto	Netto has no stated policy to reduce pesticide residues. It failed to respond to a recent Friends of the Earth survey on pesticide policies.	Netto should wake up to the fact that consumers do not want pesticides in their food.