Briefing

Pesticides in supermarket food

Friends of the Earth believes 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 Government figures show that about half of the fruit and vegetables sold in supermarkets contain pesticide residues.
**Pesticides in supermarket food**

**What can supermarkets do about pesticides?**

Supermarkets sell most of the food we eat in the UK. The top four supermarkets (Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Asda, and Morrisons/Safeway) control over 70 per cent of the grocery market in the UK. 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).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supermarket</th>
<th>Percentage of fruit and veg with residues</th>
<th>Number of samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marks &amp; Spencer</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeway</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sainsbury’s</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asda</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-op</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerfield</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waitrose</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrisons</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td><strong>5475</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 such as carbendazim, lindane and vinclozolin, and those that affect the nervous system such as aldicarb and chlorpyrifos.

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.

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1 Taylor Nelson Sofres share of till roll 52 w/e December 8 2002. From Grocer magazine 11 January 2003 “Redrawing the grocery map of Britain” and Guardian 14 January 2003 “Who’ll be going down the aisle”.

2 Pesticide Residues Committee Quarterly and Annual Pesticide Monitoring Reports 1998-2003
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 is 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 table below 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. Please send any replies you get to info@foe.co.uk.

**How Friends of the Earth rate the supermarkets on pesticides**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our verdict</th>
<th>Supermarket</th>
<th>Steps in the right direction</th>
<th>Next steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leaders</td>
<td>Marks &amp; Spencer</td>
<td>M&amp;S has prohibited the use by its suppliers of 60 pesticides. Although some of these are</td>
<td>M&amp;S still needs to ban some risky pesticides such as vinclozolin - a hormone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>banned in the UK already, the M&amp;S prohibition will apply globally. 19 other pesticides can</td>
<td>disrupter, which is restricted but not banned. M&amp;S will need to work with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>be used on a restricted basis only. M&amp;S has committed to phasing out any pesticides which</td>
<td>its suppliers to find alternatives. M&amp;S may need to be more flexible about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>may pose health or environmental risks before they are officially banned. It has set</td>
<td>the cosmetic appearance of its food in order to meet its residue targets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>targets for residue reduction in fresh produce and is aiming for</td>
<td></td>
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### Pesticides in supermarket food

| 3. Getting there | Waitrose | Waitrose is working with its suppliers globally 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 still needs to ban some of the most risky pesticides like carbendazim and vinclozolin - at present their use is only restricted. It needs to continue to find alternatives to the pesticides it restricts in order that they can be phased out completely. |
| 4. Work to do | Sainsbury’s | Sainsbury’s has made a commitment to pesticide reduction and to phasing out aldicarb, carbendazim and vinclozolin, but carbendazim is still turning up on Sainsbury’s fruit and veg. It says that it will not allow the use by its suppliers in any country of any pesticide which is banned in the UK. | Sainsbury’s should make its residue testing results public, and publish a list of prohibited and restricted pesticides. It should aim for zero residues in all its food. It should set a date for its commitment to phasing out aldicarb, carbendazim and vinclozolin, and add other risky pesticides to its list. It should work with farmers to find alternatives to these pesticides. |
| 5. Falling behind | Asda | Asda claims that it has prohibited the use of carbendazim, but this is still turning up in Asda fruit and vegetables. It does not appear to have a general policy of pesticide reduction and failed to respond to a recent Friends of the Earth survey on pesticide policies. | Asda should live up to its promises and publish its testing results so consumers can make sure these pesticides are not still in Asda food. It should aim for zero residues. |
| | Tesco | Tesco has developed a scheme called Nature's Choice which | Tesco should publish details of its Nature's Choice |
Tescos scheme encourages 'rational' pesticide use, but details of the scheme are not available to the public. Tesco says it works with suppliers to keep pesticide use to the minimum required, but nearly half of Tesco fruit and veg contains residues according to Government testing.

7. Stuck in a rut

Somerfield

Somerfield indicates that it aims to reduce pesticide usage or residues but it won't prohibit pesticides which are approved in the UK.

Somerfield should ban the most dangerous pesticides like hormone disrupters and work with farmers to find alternatives. It should publish its own residue testing results.

8. Slackers

Morrisons/Safeway

Morrisons has no stated policy to reduce pesticide residues and failed to respond to the last Friends of the Earth survey on pesticide policies. Safeway has said that it aims to reduce residues in its 'Kid's Range' apples and pears, but it is not clear if this policy will remain now that Safeway has been taken over by Morrisons

Morrisons should wake up to the fact that consumers do not want pesticides in their food. It should develop a pesticide reduction policy, and take action on phasing out the use of risky pesticides and work with farmers to find alternatives. It should also publish its own residue testing results.

**Supermarket contact details:**

**Asda**

**Tel:** 0500 100 055  
**Fax:** 0113 241 7732  
**Email via web page:** [http://www.asda.co.uk](http://www.asda.co.uk)  
**Write to:**  
Customer Services,  
ASDA House,  
Southbank,  
Great Wilson Street,  
Leeds LS11 5AD

**Co-op**

**Tel:** 0800 0686 727  
**Email:** customer.relations@co-op.co.uk  
**Write to:**  
Customer Relations  
Freepost MR9473  
Manchester
Pesticides in supermarket food

M4 8BA

Marks & Spencer

Tel: 0845 302 1234
Fax: 0845 303 0170
Email via web page: http://www.marksandspencer.com
Write to:
Retail Customer Services
Marks & Spencer
Chester Business Park
Wrexham Road
Chester CH4 9GA

Morrisons/Safeway

Tel: 01924 870000 and ask for the Customer Service Department
Write to:
Customer Service Department
Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc
J41 Industrial Estate
Carr Gate
Wakefield WF2 0XF

Sainsbury's

Tel: 0800 636 262
Email via website: http://www.sainsburys.co.uk/contactus/
Write to:
Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd
33 Holborn
London EC1N 2HT

Sommerfield

Tel: 0117 935 9359
Fax: 0117 978 0629
Email via website: http://www.somerfield.co.uk/site/contact/feedback/index.asp
Write to:
Sommerfield Stores Ltd
Sommerfield House
Whitchurch Lane
Whitchurch
Bristol BS14 0TJ

Tesco

Tel: 0800 505 555
Email: customer.services@tesco.co.uk

Waitrose

Tel: 0800 188 884
Email: customer_service@waitrose.co.uk
Write to:
Waitrose Customer Service Department
Waitrose Limited
Doncastle Road
Bracknell
Berkshire RG12 8YA