

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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## Produce – or Pesticide?

Despite the recent headlines, you're still better off eating fruits and vegetables! If you saw the headlines recently you might have noticed that there's been another change in what is called the "Dirty Dozen", the foods that are considered to be the most contaminated by pesticides. Every year the USDA reports on the results of their on-going surveys of pesticides in our food supply. And every year various groups create their lists of what not to eat. The USDA report just came out for 2009, so there's a new list out. Interestingly, some of the foods on the 'dirty' list were not even included in the USDA report! But there's a lot more to consider as well.

What did they test? The USDA labs that collected and analyzed the foods looked for over 200 different chemicals that might contaminate fruits, vegetables, rice, meats or water. They checked thousands of food samples. Just apples of alone, they tried to find and measure 198 different chemicals in 744 different samples of apples from states all across the country, or 140,881 individual tests. They also checked asparagus, cilantro, cucumbers, grapes, green onions, organic lettuce, oranges, pears, potatoes, spinach, strawberries, fresh sweet corn and sweet potatoes. Those were just the fresh produce items. They checked 5 canned vegetables, beef, and rice too.

How much did they measure? Pesticide measurements are usually reported as *parts per million* or ppm. That means that of 1 million ounces, 1 ppm would be 1 ounce. A comparison of ppm to our usual measures would be 1 drop of water in the gas tank of a compact car. Or about 30 seconds (half a minute) out of a year. So ppm is not very

much. What they could measure was as small as .001 ppm. That's as little as 1 drop of water in 1000 gas tanks. This is not very much stuff they're measuring in there!

How much did they find? Let's use apples as an example, since that's the fruit headlined in the 'dirty' list. Of those 140,881 tests they did, 2.6% had a pesticide on them. Of the 198 pesticides they looked for, they found just 48. Of those 48, only 2 had high enough levels that they had to be reported to FDA.

How high is too high? Each pesticide has a tolerance level. It's set by figuring first how much it takes to cause some kind of change in lab animals. The smallest amount that causes any kind of change is divided by 100, to give us humans a safety buffer of 100. Then, the more foods a pesticide might be in, the less is allowed in each one. It's divided down so that no person is likely to eat enough of all the different foods to get that much. Only 2 apples had more than their allowed amount (tolerance level) of pesticide. Most of the other produce that was tested had even less than the 2.6% contamination that the apples had.

Compare this very small percentage of produce tested that was contaminated to the benefits of eating more produce. We know that fruits and vegetables have lots of vitamins, minerals, protein, carbohydrates and fiber. They are also the sources of many, many antioxidants and phytonutrients, all those things that protect us from cancers, diabetes, Alzheimer's and other diseases. They're high in nutrients and low in calories. They have the minerals to lower our blood pressure. The ones that have any fat have mostly the healthy, unsaturated oils. Diets high in fruits and vegetables have been shown over and over to be the diets that help us manage our weight and keep us healthy. Avoiding fresh produce or limiting ourselves to just a few kinds because of

such minor amounts of contamination is like the old saying, we're "cutting off our noses to spite our faces!" It does us more harm than it helps prevent.

What should we do? Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. That way we're less likely to be loading up on any particular contaminant. Wash your produce in clean running water. Tap water is fine, no special cleaners are needed. Buy locally grown produce. The foods grown in the US had less contamination than the imported ones. Cooked, raw, canned frozen, it doesn't matter, just eat your fruits and veggies!

### Tossed Veggies in Creamy Sauce

1 bag frozen mixed vegetables for steaming	2 medium tomatoes, cut in wedges
3-4 green onions, thinly sliced	4 oz small mushrooms, optional
¼ cup fat free plain yogurt	2 Tbsp white wine vinegar
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard	1 tsp sugar or sweetener
1 tsp canola or olive oil	salt, pepper to taste

Steam vegetables according to package directions until tender-crisp. Drop immediately into ice water to chill. Don't overcook! Quarter mushrooms if using. Add tomatoes, onions and mushrooms to steamed vegetables. Mix other ingredients in small bowl. Add to vegetables, toss gently to coat. Refrigerate ½ to 4 hours. Serves 8.