

## Viewpoint: Toxic fruits and vegetables? Inspired by Environmental Working Group's chemical scare fundraising gimmick in the US, Pesticide Action Network brings disinformation to Europe



ould you feed fruits and vegetables to your family after reading these headlines?

Many European consumers may not, and they'd be making a big mistake.

screenshot on the unknown

Fruits and vegetables are widely recognized as a critical part of a healthy diet. But according to a new report named [Forbidden Fruit](#) by the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe, if you consume these healthy dietary staples you are essentially being poisoned. But how can regulators not take action, and why isn't everyone dropping dead?

The new report steals its unscrupulous methods directly from the organic-industry funded Environmental Working Group (EWG) in the United States, which each year releases a 'Dirty Dozen' hit list of supposedly chemical-drenched fruits and vegetables. While [decried by scientists](#) for its hysteria and misportrayal of the minute danger of vanishingly small traces of chemical residues, it's been a [fund-raising bonanza](#) for the activist group. Now the deceptive model is being copied in Europe. It's a direct attack on the conventional market — propaganda often cited by well-meaning but ill-informed health and natural food sites and by journalists at mainstream news outlets who should know better.

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### Are conventional fruits and vegetables soaked with chemicals?

Government regulators all over the world carefully monitor pesticide residues on fruits and vegetables acquired from multiple sources, including imports. These reports are published on government websites and provide transparent evidence about the safety of produce. The goal is to build public trust, to verify that agricultural chemistries are being used responsibly.

For example, in the European Union, Brussels started to [monitor the progress of member states in 2019](#) in reducing trace chemicals in food. Last year, the EU found a recent [12 percent drop in the presence of pesticides](#) that contain toxic chemicals. On the other hand, PAN—using its unarticulated 'proprietary' evaluation process (a tactic in non-transparency that mimics EWG in the U.S.), claims to have found a recent increase in 'harmful' residues of 53%

So how do organizations like PAN take data that verify safety and contort them into toxic poison?

## PAN's flawed 'process' is designed to scare

The Pesticide Action Network Europe does not perform the sophisticated analytical chemistry required to measure pesticide residues. Instead, they rely on EU monitoring data furnished by the Multiannual Control Programme (MCP). The MCP carefully assesses the presence of discrete pesticides where their levels are above 0.01 mg/kg, that is, ten parts per billion, or about ten seconds in 32 years. These ultra-sensitive testing methods can detect chemistries present on just this side of not there.

The PAN 'analysis' focuses on the EU's Candidates for Substitution, a cadre of 77 agricultural chemicals that have been identified for replacement with "more favourable" alternatives or non-chemical methods. That does not necessarily mean less risky or more effective, it means substituted with a non-synthetic or naturally occurring poison that might do a similar job.

These EU data that demonstrate safety are distorted as dangerous in a simple way: PAN abandons the significant information in knowing how much is present. They ignore quantitation. If a given chemical is detected at a wisp of a trace with no possible risk, it is counted as if the fruit or vegetable is dripping with deleterious chemistry. It is akin to someone taking an eye dropper of crude oil and placing a drop in the ocean in Iceland, and then reporting that penguins will be coated in sludge in Antarctica, after all, there is oil in the water. Drop of oil = Exxon Valdez. Same.

In this parlance, if a chemical is *detected*, the produce item is deemed "contaminated", a word used frequently in the report.

But in the real world the dose makes the poison. When they ignore dose information a smattering of a few molecules is considered equal to a concentrated reagent. Whether it is detected at tens of thousands of times below biologically relevant levels, or whether it is there in lethal concentrations (which nothing was even close) it is counted as a positive.

With this approach it is easy to make something innocuous sound like an atrocity.

## Kiwi example

Kiwi fruits provide a good illustration. They were tested for fudioxonil, a fungicide applied to kiwifruits, oftentimes after harvest. It helps limit the growth of fungus on the fruit during shipping and retail, which means a better product for consumers and less food waste.

This chemical targets a specific aspect of fungal metabolism, poses low risk to non-fungal organisms, and is easily rinsed off. Because it is applied after harvest, it is not surprising that it was detected on 29% of kiwi fruits. In all cases the levels were well below the stringent Maximum Residue Level (MRL) an amount defined as concentration permitted on produce, a tolerance hundreds to thousands of times below biologically relevant levels.

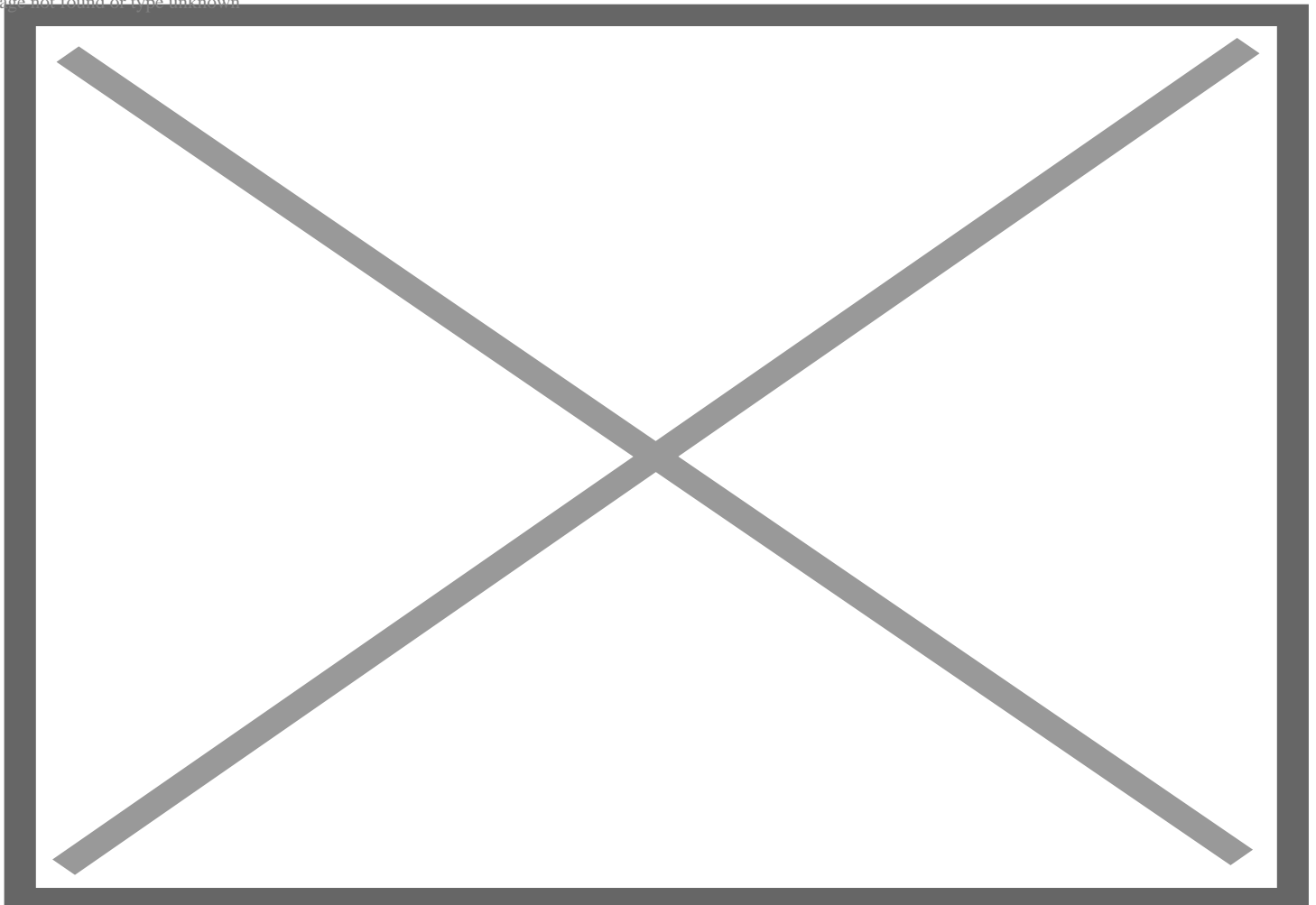
They also use deceiving rhetoric to manufacture risk where none is known to exist. For example, with regard to Fludoxonil fungicide, their report states: “Endocrine disrupting effects are suspected buy comprehensive data is (sic) lacking.”

Which in science language means: *There are no data to support the hypothesis that Fludoxonil is an endocrine disruptor.* Same data, two completely opposite interpretations.

## Consumer confusion

Intent on increasing the sale of their organic food sponsors, PAN and EWG throw red meat warning flags to social media and undiscerning journalists who report inflammatory misrepresentations over science 101 and sober reality.

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Sadly, organizations these activist NGOs masquerading as public interest groups exploit the conduits of major media to spread their distortion. The complicated nuance of food safety, coupled to the potential for a bump in views or clicks, makes fearful headlines all too attractive to non-science-minded journalists, who are duped into spreading disinformation.

This article in *Daily News Hungary* claims that pesticide levels rise, yet the actual “level” of pesticides was never reported. PAN Europe only reported the rate of detection, not the levels measured, which are almost all below the EU’s strict standards, counting on anti-agriculture groups to perpetuate the misinformation.

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This has harmful effects. Many of us stop eating relatively inexpensive fresh fruits and vegetables, with many opting instead for processed foods. Some may choose organic produce, which costs significantly more, is not affordable to many, and uses a host of pesticides not monitored by government bodies. Heck, they’re natural, how bad can they be? (see all natural [alpha-amanitin](#), [DIMBOA](#), [cyanide](#))

The collateral damage to consumers, the erosion of trust in regulators, and the fear of healthy fruits and vegetables does not deter organizations like PAN and EWG from their deliberate misrepresentations. They grab headlines, conjure a perception of looking out for consumers, and keep donations coming in. In reality, these organizations seek to remove tools from farmers’ choice, promote antiquated crop production methods, and ultimately break trust in government regulators.

So how should you interpret this report? Understand how data are distorted to generate [inflammatory headlines](#). Ignore the disinformation. Instead celebrate that we live in times of unprecedented choice and abundance, with the safest food supply in human history.

**Kevin M. Folta is a professor, keynote speaker and podcast host. Follow Professor Folta on Twitter [@kevinfolta](#)**