

Viewpoint: Disinformation on alleged dangers of chemical residues on fruits and vegetables is not only bad science, it causes consumers to avoid produce

Peer reviewed research and Alliance for Food and Farming (AFF) [surveys among consumers](#) and [registered dietitians](#) all show the negative impact of misinformation about pesticide residues on produce consumption among consumers. And, last week, [a new national survey was released by the International Food Information Council \(IFIC\)](#) where 60% of respondents stated that they did not consume certain foods due to concerns about residues. For the people who say they have avoided food because of pesticide concerns, 71% report that they avoided vegetables and 59% avoided fruits, according to IFIC's survey.

With decades of government data and peer reviewed studies showing the overwhelming safety of conventionally grown produce, IFIC's survey adds to the mounting evidence of how misleading and inaccurate fear-based messaging by agendized groups is discouraging consumption of nutrient-dense produce.

Health officials and registered dietitians are increasingly concerned that fears about produce safety are becoming another barrier to consumption since only one in 10 of Americans currently consume enough fruits and vegetables each day.

"Fruits and vegetables provide abundant antioxidants that protect our bodies by building healthy cells. Therefore, I find it hard to understand why anyone would discourage people from eating something so incredibly nutritious such as fruits and vegetables, which can lower the risk of chronic disease. That's why my top advice will always be: Eat your fruits and veggies," says Dr. Sylvia Klinger, DBA, MS, RD, founder of [Hispanic Food Communications](#) who serves on the AFF's Management Board.

"I will continue to advocate to the public that consuming more produce in all forms is good for your health considering the decades of research that continue to prove this," says Elizabeth Shaw, MS, RDN, CPT, Founder of [Shaw Simple Swaps](#) and an AFF Board member. "With the mixed messages people receive from news outlets, social media, and their peers, it's important health authorities like registered dietitians continue to drive home the message that consuming any form of produce is better than consuming no produce."

IFIC's study also underscores the lack of understanding about farming. When respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement, "Organic agriculture does not use pesticides to grow food," almost half agreed with a quarter stating they were unsure. Only 26% correctly stated that this statement was false.

For those surprised by this information, organic production is also reliant on the use of pesticides – natural and some synthetics – to grow safe and healthy produce. (Visit the [Safety Standard](#) section at [safefruitsandveggies.com](#) to learn more about the regulations governing the use of pesticides in organic production.)

There is good news in the IFIC survey: “Government agencies, health professionals, and farmers are the most trusted sources about the safety of pesticides in food production.”

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’ innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

The AFF’s survey also found that consumers look to these credible sources for safety information. This is why the AFF conducts tours of fruit and vegetable farms so media contributors and influencers can meet farmers, see what they do firsthand and share what they learn with consumers.

And why we repeatedly and consistently share results of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s [Pesticide Data Program](#) and [Food and Drug Administration](#) residue sampling results to anyone and everyone. (These government sampling programs find that over 99% of the foods sampled had residues well below established safety levels, if residues are present at all.)

IFIC’s conclusions about their survey results complement that of peer reviewed research and the AFF as well as dietitians’ concerns.

- IFIC: “This new consumer research from IFIC highlights gaps in consumer understanding and provides key insights for developing effective messaging that reminds and reassures the public that consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables, in all forms and from all production methods, is safe, nutritious, and an important component to achieving and maintaining good health.”
- [Nutrition Today](#): “It is clear that low-income shoppers are hearing messages about pesticide residues and fruits and vegetables. It is also clear that the content and how the information is presented could negatively impact overall fruit and vegetable purchasing and intake in low-income populations.”
- [Journal of Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment](#): “The issue of organic can swamp or compete with other messages about nutrition, as evidenced by the data presented here. Perceiving that there is an overwhelming amount of sometimes contradictory information about healthy eating could make some consumers defeatist about trying to eat healthily.”
- AFF: “The survey results show that efforts to provide consumers with consistent, science-based information to counter disinformation campaigns must continue to further alleviate unfounded safety fears about the more affordable and accessible forms of produce.”

“We need to break this vicious cycle of demonizing produce forms that some outlets deem not as ‘healthy’ despite years of high-quality evidence proving otherwise,” Shaw says. “At the end of the day, we need to ensure the message is crystal clear: eat more, not less, of whatever fruits and veggies you can afford and enjoy.”

“As a registered dietitian, my top advice will always be: Eat fruits and veggies with every meal” Dr. Klinger concludes.

A version of this article was originally posted at [Alliance for Food and Farming](#) and has been reposted here with permission. Any reposting should credit the original author and provide links to both the GLP and the original article. Find Alliance for Food and Farming on X [@SafeProduce](#)