

6. Pesticides and food safety in Canada

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To be healthy, we need to eat a variety of foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables. Pesticides play an important role in making sure there is enough food for everyone, by protecting crops from pests like insects, weeds, and fungal diseases.

While pesticides help protect our food supply, some people have concerns about pesticide residue that may be on the food they eat.

As part of the assessment process before a pesticide can be used on a food product, Health Canada scientists must study whether the pesticide residues that may be found in or on food will be a concern to human health, and determine the safe levels of residues, called Maximum Residue Limits, or MRLs.

Canadian MRLs are set for each pesticide and crop combination, for an approved pesticide use. Canadian MRLs:

- Are legally established as the highest amount of allowable residue.
- Are set at levels far below the amount of pesticide residue that could cause health concerns.
- Take into account all of the population including infants, children, and pregnant women.
- Are set for all foods sold in Canada, whether produced locally or imported.
- Apply to fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, grains, and some processed foods.

Maximum residue limits are regulated under the Pest Control Products Act. Establishing science-based MRLs helps ensure that pesticides are being used properly by growers, and provides Canadians with access to a safe food supply.

To ensure that Canada's MRLs are respected, both domestically produced food and imported foods are examined for pesticide residues. Imported foods must meet Canada's pesticide residue limits and are inspected at the point of entry into Canada.

Food safety is a priority of the Government of Canada and is a shared responsibility between growers, industry, provinces, and federal organizations:

Health Canada:

evaluates the health and environmental risks of proposed pesticides before they can be registered or used on foods;

provides food safety tips for all food types, and information on how to protect those who are vulnerable to food poisoning, food allergies and recalls.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Health Canada work together on a number of programs that help provide safe food for Canadians, engage food producers in sustainable pest management practices and encourage environmental protection.

Food producers help keep food safe by using and improving on good agricultural, food safety, and sustainable pest management practices. This helps keep residues within the limits, helping ensure a safe food supply. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency enforces federal food safety regulations for both domestic and imported food. Inspectors sample domestic and imported foods for chemical residues and pesticide residues. If tested food products exceed limits, enforcement actions could include: removing the food from stores; seizing food stocks; rejecting imports; prosecuting offenders.

In this way, the Government of Canada makes sure producers properly use and apply pesticides and respect established residue limits.