

Overweight?

Try the organic diet

» By Jan Nary

As more research becomes available, the organic diet is becoming more recognised as prevention for many and varied health concerns from food intolerances to debilitating diseases.

A recently released report from the French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) has found that organic foods are not only nutritionally superior to their conventionally-produced counterparts, containing higher levels of minerals, antioxidants and polyunsaturated fatty acids, but contain less pesticides and nitrates, which have been linked to a range of health problems including diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.

The AFSSA report was the result of more than two years research by an expert working group, involving about 50 experts from all-specific areas.

But is it possible that one of the 21st century's most visible and challenging health problems – obesity – is yet another outcome of pesticides in our food chain?

Dr. Baillie Hamilton, a multi-disciplinary doctor, researcher and expert in human

metabolism and environmental and occupational health, noted that the increased use of synthetic chemicals in the latter part of the twentieth century was concomitant with an increase in adult obesity in the U.S. Her findings, published in 2002, suggest that many pesticides act as toxic nerve agents, disrupting the functions of those parts of the brain connected with hormones and weight control (such as catecholamines - hormones which tend to suppress the appetite for fatty foods). These "Chemical Calories", are an integral contributor to weight gain, she says.

Principal culprits are the organophosphates and carbamates, used as pesticides and fungicides on food crops; and steroids and antibiotics in animal production.

Nearly all pesticides are prohibited in organic farming and residues are rarely found; the AFSSA research concluded that 94–100% of organic foods do not contain any pesticide residues. By contrast, a high incidence of pesticide residues occurs in non-organic foods, and there is growing concern about the synergistic 'cocktail effect' of multiple residues on human health.

The National Residue Survey Annual Report 2007-2008 (Australian Government, Dept. Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) gives the five horticulture products tested an overall compliance rating of 99.76%.

However, nutritionist Shane Heaton points out that produce most likely to be a problem and produce most widely consumed in Australia are not included in the survey.

"This survey looks mainly at produce intended for export rather than the domestic market and is driven by a desire to present our produce as 'clean and green'," he says. "This is not an appropriately designed or comprehensive report on pesticide residues in Australia.

"A much better model is the Victorian Produce Monitoring Program (VPMP), a targeted program that tests for chemical residues in specific produce where there may be chemical residue issues, including leafy vegetables, root and tuber vegetables, strawberries, pome fruits, stone fruits and table grapes. The results, while not always reassuring, are transparent. Most monitoring programs here and around the world reveal that around 1 in 3 of all foods tested contain pesticide residues."



To compound the problem, Dr Baillie Hamilton's work indicates that our exposure to toxic chemicals has increased our need for intake of certain vitamins and minerals –which brings us full circle to the argument for enhanced nutrient density and virtual absence of synthetic pesticides in organic food.

It seems that whatever the issue of food related health concerns, evidence is mounting in favour of organics. ◀◆

References

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Something to chew on

- "Tests of human fat for pesticide residues show that human bodies are so heavily polluted that - were we cannibals - our own meat would be unfit for human consumption"; Dr Paula Baillie-Hamilton, *The Detox Diet*, Penguin 2002
- American research has found that artificial sweeteners could disrupt the body's natural ability to connect sweet taste and viscosity to high caloric content – leading to unwitting weight gain. In testing, animals that were exposed to artificial sweeteners failed to form an accurate link between taste and calories and when later exposed to chocolate, ate more.
- Organic processing prohibits the use of synthetic sugar substitutes including aspartame. Phosphoric acid - a highly acidic ingredient in cola drinks, used to offset the extreme sweetness - is also banned. (www.purdue.edu/UNS/html4ever/2004/040629.Swithers.research.html)