

Dramatic rise in 'illegal' pesticides on fresh fruit

50% cherries, 34% apples contaminated by most toxic pesticides -
government data

28 chemical agents linked to cancer & birth deformities

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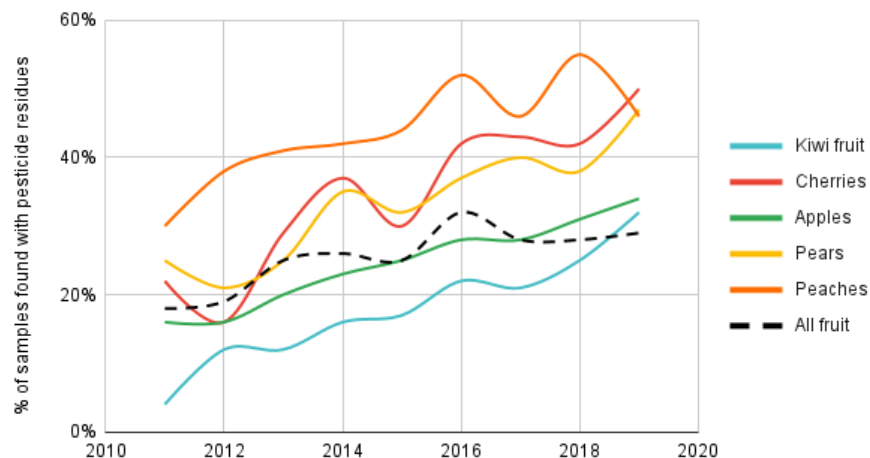
Brussels - There has been a dramatic rise in fruit sold to the public with residues of the most toxic pesticides that are supposed to be banned in Europe on health grounds, a new study has found.

The analysis of 97,170 samples of popular varieties of fresh fruit grown in Europe shows a 53% rise over 9 years in the frequency of samples contaminated by the most risky category of pesticides.

The study contradicts claims by the European Commission that farmers are using less of the pesticides, which are linked to cancer and other serious illnesses.

Nearly one in every three (29%) fruit samples were contaminated in 2019, the latest year for which data was available to researchers at the time of study. Half of all cherry samples were contaminated, up by 152% compared to 2011, the year governments were supposed to start banning the substances. A third (34%) of all apples were contaminated, up by 117%. Apples are Europe's most grown and most valuable fruit product. Around half of pears and half of peaches were tainted, up by 103% and 52% respectively.

5 fastest growing fruit contamination



Over the nine years studied, the most contaminated fruits were blackberries (51% of samples polluted), peaches (45%), strawberries (38%), cherries (35%) and apricots (35%). Countries producing the most frequently contaminated fruit and vegetables over the same period were Belgium (34% samples were contaminated), Ireland (26%), France (22%), Italy (21%) and Germany (20%).

Vegetables are less prone to insects and disease, so pesticide contamination is lower, at 13% in the latest round of tests, a 19% rise relative to the 2011 rate. The most contaminated vegetables over a nine year period were celery, with half (54%) the samples contaminated, up by 68%, followed by celeriac 45%. Third was kale, known as a 'super-food' due to its nutritional value, with 31% of samples contaminated.

Not only has the likelihood of buying contaminated fruit and vegetables risen, but more chemical combinations are being found too, multiplying their strength and risks. Researchers found that half of the pears sampled throughout Europe are contaminated with as many as 5 powerful chemical agents, rising to 87% for pears grown in Belgium and 85% for those grown in Portugal. Such 'chemical cocktails' are known to [multiply health impacts](#), with [unknown consequences](#). The cocktail effect [breaks contamination limits](#) set by officials. Although officials are legally obliged to test combinations (Article 4(3)(b) of Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2009), but do not, due to [foot dragging](#) by the [controversial](#) European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

This is the first time [government data](#) has been studied over time in a trend analysis. The testing programmes were large enough to be considered representative of general public exposure. The research by [Pesticide Action Network Europe](#) (PAN Europe) excluded food imports to focus on home-grown produce. Researchers also focused on the [55 most hazardous](#) chemical agents used to make hundreds of different pesticides, including fungicides, herbicides and insecticides. The agents are identified by EU officials as being highly toxic to humans, animals and the environment (see [Annex II, point 4](#)), each suspected of causing one or more [severe impacts](#), such as cancer, birth deformities or heart disease. Although supposedly subject to the strictest EU regulation, a total of 32 were found on fruit and vegetables during the 9 year testing period.

Governments have been [obliged](#) to phase the agents out, starting in 2011. A European Commission [report](#) in 2019 found that none have been phased-out. Despite this, the EU claims there was a [12% drop](#) in 2019 in the use of pesticides that contain the agents. That claim is challenged by today's report. PAN Europe says contamination rates are the most reliable evidence and use has risen by 8.8% in 2019. Industry argues that no alternatives exist to pesticides using such strong chemical agents. PAN Europe points to organic farming techniques to control pests, like crop rotation and biological controls. It says governments are dragging their feet to protect chemical-intensive farming interests.

Organic farmers are [allowed](#) to use pesticides with 7 of the chemical agents, under strict conditions. Organic produce was also sampled, but it was not possible to filter the results. Non-organic farmers use pesticides with higher combinations of toxic agents in order to deal

with weeds and pests that are resistant to previous formulations. The chemical agent found on most samples is Fludioxonil, used by Syngenta to make the pesticides Celest, Dividend and Maxim, and by Bayer to make Bariton Super.

PAN Europe campaigner Salomé Roynel said: *“The pesticide risk from eating fruit has risen dramatically. Consumers are now in an awful position, told to eat fresh fruit, much of which is contaminated with the most toxic pesticide residues linked to serious health impacts. It is clear to us that governments have no intention of banning these pesticides, whatever the law says. They are too afraid of the farming lobby, which depends on powerful chemicals and a broken agricultural model. Syngenta, Bayer and other chemical giants will say these trace pesticides are safe, but [medical experts](#) say some chemicals have no safe limit and that applies to most of these pesticides. We urge people to buy organic fruit this summer, especially if they are pregnant or feeding young children, because the risks are much reduced or zero.”*

A lobbying battle is now raging in Brussels over new pesticide reduction targets, set to be proposed by the European Commission on 22 June. The Commission wants binding new rules to cut pesticide use in half by 2030. Industry groups are [weakening](#) this ambition, PAN Europe has warned. Over a million Europeans [support](#) an 80% reduction of synthetic pesticides by 2030 and a full phase out by 2035.

The PAN Europe report marked the launch of a new campaign today, publishing hard-hitting graphics on [social media](#). The group is demanding an immediate ban of the [Toxic Twelve](#) most harmful pesticides causing widespread public exposure, plus a review of all others containing one of the 55 worst chemical agents, among other goals.

Over a third of Europeans are concerned about pesticide food contamination and the threat is the highest topic of concern in six European countries, according to official [polling](#). In 2017, the second most popular EU recognised [petition](#) was lodged, calling for a complete ban of pesticides.

Ends

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National NGOs available on request