

# Raw fear in the news: EWG still beating the organic drum ignoring that nasty *E. coli* situation

By ACSH Staff — June 13, 2011

It's a shame that the *The Wall Street Journal* editors weren't tuning in to yesterday's "Sunday House Call," which featured ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross; otherwise the front page of Marketplace wouldn't have featured a [chemophobic article](#) [1] on the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) annual *Dirty Dozen* publication. The report, published every year (although it feels like more often) by the science-free activist group, determines which twelve fresh fruits and vegetables contain the most pesticide residues. *WSJ* columnist Scott Kilman — who seems to have gotten his marching orders directly from the EWG — advises consumers to instead buy organically-grown produce while steering away from crops cultivated with insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides. Unfortunately, such unscientific fears will often drive people to forgo fruits and vegetables altogether.

Those who stop at the scary headline, however, will miss out on the fact that, according to Deputy Agriculture Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, the residues are well within the safe and tolerable levels set by the EPA.

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan expressed disappointment that the story was so prominently featured. "Is the *WSJ* now in the pocket of the organic food industry? Not only is this report rife with errors — such as referring to the apple growth-regulator Alar as a pesticide and claiming that it was banned altogether — but it comes from an activist group that produces at least two of these so-called 'studies' each year. If this appeared in the *NY Times*, I wouldn't have been surprised, but I'm disappointed to see it in the *Journal*."

Dr. Ross agrees: "The article's title should have been 'EWG is at it again.' As is pointed out by the USDA, the amount of pesticides present on conventionally grown produce is so minuscule as to pose no health threat."

Just because a crop is grown organically, however, does not mean it is safe. In a [redeeming editorial](#) [2], the *WSJ* presents the opinion that food irradiation, among the many modern agricultural technologies shunned by the organic food industry, is the best agricultural practice to prevent widespread bacterial contamination such as the most recent *E. coli* outbreak from a German organic sprout farm. Employing a healthy dose of humor, the editorial points out that, despite the pervasive "frankenfood" fears that have cropped up throughout the world, even the classic TV show *The Simpsons* is moving beyond the food technology hysteria. The article concludes, "This latest *E. coli* outbreak is painful real-life evidence that natural foods are not always better, nor safe for consumption."

Dr. Whelan is impressed. This editorial, she observes, is the “first endorsement of food irradiation that I’ve seen in print.” ACSH highly recommends this piece to anyone curious about food technology.

---

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2011/06/13/raw-fear-in-the-news-ewg-still-beating-the-organic-drum-ignoring-that-nasty-e-coli-situation>

**Links**

[1] <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303848104576381671610587348.html>

[2]

<http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCEQqQlwAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.acsh.org%2Fnews%2F2011%2F06%2F13%2Fraw-fear-in-the-news-ewg-still-beating-the-organic-drum-ignoring-that-nasty-e-coli-situation>  
LgDUMhA1G\_qO15w&sig2=LRU0EnP98agQWbT08PwjxA