

# Scientific Community Agrees: America's Food Supply is Safe

*By ACSH Staff — April 5, 1989*

That is the concensus of leading physicians, toxicologists and epidemiologists who met in New York on Wednesday to discuss the issue of food safety and pesticide use. In an unusual action, a panel of scientists, joined by 65 of their colleagues, signed a full-page advertisement that appeared Wednesday in major national newspapers, denouncing the recent pesticide scare.

The group of scientists, including Dr. Stephen S. Sternberg of the SloanKettering Institute for Cancer research and Dr. John Higginson, founding director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, was convened by the American Council on Science and Health, a national consumer education organization of scientists and physicians. The panel's message, intended to calm public fear about food safety, was the first announcement from America's mainstream scientific community since the pesticide issue began dominating headlines earlier this year.

Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, Executive Director of ACSH, noted that scientists usually prefer to focus their efforts on research, and keep themselves out of public debate. But, she added, that "chemophobia" is rampant. The charge that pesticide residues 'endanger' the American food supply has no basis. Scientific data, as a whole, emphasize that traces of pesticide residues in food pose no hazard to human health."

"A mouse or rat is not a little man," said Dr. Whelan. Huge doses of chemicals that cause cancer in laboratory animals do not automatically predict that minute doses will have similar effects on human beings. In fact, over the last decade the scientific community has largely abandoned this approach of extrapolation.

One of the major points raised by the group was that if people really wanted to concentrate on the potential hazards of carcinogenic substances in food, they would focus at least as much attention if not more on those that occur naturally. One of several examples cited was the everyday mushroom, which contains hydrazines, a potent animal carcinogen.

It was pointed out that natural carcinogens are more numerous, more widespread, and in many cases, more potent than the manmade carcinogens in food. Fortunately, these levels are minute and pose no threat to humans. If environmental groups were to apply the same standards to natural carcinogens labeling them as a health hazard based on isolated experiments on laboratory animals we would have nothing to eat.

Throughout the meeting the scientists emphasized three points:

\* After 50 years of widespread use, there is no evidence whatever that, when used in the approved, regulated fashion, pesticide residues are responsible for any cases of cancer or any

other diseases in adults or children.

\* The use of modern pesticides has brought more progress in agricultural production than in all previous recorded history.

\* America's food supply is the most varied, nutritious, safe and inexpensive in the world.

Dr. Whelan concluded, " We should focus on the major public health challenges, like the AIDS epidemic and the staggering incidence of heart and lung diseases linked to cigarette smoking."

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