Organic vs. conventional produce: Organic doesn't equal better

By ACSH Staff — January 30, 2014

Melinda Wenner Moyer, a science writer and mother, curious about whether it was really necessary to feed her son organic instead of conventional produce took matters into her own hands and did research to find out the answer. Her conclusion? Let’s just say I’m going to be a little more relaxed about what I serve kid No. 2.

First, she points out that organic does not necessarily mean pesticide free. And in the case of natural pesticides, farmers often have to use the pesticide more frequently because natural pesticides break down faster. Moyer also points out that studies looking at pesticide residue on fruits and vegetables typically only test for synthetic pesticides. In the studies that did take into account natural pesticides for example, those conducted by the USDA researchers found that between 15 and 43 percent of organic produce samples contained traces of either natural or synthetic pesticides.

The next question though, is the most important. Boyes asks, Are these pesticides harmful to your kids? According to a study led by ACSH advisor, Dr. Carl Winter, a pesticide and risk assessment specialist at the University of California Davis and colleague Josh Katz, even for those fruits and vegetables on the Environmental Working Group’s Dirty Dozen list a top 12 list of what they consider to be the most contaminated fruits and vegetables the EPA’s exposure limits were more than 1000 times higher than the daily exposure estimates for 90 percent of the fruit and vegetable comparisons they made. In other words, the levels of residue found on these fruits and vegetables are nothing to worry about. And the EWG itself even acknowledges this point saying in their 2013 Shoppers Guide to Produce, the health benefits of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables outweigh the risks of pesticide exposure. Way to confuse people: warning parents about toxic pesticides, while blathering about continuing to feed kids healthy fruits and vegetables. Talk about hypocrisy!
And keep in mind, fruits and vegetables contain thousands of natural toxins, as we at ACSH have repeatedly illustrated with our Holiday Dinner Menu. [2] But the bottom line is if the research literature is clear about anything regarding fruits and vegetables, it's that eating more of them conventional or organic does good things for the body.

As for those parents who still believe that organic food is somehow healthier, read our prior discussion putting rest to that myth here. [3]

Melinda's conclusion? What all this means for parents is that we should stop worrying so much about whether the apples we buy are organic or conventional we should just start giving our kids more apples.

Well said. Read the full piece here [1]!