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Reducing Children's Pesticide Exposure: EPA MISSES CRITICAL DEADLINE

Foster, R.I. – According to a critical issue report released by The Organic Center today, only modest progress has been made in the last 10 years in reducing children's exposure to pesticides, despite the Food Quality and Protection Act (FQPA), a tough federal law passed unanimously by both houses of Congress in 1996 designed to assure a "reasonable certainty of no harm," from pesticides in our foods, with an outside deadline of Aug. 2006.

The Organic Center report, "Successes and Lost Opportunities to Reduce Children's Exposure to Pesticides Since the Mid-1990s" (CRI 2006.1), provides the first publicly available, data-driven analysis of changes in pesticide dietary exposures and risk, since passage of the FQPA. While overall risks have gone down by about one-third, the report highlights the worrisome, sharply upward trend in pesticide residues and risks in imported foods. The full report and two-page consumer summary are available for free at <http://www.organic-center.org/science.pest.php>.

The modest impact of the FQPA on high-risk insecticides often found in children's foods led unions, representing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) staff scientists, to send a strong letter to the EPA administrator. Members of the union charge that senior EPA officials have been swayed to keep high-risk pesticides on the market due to political pressure and have failed to consider the findings of independent scientists published in peer reviewed journals when revising pesticide risk assessments. The union letter and EPA's response to it were featured in The New York Times on Aug. 2 ("Unions Say E.P.A. Bends to Political Pressure").

"It is difficult to understand EPA assertions that it is 99-percent done with the task of reviewing tolerances under the FQPA, given that the agency has still not reduced dietary exposures to a half-dozen of the riskiest insecticides on the market since 1996, including azinphos-methyl, dimethoate, and methamidophos," says Chuck Benbrook, chief scientist of The Organic Center and co-author of the CRI report. "Congress directed the EPA to deal with these high-risk pesticides within three years (by 1999) and should be outraged by the lack of progress after 10 years."

The Organic Center's recent report credits the pesticide industry for the discovery and registration of several reduced risk pesticides that have helped farmers shift away from some high-risk products. Much less progress in reducing dietary risks has been achieved through the adoption of Integrated Pest Management and by most ecolabel programs. The authors credit organic farming with the most significant and assured reductions in pesticide dietary risk, and call upon families raising young children to seek out organic fruits and vegetables whenever possible.

"The average American child is exposed to more than five servings of food and water daily that contain pesticide residues," Alan Greene, M.D., pediatrician and co-author of the CRI report. "The surest way families can dramatically reduce pesticide dietary exposures is to choose organic foods whenever possible."

The Organic Center recently launched a campaign, "Mission Organic 2010," to educate Americans about the benefits of eating organic and how they can make a difference by just making 10 percent of their food choices organic. The goal of Mission Organic 2010 is to increase organic food consumption to 10 percent of the U.S. food supply by the year 2010. Consumers can join Mission Organic 2010 at <http://www.MO2010.org>.

The Organic Center is a 501 (c) (3) organization founded in 2002 to present and provide peer-reviewed scientific evidence on how organic products benefit human and environmental health. The Organic Center's research and educational efforts are funded through individuals, foundations, businesses and government programs. For information about The Organic Center, its current programs and scientific reports go to www.organic-center.org.

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