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**NEW ORGANIC CENTER REPORT PROVIDES FIRST-  
EVER ESTIMATE OF THE DRAMATIC REDUCTION  
IN PESTICIDE RISK POSSIBLE THROUGH  
THE "ORGANIC OPTION"**

*Converting Nation's Produce Farms to Organic, Coupled with Buying Organic  
Imported Produce, Would Reduce Pesticide Risks by 97%*

**Group Lists Top Priority Organic Fruits and Vegetables  
for Consumers to Reduce Current Pesticide Risks**

**BOULDER, Colo. - March 11, 2008** - The Organic Center today releases an historic report that concludes converting the nation's eight million acres of produce farms to organic would reduce pesticide dietary risks by about 97 percent.

The Organic Center provides the first-ever quantitative estimate of the degree to which pesticide risks from food can be eliminated through adoption of organic farming methods in "Simplifying the Pesticide Risk Equation: The Organic Option," a new State of Science Review by Dr. Charles Benbrook, the Organic Center's chief scientist.

Less than three percent of the nation's cropland produces fruits and vegetables. Yet, according to The Organic Center, these crops account for most of the pesticide risks from dietary exposure in domestically produced foods. The 97 percent risk reduction can only be achieved if converting domestic cropland of organic is coupled with consumers choosing only imported produce that is certified organic.

The estimates are based on up-to-date pesticide residue data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency's current methods for estimating pesticide dietary risks.

Founded in 2002, The Organic Center is a non-profit devoted to presenting and providing peer-reviewed scientific evidence on how organic products benefit human health and environmental quality.

Other findings and information shared in the report include:

- An analysis of the significantly greater pesticide risks linked to consumption of imported conventionally-grown fruits and vegetables, as compared to

domestically-grown produce.

- Rankings of dietary risk levels in select conventionally-grown fruits and vegetables, arranged to help guide consumers seeking to minimize pesticide risks.
- Suggestions on how to meet dietary guidelines for fruit and vegetable intake in the winter, while also reducing pesticide exposures.
- An overview of pesticide residues found in milk.

The Organic Center will offer a free download of its report beginning March 11 at [www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org).

### **Pesticide Residues are Hard to Avoid**

Driving pesticide risks downward is important because, according to pediatrician Alan Greene, M.D., chairman of The Organic Center's board of directors, "Recent science has established strong links between exposure to pesticides at critical stages of prenatal development and throughout childhood, and heightened risk of pre-term, underweight babies, developmental abnormalities impacting the brain and nervous system, as well as diabetes and cancer."

"Yes, with surprising frequency, all Americans, including infants and children, are exposed to pesticides via their diet and drinking water," added Dr. Benbrook.

In fact, Dr. Benbrook noted, recent USDA pesticide residue and food consumption surveys show that most people consume three to four residues daily just through fruits and vegetables.

"Accounting for residues in conventional milk, tap water and other foods, the average American exposes him or herself to ten to 13 pesticide residues daily," Dr. Benbrook added.

The frequency of multiple pesticide residues in conventional produce contributes significantly to each person's daily dose. Multiple residues are eight-times more likely in conventional produce than in organic produce. Reasons why include:

- A conventional spinach sample in 2006 testing was found to have nine residues, a kale sample had 10, and a raisin sample contained 11;
- Almost half the conventional peach samples in 2006 contained five or more residues;
- Conventional sweet bell peppers top the multiple-residue chart, with two samples containing 12 pesticides in 2003 testing; and,
- More than one-third of conventional fruit and vegetable samples in 2006 contained multiple residues.

## **The 97% Solution**

The Organic Center bases its 97 percent risk reduction estimate upon a “Dietary Risk Index” (DRI), developed by the EPA’s Office of Inspector General (OIG). The EPA-OIG used the index in a 2006 appraisal of the impacts of the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) on pesticide dietary risks.

The Organic Center applied the same DRI to estimate the changes that would occur in risk levels if all produce were grown using organic methods. The Organic Center concluded that a 100 percent reduction in risk is unattainable because of the widespread use of pesticides on conventional farms, and the movement of pesticides in the air and water onto organic farm fields.

“While it will take years to convert most American fruit and vegetable farms to organic methods, the process is well underway and accelerating fast, especially in the Western U.S.,” Dr. Benbrook noted. Already, organic produce accounts for nearly ten percent of retail sales of fresh fruits and vegetables. Several major fresh produce grower-shippers have recently announced aggressive timetables to convert all or most of their fruit and vegetable acreage to organic, assuming consumer demand continues to grow.

The report points out that a substantial reduction in pesticide exposure will remove, or markedly lessen, an important risk factor for several serious public health problems.

## **Helping Consumers Minimize Pesticide Exposures**

The Organic Center’s report also presents lists of fresh fruits and vegetables that score the highest using the DRI. Two lists cover domestically grown fruits and vegetables, while two others apply to imported produce that typically enters the U.S. market in the wintertime.

The organization hopes consumers will follow these lists in determining which organic fruits and vegetables will most significantly improve their personal pesticide dietary risk equation.

## **Conventional Fruits and Vegetables with the Highest Pesticide Dietary Risk Index Scores: Domestic**

## Fruits

Cranberries: 178

Nectarines: 97

Strawberries: 56

Peaches: 54

Pears: 48

## Vegetables

Green beans: 330

Sweet bell peppers: 132

Celery: 104

Cucumbers: 93

Potatoes: 74

## **Conventional Fruits and Vegetables with the Highest Pesticide Dietary Risk Index Scores: Imported**

### Fruits

Grapes: 282

Nectarines: 281

Peaches: 266

Pears: 221

Strawberries: 78

### Vegetables:

Sweet bell peppers: 720

Lettuce: 326

Cucumbers: 317

Celery: 170

Tomatoes: 142

Complete Dietary Risk Index can be found in the full report, downloadable at [www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org).

### **About The Organic Center**

The Organic Center, based in Boulder, CO, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

founded in 2002 to generate and advance credible, peer-reviewed scientific research and information on the health and environmental benefits of organic food and farming – and to communicate those benefits to the public through education, resources and information. By doing so, it helps promote the conversion of more farmland to organic methods, improve public health, and work to restore our natural world through more sustainable and ecological practices. All of The Organic Center’s research reports and publications are available free at [www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org). Individuals can also sign up for our free monthly e-newsletter, *The Scoop*. For information about The Organic Center, its current programs and scientific reports please visit [www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org) or call 303.499.1840.

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