

Lists Help Produce Consumers Know How to Choose Wisely

By Janet Hackert, Nutrition Specialist

A report released in June, 2011, listed the “Dirty Dozen” and “Clean Fifteen” when it comes to pesticide on produce. This does not lead to dropping produce from a healthy eating plan. Instead it helps consumers know about what they are buying and eating.

The Environmental Working Group has updated their *Shopper’s Guide to Pesticide in Produce*, with its worst findings listed as the “Dirty Dozen” and those least contaminated as the “Clean Fifteen.” The group looked at data collected from U.S. Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration tests for 2000-2009. The commonly consumed produce is then ranked based on six factors, including percent of samples tested with detectable pesticides, percent of samples with two or more pesticides, and average amount (levels in parts per million) of all pesticides found, among others.

On the “Dirty Dozen” list are apples (highest in pesticides), celery, strawberries, peaches, spinach, imported nectarines and grapes, sweet bell peppers, potatoes, domestic blueberries, lettuce, and kale or collard greens. Alternatively the “Clean 15” are onions (lowest in pesticides), corn, pineapple, avocado, asparagus, sweet peas, mangoes, eggplant, domestic cantaloupe, kiwi, cabbage, watermelon, sweet potatoes, grapefruit, and mushrooms. The Environmental Working Group suggests purchasing organic options from the “Dirty Dozen” list to reduce the amount of pesticides present. The organic label requires low to no pesticide use.

Another way to know that produce is lower in pesticides is to grow it at home, or to purchase it directly from the grower: at a farmers market, roadside stand, orchard, or on-farm. This way the consumer can find out just how the produce was grown. They can also request reduced use of pesticides or organically grown food.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends making half the food placed on the plate fruits and vegetables. The “Dirty Dozen” and “Clean Fifteen” lists help consumers know when it is safe to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from the supermarket, and when they may want to find cleaner alternatives. Unsweetened and low salt frozen, canned, and dried are also ways to fit in the fruits and vegetables needed for a healthy eating plan.

For more information on the group’s finding, go to <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/>.

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