

# Some Not-So-Fun Facts About Pesticides

by Michael Garfield

- 99 percent of pesticide applications never reach their target pest. Instead, they attack other plants and animals, and drift onto nearby lawns, gardens, farms, and persons.

- The chemical lawn care industry has grown from a smattering of small businesses in 1980 to an industry with \$1.3 billion in sales, treating 14 percent of the nation's residential lawns, in 1986.

- Despite a tenfold increase in insecticide use since 1945, crop loss to insects has increased from seven percent in 1945 to thirteen percent today.

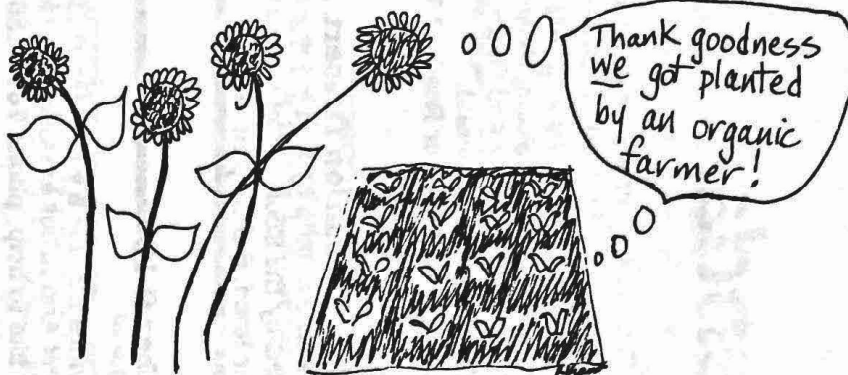
- At least 1.46 million people will develop cancer due to pesticide contamination of food, over the course of our lifetimes. The riskiest foods are, in order: tomatoes, beef, potatoes, oranges, lettuce, apples, peaches, and pork.

- Before World War II, seven insect species were resistant to insecticides; in 1984, 447 species were resistant. The Colorado potato beetle, that plump yellow-striped foe of many home gardeners, is resistant to twelve types of pesticides.

- The children of California farm workers are thirteen times more likely to be born with birth defects than are the children of the rest of the state's population.

- Kansas farmers who are exposed to herbicides more than twenty days per year are six times as likely to develop lymph cancer as those not exposed at all.

- The Food and Drug Administration can only test one percent of all food before it reaches the market. The FDA



tests of only one-third of 500 potentially dangerous pesticides on domestic food. Because pesticide laws vary from country to country, the FDA often does not know which chemicals to test for on imported food.

- In its spot check food-testing program, the FDA found that 3 to 6% of all food en route to market is contaminated with pesticide levels above approved safety levels. Independent local testing has found even greater contamination.

- Banned for domestic use in 1972, DDT is still produced in the United States by the Montrose Chemical Corporation, and is exported to 21 countries.

- Blood tests of Guatemalans have found 31 times the concentration of DDT in their bodies as in the bodies of North Americans.

- Between 95 and 99% of most pesticide products consist of "inert" ingredients. "Inert" does not mean "benign"; rather, it means that the "inert" chemical is not the specified killing agent. 1200 such chemicals are used in the United States; 57 are known to be carcinogenic, and 122 are suspected carcinogens. Inert ingredients include benzene, formaldehyde, and PCP.

- 22 pesticides have been found in 24 separate states (not Michigan -- yet). These pesticides

include aldicarb, alachlor, and chlorpyrifos. Pesticides in water are not very well regulated -- there are only six federal standards to date.

- Only one percent of U.S. municipal water supplies have carbon filters that are able to remove pesticides from drinking water. Ann Arbor is in the other 99%.

- The EPA has registered at least ten pesticides that are banned in countries such as Sweden, India, the Netherlands, Israel, and the Philippines. These pesticides include chlordane, 2,4-D, paraquat, parathion, malathion, and hexachlorobenzene.

- For a pesticide to be sold and used in the United States, the EPA must register it. EPA registration does not imply EPA "approval"; in fact, the EPA and FDA consider the words "EPA-approved" to be misleading advertising on pesticide products. The EPA has not yet tested over 200 pesticides that are currently registered for use.

Sources: Center for Science in the Public Interest, National Academy of Sciences, Technology Review, University of California Medical Center, Environmental Protection Agency, Professional Lawn Care Association of America, American Cancer Society, The Land Institute, National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides, League of Women Voters of Michigan.