

School Pesticide Monitor

A Bi-monthly Bulletin on Pesticides and Alternatives

Vol. 6 No. 1 Jan/Feb 2006

Beyond Pesticides / National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides
701 E Street, SE, Suite 200 • Washington, DC 20003 • 202-543-5450
info@beyondpesticides.org • www.beyondpesticides.org

Organic Food Movement Grows in Schools and Homes Scientific Evidence Shows that Organic Diets Keep Chemicals Out of Children

In an effort to keep children's diet free of pesticides, antibiotics and genetically engineered ingredients, increasing numbers of parents and schools throughout the country are purchasing organic food.

Schools in Washington State and California are leading the nation in introducing organic food into school lunch programs. An organic salad bar started at Lincoln Elementary School in Olympia, Washington has proven so popular and economically feasible, all grade schools in Olympia now have one. In 2004, the Seattle school district adopted H61.01, a Breakfast and Lunch Program Procedure banning junk food and encouraging organic food in school cafeterias. California school districts in Berkeley, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto also have organic food programs.

Parents are increasingly driving this demand for organic food in their homes as well as in schools. AC Nielsen marketing ratings show that sales of organic baby food have jumped nearly 18 percent since 2004—double the overall growth of organic food sales. Additionally, dairy, produce, and snacks (food purchased often for children) are rapidly growing segments of the organic food market, according to the Organic Trade Association. Due to rising demand, organic food for children is now available in mainstream supermarkets such as Safeway in addition to natural food stores.

Organic companies responding to increasing parent concern have assisted in developing school organic food programs. For example, the organic yogurt company Stonyfield Farm has sponsored organic food programs at schools in Rhode Island, California, Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire and Connecticut. Stonyfield's school pro-

gram was conceived by president and CEO, Gary Hirshberg. For Hirshberg, the wake-up call came when he asked his teenage son what he'd eaten at school one day. "Pizza, chocolate milk



and Skittles," was the reply. Responding to an opportunity, Stonyfield's campaign to put organic foods in schools was born, and refrigerated vending machines selling healthy organic treats replaced junk food vending machines in participating schools around the country.

Stonyfield Farm is not the first company to sponsor school organic food programs. Several years ago, Horizon Organic implemented two school programs designed to educate teachers, kids and their families about the environmental and health benefits of organic production. As part of the program, Horizon helped bring organic lunches to 12 schools in Palo Alto, CA.

Independent schools are also going organic without corporate sponsorship. The Ross School in New York, as well as many Waldorf schools,

are leading the way in integrating organic products into their food service. Many colleges have also started bringing organic food into the dining hall, including Princeton, Stanford, Colorado College, and the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

The increased availability of organic food in schools throughout the country indicates a growing movement towards healthier, more conscious school lunches. "This is the beginning of the sea change," predicts Ronnie Cummins, director of the Organic Consumers Association. "Unfortunately, it's coming at the same time school districts all over the country are squeezed by a fiscal crisis."

Organic food is especially important for children because children face unique hazards from pesticide exposure. Pound

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National Survey Estimates 4.4 Million Kids Diagnosed With ADHD

A recent report released this fall by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 4.4 million kids, or 7.8% of school-aged children, have been diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). ADHD is a neurobehavioral disorder characterized by pervasive inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity and resulting in significant functional impairment, according to the CDC.

Scientific studies link exposure to certain common organophosphate pesticides, such as carbaryl – a pesticide found on the shelves of retail stores as well as in agriculture – to adverse cognitive and behavioral effects in mice and other subjects. Research by Dr. Warren Porter, a researcher at University of Wisconsin, has shown that even low levels of pesticide exposure can cause endocrine disruption, which can lead to learning disabilities. Another study published in the March 2003 issue of *Nature Genetics* demonstrates a clear genetic link between exposure to organophosphate pesticides and neurological disorders such as ADHD and gulf war syndrome.

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for pound, children eat more food, drink more water and juices, and breathe more air than adults, and thus they take in more pesticides relative to their body weight. Their developing organ systems make children more sensitive than adults to exposure to toxic chemicals and less able to detoxify the chemicals.

The schools and parents turning to healthy organic food are doing so as a way to improve children's health. One of the main concerns for parents is the "body burden" of pesticide residues in children's bodies from eating non-organic food. Studies show that children who eat a diet of organic food show levels of pesticides in their bodies that is six times lower than children who eat a diet of food produced with chemical-intensive methods.

Moreover, a new study from researchers at Emory University finds that switching children to an organic diet provides a "dramatic and immediate protective effect" against exposures to two organophosphate pesticides that are commonly used in U.S. agricultural production, malathion and chlorpyrifos. The results were published in the September 2005 issue of the scientific journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*. "Immediately after substituting organic food items for the children's normal diets, the concentration of the organophosphorus pesticides found in their bodies decreased substantially to non-detectable levels until the conventional diets were re-introduced," says Dr. Lu, an assistant professor in the department of environmental and occupational health, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University.

How to Get Your School to Go Organic

1. Familiarize yourself with your child's school district policy regarding meals and snack items sold in school stores and/or vending machines.
2. Eat a typical lunch at the school if possible. Consult the curriculum, teachers or school health staff to determine if students receive any instruction in nutrition and healthy eating. Talk with food service workers to get their opinions on what students do and don't eat.
3. Meet with your school's decision makers: the school food services director; the principal; the PTO/PTA; and school board members to discuss your concerns.
4. Organize a committee. Enlist other parents, teachers and staff to join.
5. Recruit members from the community who will be helpful such as a pediatrician, nurse or nutrition expert. Identify students to serve on your committee or help with the project. Student participation is key!
6. Know the reason for organics at schools. Use the information from the following sources to build your case and become informed: Beyond Pesticides www.beyondpesticides.org, National Farm to School www.farmtoschool.org, Organic Valley www.organicvalley.com, Organics Made Easy www.organic.org and www.allorganicslink.com, Organics Consumers Association www.organicconsumersassociation.org, Generation Green www.generationgreen.org, The Eat Well Guide www.eatwellguide.com, www.freshbaby.com, www.wholefoodsmarket.com and www.stonyfield.com. If you have a co-op in your area, you may want to contact them for resources.
7. Involve the media. Write letters to the editor about the problems you see and ways that you feel it can be corrected. Cite statistics. Send press releases to local newspapers and radio stations to announce events or important meetings. Suggest your local paper do a feature story on school lunches. If the school has a newspaper, get students to write articles on the need for organics.
8. Stay tuned to the process. Whether your school agrees to ban some junk foods, discontinue vending services, change the cafeteria menu...whatever it is, stay involved. Keep your commitment intact to oversee the process and to step in if implementation doesn't go as expected.
9. Advocate for the issue: Write letters to public officials to help change public policy be sure to include letters from the students.
10. Inspire others. Celebrate all victories no matter how small. Tell your story to the media. Share your story with others such as Beyond Pesticides at info@beyondpesticides.org, Stonyfield's Creating Healthy Kids blog at: menuforchange@stonyfield.com.

These steps have been adapted from Stonyfield Farm's Menu for Change "Ten Steps to Changing Your School's Menu" from <http://www.stonyfield.com/MenuForChange/parentsAction/MFCParentActionKit.cfm>