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Preventative Health Programs supported by Federal and State governments encourage the general population to take responsibility for their health. They also advise on an increase in the consumption of fruit and vegetables to a minimum of five portions per day. However food produced in Australia and abroad invariably necessitates the use of pesticides unless grown on an organic farm.

Commonly used agricultural pesticides can cause ill health and diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, allergies, behaviour disorders, fertility problems, immune system disturbances, neurodegenerative diseases (e.g. Parkinson's) and some mental illnesses (e.g. depression and schizophrenia). Pesticides can do this by disrupting hormone function and inducing epigenetic changes both of which can be transgenerational and change our phenotype. Cancer and tumour formation is of course dependent on many variables including lifestyle and inherited genetics but enzyme systems and genomes with on-off switching signalled by chemicals can allow cancer to appear earlier and more frequently in the population. Pesticides at minute concentrations can cause these problems and scientific papers are appearing which show this quite clearly. The embryo is exquisitely sensitive to such effects and children are affected more so than adults. Many pesticides are found in breast milk and so can be transmitted to the infant. Other vulnerable groups are the aged and the sick.

The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines state that pesticides should not be found in drinking water. The Public Health Act states that people have a legislative right to clean safe non-toxic drinking water. In the same way people should have a right to buy and consume non-toxic foods. People have a choice when they are informed and understand the consequences of their actions. At present food packaging does not contain any information about pesticide contamination and the pros and cons of certain pesticides in food is not readily available to the average shopper. For example, how many pregnant women know about and understand the consequences of eating strawberries contaminated with endosulfan?

Endosulfan is a highly toxic, neurotoxic, organochlorine insecticide. It is on the proposed inclusion list of those persistent organic pollutants (POPs) targeted for global elimination. (vide the Stockholm convention "dirty dozen" POPs and their characteristics: persistent, bioaccumulation, long-range transport and adverse health and environmental impact). Low levels of exposure can produce adverse effects on immune and endocrine function and those with low protein diets are more sensitive to its effects

Organic foods advertise that they are produced using no pesticides. However, unless you grow your own organic foods are more expensive to buy than nonorganic produce. This then discriminates against the lower socio-economic groups. The average shopper has no idea which goods are produced using pesticides and the potential effects that this may produce. The pesticides in food add to the many (over 4,000) toxic chemicals already in a person's body (the body burden of chemicals) and the combined effects of this are unknown.

It should be noted that The Australian Total Diet Study does not reflect the total daily pesticide dose that an individual is exposed to from all sources.

In Tasmania there is currently no State testing for pesticides in food produced in the State. Furthermore the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service test only a small number of imported food consignments for pesticides used and then only for a limited range.

Allowing pesticide residues or any introduced substances such as growth factors which can cause epigenetic changes, cannot be condoned. Labelling of food substances should reflect potential contaminants such as pesticides. Current legislation requires contents, additives and country of origin to be shown on produce. If this has been deemed essential to be incorporated on the labelling, why then not pesticides? Everyone has the right to an informed choice when buying a product especially when it may have an adverse effect on their own or their children's health and future.

There is growing evidence of the enormous cost to the country from the use of pesticides, directly through health costs and indirectly through the loss of labour. Research into the economics of returning to organic farming has proven to be cost-effective. For example French food producers are returning to organic farming for economic as well as health reasons.

In the light of current research and medical findings of diseases connected with pesticides it can no longer be considered a safe or ethical practice to sell food whose label does not indicate maximum possible pesticide residues.

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