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Farmers' Corner- A Knowledge Hub

Safe use of fruits and vegetables to avoid chemical residues

With advancement in agricultural technologies, there is an increased use in agrochemicals (pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, herbicides etc.) to improve crop productivity, reduce wastage. Pesticides are group of chemicals applied for protection against pests and diseases however, pesticides can cause problems if they are consumed by humans oftenly they are cause of carcinogenesis, immunotoxicity, neurotoxicity, reproductive dysfunction, endocrine disruption, developmental disabilities, skin conditions, and respiratory



diseases. Main route of pesticides entry into the human system is through ingestion of food. So, proper handling of the food items will reduce their inadvertent entry into our human system.

For most pesticides, a minimum time between spraying and harvesting of produce will ensure safe food. However, when pesticides are not applied according to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), may leave harmful residues, which ultimately involve possible health risk. Such residues in food commodities can be decreased or removed by various simple techniques prior to consumption.

Washing is the most common method which removes surface residual on the product. Almost 75 to 80 percent of pesticide residues are removed by cold water washing. The fruits like grapes, apples, guava, plums, mangoes, peaches and pears and vegetables like tomatoes, brinjal and okra should be washed thoroughly as they might carry more residue in their crevices. However, certain residues cannot be removed by washing. Washing them with 2% of salt water will remove most of the contact pesticide residues that normally appear on the surface of the vegetables and fruits. Washing with 10% vinegar is also found useful in removing the surface residues. Treating vegetables in warm water for a short while will remove any leftover residue.

Peeling or removing the skin of the vegetables or fruits is highly efficient to remove residues. The removal of the excess fat and skin for animal products like chicken or meat could reduce the unwanted pesticide residues absorbed on them. Thermal processing treatments like pasteurization, blanching, boiling, cooking, steaming, canning, scrambling etc. are effective in degradation of various pesticides depending upon the type of pesticide and length of treatment. Other simple tips include changing the vendor regularly will also helpful in reducing the exposure to any harmful residues.

Benefit: Farmers and consumers are unknowingly using and consuming pest treated fruits and vegetables imported from the mainland. Simple decontamination techniques will enable the larger public to safely consume fruits and vegetables.

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