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Greenpeace Study: Pesticide contamination of our food far underestimated

State laboratories cannot detect more than half of all plant sprays

Hamburg, 31 January 2008 – When monitoring fruit, vegetables and cereals, even the best state labs can only detect less than half of all the pesticides which they may contain. This is the outcome of the study “The Limits of Pesticide Analysis“ which is published by Greenpeace today. Of around 1350 pesticides so far in use in agriculture worldwide, at best about 600 active substances can be identified. The laboratories of most German States even detect fewer than 400 substances. Residues of the plant sprays, which are often highly toxic, often remain in the plants treated and thereby also contaminate food sold in Germany. Greenpeace demands a halt to the use and registration of these toxins which are virtually invisible during monitoring.

“Half blind would be putting it mildly! Our food control authorities cannot nearly reveal the true contamination of fruit, vegetables and cereals with toxic pesticides.” This is the verdict by Greenpeace chemistry expert Manfred Krautter. “We have to assume that our food contains a lot more plant sprays which are damaging to our health than previously thought. This is the fault of the pesticide registration regime in Germany and the EU, which is too industry friendly, and also of shortcomings in the monitoring by the States.“

The study was carried out by Günter Lach, one of the leading German experts on pesticide analysis, on the basis of information provided by German food testing labs. Lach recommends: “New and optimized methods for analysis have to be developed. Else pesticide contamination should be avoided right from the start.“

During the course of the last three years alone the German Federal Office for Customer Protection and Food Safety (Bundesamt für Verbraucherschutz und Lebensmittelsicherheit (BVL)), which forms part of the Ministry for Agriculture, approved 38 active pesticide substances, of which twelve are not identified during the course of routine testing by the state labs. Examples are the pesticide Amitrole by the chemical multinational corporation Bayer CropScience which can interfere with the hormone system and is allowed for use in cultivating apples, pears and wine. Or take the possibly carcinogenic Sulfosulfurone by Syngenta and Monsanto which was approved for wheat cultivation in 2004.

“It is irresponsible to register dangerous pesticides which cannot even be monitored in a rudimentary way. The health of the consumer is thereby put at risk. The secretary of state Seehofer must immediately revoke the registration of such pesticides which can hardly be monitored in our food. The EU has to amend its registration law so that such pesticides are no longer marketed“, says Krautter. Greenpeace also calls upon the food producers and the food trade to make sure that these plant sprays, which are practically invisible in our food, are no longer used. Greenpeace recommends that consumers buy organic food which as a rule is completely free of artificial pesticides.

The study “The Limits of Pesticide Analysis“ can be downloaded at www.greenpeace.de

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