



AMERICAN COUNCIL
ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH
Promoting science and debunking junk since 1978.
This website is for educational purposes.

Slow Food's 10 Anti-Pesticide 'Facts' Debunked

By [Cameron English](#) — June 16, 2022

The activist group Slow Food recently published a listicle warning consumers about the dangers of pesticides. Let's see if their top-10 list stands up to scrutiny.



Organic activist group Slow Food recently [released its list of](#) "10 Key Facts on Pesticides," a post designed to "raise awareness about the risks and dangers of pesticides and to put pressure on European policymakers to commit to a drastic reduction of pesticides." A quick glance at the article reveals a serious issue, though:

there isn't a single fact listed. Every one of the 10 points is an oversimplification or an outright falsehood.

Properly used, pesticides don't pose an elevated risk to public health. No policymaker anywhere needs to commit to a universal reduction in the use of these chemicals. If you know anyone inclined to believe organic-activist rhetoric, send them my list below as an antidote. Slow Food in quotes, followed by my response.

"Our current agricultural model that heavily relies on the excessive use of pesticides is dangerous to human health and the environment."

Any time someone claims that farmers utilize "excessive" quantities of pesticide, ask them which amounts would be appropriate. Are certain chemicals more dangerous than others? Should some be banned and others allowed? They almost certainly won't be able to tell you because they likely don't know how these products are applied in agricultural settings or regulated by agencies like the EPA.

My colleague Dr Josh Bloom has no patience for journalists who complain about "artificial sweeteners" as if they're a single product that, for some unknown reason, just happens to come in different colored packets. These sweeteners are very different from each other, chemically speaking. The same is true of pesticides: they have [different active ingredients](#) which have unique modes of action; some are [meant to kill](#) insects, others weeds, or harmful microorganisms. We can't meaningfully discuss pesticides if we ignore the qualities that distinguish one from the other.

"Pesticide use has failed to help eradicate world hunger and claims that say pesticides are vital for food security are misleading, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. "

The UN Special Rapporteur is wrong. I invite them to move to a country that [unnecessarily restricts](#) pesticide use. After living through a year of food shortages, perhaps they could write another report documenting their experience. The simple fact of the matter is that modern pesticides have enabled enormous progress in public health; use [any metric you like](#)—reductions in mortality, impairment, infectious diseases, or improved quality of life. The result is the same.

"Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to [a long list of scary diseases]."

“Linked to” is a slippery epidemiological phrase that can mean almost anything. It could indicate that people who develop cancer, for example, have been exposed to some pesticide at one point in their lives. But that's not the same assertion as “exposure to pesticide A causes cancer.” Charlatans like Joe “Crazy Joe” Mercola [routinely conflate](#) these two very different observations. Slow Food stopped just shy of committing this same fallacy.

“Pesticides are everywhere: pesticides residues have been detected in many places including people's bedrooms and children's playgrounds.”

“Detection” is yet another misleading term. I could “detect” trace amounts of the insecticide the Orkin Man sprayed in my backyard a month ago. There's not enough to harm my young son or my pets, but it was enough to kill the wasps that tried to set up shop in the lawn. This goes to my point above about “excessive” pesticide use. Context is everything.

“Pesticides are a harmful business: every year, around 385 million unintentional, acute pesticide poisonings are reported, leading to approximately 11,000 deaths per year. Farmers and farm workers, particularly in the Global South, are the most affected.”

Emphasis on “unintentional” and “acute.” Most of these incidents come down to [improper handling](#) or [attempted suicide](#). Every cleaning product and pharmaceutical drug we purchase carries a label that warns us to “use as directed.” Pesticides carry [similar labels](#) with detailed instructions about how to and how *not* to use them. Each of these poisoning cases is tragic, and most are avoidable, but none of them speak to the issue that's actually in dispute: chronic pesticide exposure. Activists often conflate acute and long-term toxicity in order to unnecessarily frighten the public.

“... [M]any toxic pesticides that are banned in Europe because of health related or ecological reasons are still produced and exported to non-EU countries with weaker health and environmental laws, causing dramatic impacts for human health and the environment.”

The [banned in Europe fallacy](#) is a meme adored by environmental groups the world over. Governments ban lots of things for lots of reasons. China [carefully regulates](#)

the speech of its citizens. Should the US therefore repeal the First Amendment? Of course not.

More to the point, Europe is infamously technophobic; for example, EU countries continue to [tightly restrict](#) biotech crops that other nations grow without incident. Political decisions are often motivated by factors other than sound science. The fact that a certain jurisdiction bans a pesticide doesn't tell us anything useful by itself.

We've dealt with six of Slow Food's 10 pesticide "facts." We'll stop here to keep this article to a reasonable length. Check out the other four and see if you can spot the fallacious reasoning they require. Let us know how you did in the comment section below.