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## NAFTA Hits the Fruit and Vegetable Stands

*Information compiled by Leslie Gillett*

Canada is set to raise its limits on pesticide residues on fruit and vegetables for hundreds of products.

The move is part of an effort to harmonize Canadian pesticide rules with those of the United States, which allows higher residue levels for 40 per cent of the pesticides it regulates. Differences in residue limits, which apply both to domestic and imported food, pose a potential "trade irritant," said Richard Aucoin, chief registrar of the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), which sets Canada's pesticide rules.

However, Canada will only raise its limits "where this poses no risks," he stressed.

Green Party leader Elizabeth May said that the harmonization model adopted successfully by the European Union - where all countries must measure up to the member country with the strictest rules - should become standard practice in North America.

Canada should never lower its standards in the name of harmonization, said David Boyd, an environmental lawyer and author of a 2006 study of international pesticide regulations.

"We should look to equal or surpass the best in the world, not only measure ourselves against the US," where regulations are weaker than in jurisdictions such as the European Union, he said.

Canadian regulators and their US counterparts have been working to harmonize their pesticide regulations since 1996, as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Now the effort is being fast-tracked as an initiative under the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), a wide-ranging plan to streamline regulatory and security protocols across North America. The SPP's 2006 report identified stricter residue limits as "barriers to trade."

Canadian caps are higher in only 10 per cent of cases, Aucoin explained, adding that these may be lowered under the harmonization plan. He said Canada won't be raising its limits for all of the cases where its rules are stricter, but "will likely be asked to raise them" for cases now being identified as priorities by growers.

### Case by Case Review

The agency is reviewing its limits on a case-by-case basis, he said.

Aucoin said residue limits are set according to exacting standards in Canada, adding that differences in ecosystems and patterns of use can account for the variation from country to country.

Higher limits "will not change the amount of pesticides coming into the country," he said, noting that residue levels on imported produce are usually well below even the Canadian limits.

"The trend in both Canada and the US is to use less, not more," he said, explaining the high cost of bug-killers has prompted farmers to cut back.

Boyd's report, published by the BC-based David Suzuki Foundation, raised concerns about the allowable levels of pesticide both in the US and Canada.

Comparing 40 US limits with those set by Canada, the European Union, Australia and the World Health Organization, he found the US had the weakest rules for more than half of the pesticide uses studied.

In some cases the differences were dramatic: The US allows 50 times more vinclozolin on cherries as the EU, and 100 times as much lindane on pineapples.

Canada fared no better: For permethrin on leaf lettuce and spinach, the Canadian and US limit was 400 times higher than in Europe, and the Canadian cap on methoxychlor was 1,400 times the European limit.

Both countries also allow pesticides that have been banned not only in Europe but also in some developing countries, Boyd noted.

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-Ottawa Citizen, May 8, 2007; [www.greenparty.ca](http://www.greenparty.ca);

[Watershed Sentinel, May/June, 2007]

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The Watershed Sentinel watches over some of the most stunning landscapes in the world: tall trees, taller mountains, and the expansive ocean and forest. The magazine focuses on how we humans affect these treasures—from our logging and fishing practices to how we treat our air and water—and on the solutions, both large and small, that will eventually create a sustainable society.

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