

Food Giants Earn ‘F’ Grade on Pesticide Reduction: Report

Despite consumer demand for chemical-free food, major brands received low or failing grades on pesticide use and transitioning to regenerative agriculture, according to a new report by As You Sow.

By Suzanne Burdick, Ph.D.

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Food companies have a long way to go to ensure their products are free of harmful pesticides, according to a new report by As You Sow, a nonprofit that promotes environmental and social corporate responsibility through shareholder advocacy.

In its report, “2023 Pesticides in the Pantry: Transparency & Risk in Food Supply Chains,” the nonprofit graded 17 major food manufacturers on progress in reducing pesticides in their products and shifting to regenerative agriculture practices.

The companies earned grades ranging from C to F and collectively averaged an F grade.

As You Sow CEO Andrew Behar told The Defender, “It’s critically important for these companies to understand that their customers want to have safer food and they will win greater market share as they focus on reducing pesticides and increasing regenerative farming.”

Indeed, researchers in 2022 found 81% of U.S. consumers — many of whom may be shareholders in food companies — want their food to be pesticide-free.

Cailin Dendas, As You Sow’s environmental health program coordinator and the report’s lead author, told CNN that to appeal to shareholders, many companies set pesticide reduction goals for 2025 and 2030. “We’re looking at the progress companies are making to achieve those goals, and finding little significant movement,” Dendas said.

One week after As You Sow released its report, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) published a study that found nearly 40% of conventional baby foods still contain toxic pesticides.

Sydney Evans, a senior science analyst at EWG and co-author of the study, told The Guardian that babies and young children are “particularly vulnerable to the health risks posed by pesticides in food — and food is the way most children will be exposed to pesticides.”

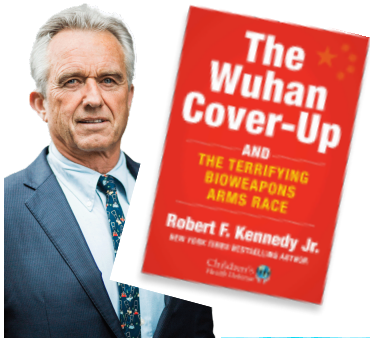
André Leu, organic farming expert and author of “Poisoning Our Children: The Parent’s Guide to the Myths of Safe Pesticides,” agreed. He told The Defender:

“The greatest concern is for the unborn, babies, young children and youths going through puberty. These groups are particularly vulnerable to damage caused by toxins such as pesticides, heavy metals, plastics and forever chemicals.

“No peer-reviewed studies show that any level of these toxic compounds is safe for children. Hundreds of independent scientific studies show that the most minuscule amounts of these toxic compounds damage the developing nervous, hormone, and immune systems, contributing to numerous diseases in children and later in life as adults.”

While these studies show that tiny amounts of pesticides are contributing to the epidemic of chronic diseases, Leu said, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other pesticide regulators refuse to study how pesticide formulations used on food may be contributing to the U.S. epidemic of chronic diseases.

“There is zero peer-reviewed science showing that these residue levels are safe,” he added.



“The Wuhan Cover-Up” by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

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More than half of companies analyzed scored an F

For its analysis, As You Sow rated 17 major food companies on 27 indicators of progress toward reducing pesticides based on a “thorough review of publicly available information, including companies’ published reports, press statements, and website text,” the report said.

The companies analyzed were (in alphabetical order): Archer Daniels, Midland (ADM), Bloch & Guggenheimer (B&G) Foods Inc., Campbell Soup Company, Cargill, Conagra Brands Inc., Danone S. A., Del Monte Pacific Limited Foods Inc., General Mills Inc., Kellanova, The Kraft Heinz Company, Lamb Weston Holdings Inc., Mars Incorporated, Mondelēz International Inc., Nestlé, PepsiCo Inc., Post Holdings Inc. and The J.M. Smucker Company.

The indicators were listed as yes/no questions, such as “Has the company adopted chemical pesticide reduction practices in its key agricultural supply chains?” and “Does the company publicly disclose pesticide use data (including trends or changes)?”

As You Sow allowed each company to review a draft of its findings and provide additional information or clarification.

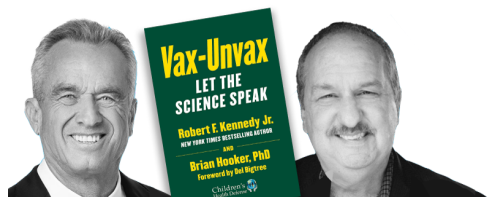
The J.M. Smucker Company — which owns numerous brands including Folgers coffee, Smucker’s jam, JIF peanut butter, Dunkin’ and Twinkies — scored the lowest by failing to get a “yes” mark for any of the indicators.

More than half of the companies earned an F grade by scoring positively for five or fewer indicators.

General Mills scored highest — earning a C letter grade — by scoring positively for 10 of the 27 indicators.

Seven of the companies have publicly stated a goal to reduce pesticide use in their key agricultural supply chains, yet none collects or monitors pesticide use data from their supply chains, the report said.

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Pesticide use may undermine consumer loyalty

According to the report, although manufacturers are aware of the risks of continued use of pesticides in their supply chains — including undermining consumer loyalty — “It has proven difficult for most growers to get off the pesticide ‘treadmill’ where pesticide use leads to adverse results and greater dependence on pesticides.”

Not just the companies but farmers themselves stand to benefit from reducing pesticide use. Behar said:

“We see that farmers who shift away from pesticides have higher earnings per acre, reduced health risks to their farm workers and adjacent communities, and build sustainable ecosystems needing fewer inputs, including fossil fuel-based fertilizers.”

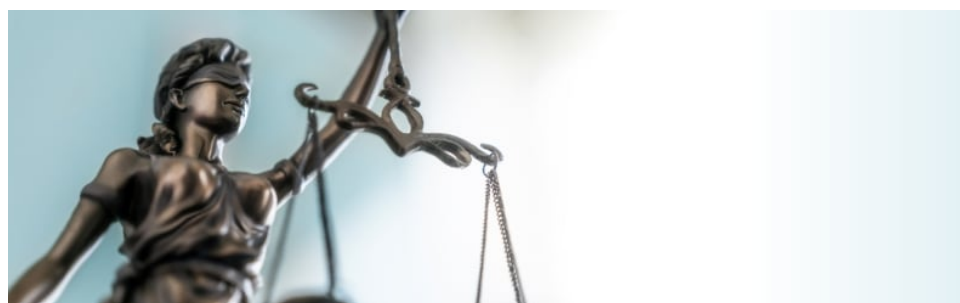
As You Sow’s latest pesticide report is its fourth. The nonprofit updates its report every two years to capture changes in the sector and inform the nonprofit’s direct engagement with the companies.

The first report focused exclusively on the herbicide Roundup which contains the pesticide glyphosate. The next three reports included all pesticides and regenerative farming.

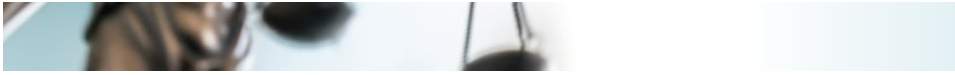
The most recent report focused a great deal of attention on how glyphosate is sprayed on many agricultural products including wheat, oats and beans only a few weeks or days before they are harvested, leading to crop contamination, Behar said.

Glyphosate has been linked to many human health problems, including cancer, neurological diseases, endocrine disruption and birth defects.

Only one of the 17 companies analyzed — ADM — prohibited its suppliers from using glyphosate as a pre-harvest desiccant on crops.



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Companies that use pesticides face litigation risks

Behar noted that glyphosate — a carcinogen and reproductive toxicant — is prevalent in our food supply and that its negative impacts pose great risks for these companies and their customers.

“From a shareholder standpoint, we see there’s a lot of risks [to continuing to use glyphosate], risks of losing market share [and] certainly risks around litigation,” he said.

Behar pointed out that lawsuits brought by people who “spritzed” the glyphosate-containing herbicide Roundup on their backyards to “knock down the weeds” have resulted in pricey settlements ranging from \$200 million to \$400 million.

“When people realize that it [glyphosate] is in every bowl of cereal that they’re eating, we think eventually this could be bigger than tobacco,” he said, referring to how state governments in 1998 successfully sued tobacco companies for \$246 billion to hold the industry accountable for the lethal effects of cigarettes.

Consumers can also push companies away from using pesticides, including glyphosate, through their purchasing power.

“Vote with your dollars,” Behar said. “Buy food that’s safer to eat. Ask your grocers — if you can’t find safer food — to start putting it on their shelves.”

Behar suggested people can take other actions:

“Post on social media when you decide to not buy a product from a company with a low score. Also send public gratitude when you buy from companies that are making decisions to reduce risk for all stakeholders.

“A dozen posts can make a difference when the board of directors makes these critical decisions.”

Regenerative agriculture is better all around

As You Sow’s report goes into detail about how supply chain providers can adopt regenerative agriculture methods to boost both productivity and profit.

Regenerative agriculture is a “much better way to produce food for the world and ... your customers want that. They want to have safer food,” Behar said, adding:

“These techniques — which, by the way, were used 10,000 years before the chemical industry got involved with farming — increase crop output on a per-acre basis, and the food is less exposed to pesticides, so it’s safer.

“The farmer makes more money on an acre-by-acre basis and there’s really no need for these pesticides — or for the fossil fuel-based fertilizers.”

Regenerative farming practices include planting cover crops, minimizing or avoiding soil tillage, integrating livestock and diversifying crops, the report said.

Such practices were used across the North American continent by Indigenous communities for hundreds of years.

Some critics of regenerative agriculture, such as Bill Gates, have argued that genetically modified crops — which are commonly sprayed with glyphosate — and synthetic fertilizers are needed due to changing climate conditions.

Behar said it's the other way around: Regenerative agriculture helps mitigate the possible effects of climate change.

"The land sequesters about 4 times the amount of carbon and biodiversity increases massively," he said. "Farms actually become carbon sinks and farmers can start to generate revenue by selling offsets as well."

"Another benefit from regenerative agriculture is that the land holds about 3.5 times the amount of water," Behar said, "so you don't lose the topsoil in a climate-induced superstorm that has become common."

According to Behar, one of the reasons General Mills and other companies are moving toward regenerative agriculture is because they found a lot of the industrial agricultural farms were losing their topsoil "and they wanted to increase the resilience of their supply chain."

EWG: 'Advocacy works'

Meanwhile, EWG for its recent pesticide study tested 58 samples of conventional baby foods and found at least one pesticide in 22, or 38%, of the samples.

The brands tested were Beech-Nut, Gerber and Parent's Choice. Many products had more than one pesticide. Nine different pesticides were detected in total among the samples.

EWG also tested 15 organic samples and found no pesticide residues.

EWG said in a press release that the results were better than the results from testing it commissioned in 1995 that found at least one pesticide in 53% of the samples tested and a total of 16 different pesticides in the samples.

"The pesticides those tests discovered were, overall, far more toxic and dangerous for infants to ingest than the ones our latest tests uncovered," EWG said.

For example, in 1995 the brain-damaging pesticide chlorpyrifos was detected in baby food samples. The EPA in 2021 banned the use of chlorpyrifos on food crops — a move EWG and other nonprofits had advocated for years.

"Advocacy works," Evans said. "Any pesticide residue in baby food is concerning, but parents should feel reassured that some of the most toxic chemicals we found in our 1995 study are no longer being detected."

However, Leu disagreed, saying EWG's assertion that the "most toxic" pesticides were no longer in baby food lacks the science to back it up.

"There is not one independent peer-reviewed study to show that any pesticide is safe for human children, even at the most negligible levels," he said, adding:

“The data for the actual pesticide formulations used in our food supply are missing as the U.S. refuses to test the formulations.

“Only the active ingredient is tested, which can be less than one percent of the formulations, and there is no requirement to test them on the unborn or newborn. The testing is done on adult animals.

“Children do not have the detoxifying enzymes of adults, so the most negligible amounts of pesticides severely affect them.”

Moreover, Leu said, the EWG press release cites the banning of chlorpyrifos as evidence of progress — but fails to mention that this ban was overturned in the courts.

The Defender reached out to the EWG for comment but the nonprofit did not respond by our publication deadline.

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Suzanne Burdick, Ph.D.

Suzanne Burdick, Ph.D., is a reporter and researcher for The Defender based in Fairfield, Iowa.

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A

A. Miller

24 days ago

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R

Ricky Ricardo

→ A. Miller

23 days ago

One big happy, evil family! Any Canadians reading this? Here's a nice visual for you...notice the "Global Citizen, 2024" shirt!

<https://leohohmann.com/2022...>

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Angie

→ Ricky Ricardo

12 days ago

You are so right. Many of us know Justine Castro agenda for a long time. Yet this buffoon

...are agenda for a long time. For this reason, is still voted in by Ontario and the Maritimes seats. The rest of the country is of no value to him/her self.



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irishtap

→ A. Miller



23 days ago

Unfortunately you're right.

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BChristine



24 days ago edited

As long as people continue to purchase these conventional BIG Food/Ag products, they will continue to manufacture them - toxic additives, chemicals and all.

AND ...

As long as the so-called regulatory agencies ALLOW these toxic additives and chemicals in our food and let them take a free pass, this will continue.

I think people are s-l-o-w-l-y becoming more informed about how broken our food system is ... thanks to sites like these and others. But it's going to take TIME.

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holisticpoet



24 days ago

Produce as much of your own food as possible. If you can get the rest from your local community farmers markets. Learn who your farmer is and what he stands for.

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Gary Brown



23 days ago

How, and why are we not protecting the children?

JULY 11, 2022 CDC finds toxic weedkiller in 87 percent of children tested

Food is the main route of exposure to glyphosate for the children,

aged 18 and under, according to CDC researchers. Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Bayer's Roundup, the weedkiller most widely used by conventional agriculture around the world.

<https://www.ewg.org/news-in...>

