



Pesticide  
residues in food:  
facts not fiction

*'The Government recommends an intake of at least five portions of fruit or vegetables per person per day to reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and many other chronic conditions.'*


The Department of Health contact details are provided at the back of the leaflet.

## Department of Health guidelines



***"The positive effects of eating fresh fruit and vegetables as part of a balanced, healthy diet are well proven and far outweigh any concern about pesticide residues."***

**Dr Ian Brown, PRC chairman**



It is important that people eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day to stay healthy. It is also important to protect the food we eat from disease and damage caused by insects.

This protection comes in the form of pesticides which are used to control, protect and prevent damage to food. As pesticides are used to kill unwanted pests, weeds or diseases, there is concern that potential pesticide residues in food may harm people, wildlife and the environment. This is why there are strict controls in place over their sale and use.

The Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC) is an independent group of experts that advises the government on the monitoring of pesticide residue levels in food and drink. This leaflet will introduce you to the monitoring programme.





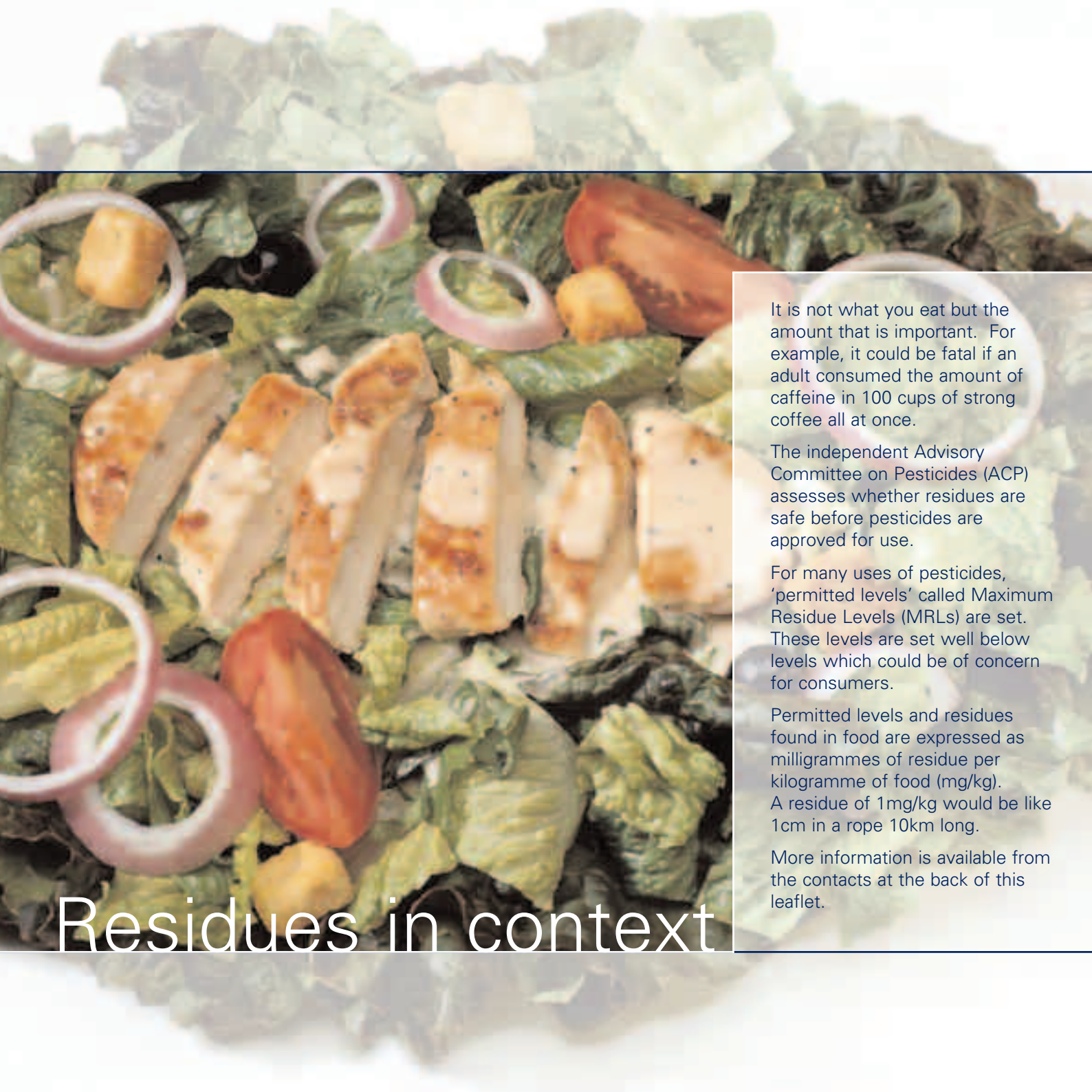
Pesticides have been widely used in agriculture for over 50 years. Without pesticides we could lose one third of world crops each year due to pests, weeds and diseases.



We have become accustomed to having food that is safe, nutritious and blemish-free without sparing a thought to how it reaches us in that condition. Some farmers use pesticides to help meet this demand, to produce food that is free from disease and pest damage.

Pesticide use may lead to traces of residues in food but some plants contain their own natural defences which have toxins similar to those found in chemical pesticides.

# Why pesticides are used



It is not what you eat but the amount that is important. For example, it could be fatal if an adult consumed the amount of caffeine in 100 cups of strong coffee all at once.

The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) assesses whether residues are safe before pesticides are approved for use.

For many uses of pesticides, 'permitted levels' called Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) are set. These levels are set well below levels which could be of concern for consumers.

Permitted levels and residues found in food are expressed as milligrammes of residue per kilogramme of food (mg/kg). A residue of 1mg/kg would be like 1cm in a rope 10km long.

More information is available from the contacts at the back of this leaflet.

# Residues in context

# Monitoring pesticide residues

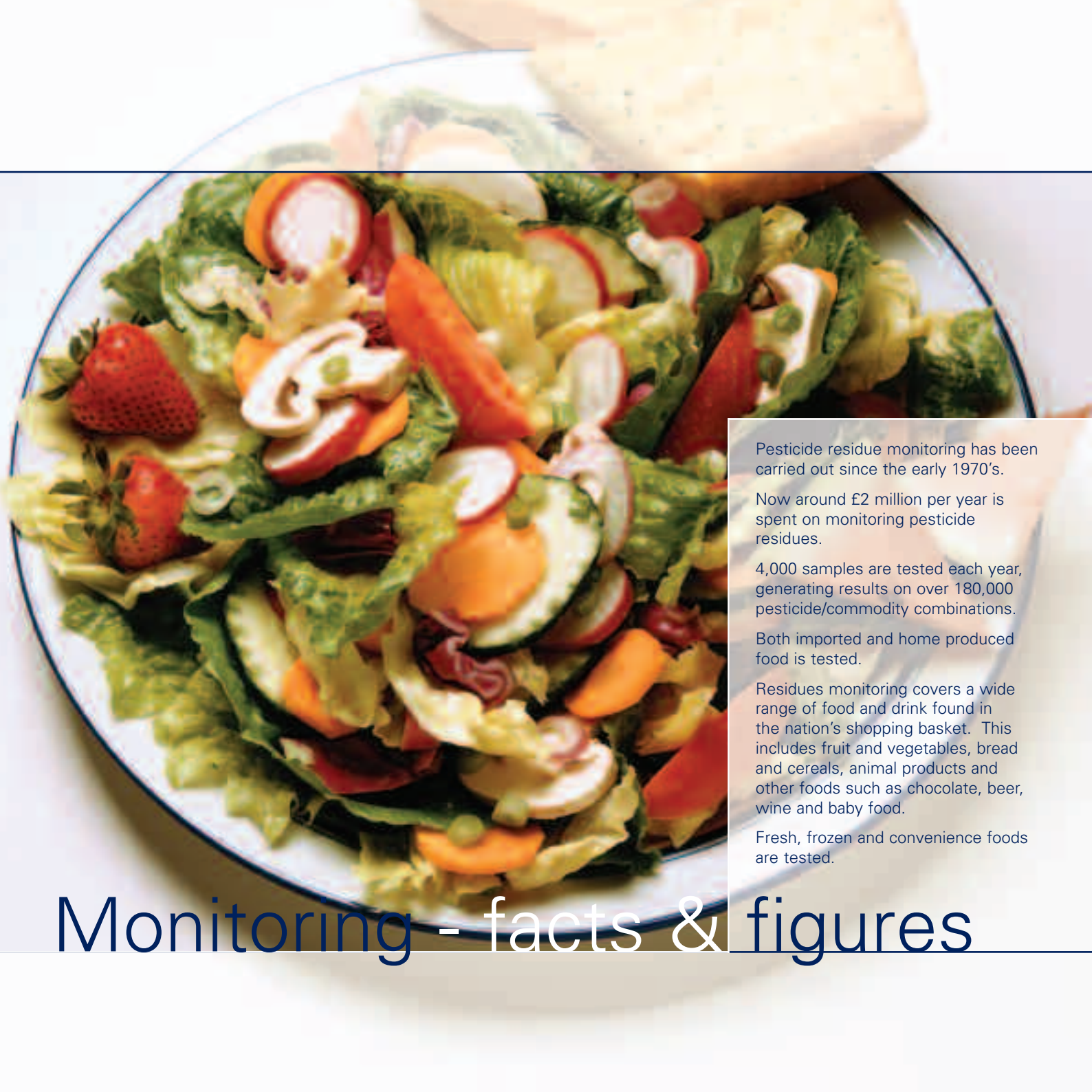
The Pesticide Residues Committee carefully monitors pesticide residues in food and drink.

PRC's annual monitoring programme involves:

1. Discussion and agreement of the range of foods to be tested in each year's programme
2. The collection of samples from a range of outlets including supermarkets, grocers, butchers, bakers, fishmongers, farm shops, pick-your-own or market stalls. Selections are also made from ports, wholesale markets and distribution depots
3. The testing of samples at laboratories
4. The processing and collation of results and the production of the draft report
5. The discussion of the data and draft report by the PRC
6. The publication of the report.



## How it works



Pesticide residue monitoring has been carried out since the early 1970's.

Now around £2 million per year is spent on monitoring pesticide residues.

4,000 samples are tested each year, generating results on over 180,000 pesticide/commodity combinations.

Both imported and home produced food is tested.

Residues monitoring covers a wide range of food and drink found in the nation's shopping basket. This includes fruit and vegetables, bread and cereals, animal products and other foods such as chocolate, beer, wine and baby food.

Fresh, frozen and convenience foods are tested.

# Monitoring - facts & figures

# Results

Since 1991, up to 4,000 samples have been tested annually. The majority contain no pesticide residues.

Of the 4,000 samples tested, just two or three each year erode the safety margins. However, checks made by the PRC have shown that these are not of concern to human health.

All data is published in quarterly and annual reports which are available via the PRC and its website.

Since 2000, the Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC) has provided the Government with advice on monitoring food and drink for residues.

The PRC is an independent body with members from a range of backgrounds including:

- Experts on the effects of chemicals on people
- People with knowledge of food production techniques
- People who have an interest in the safety of the food we eat.

# Pesticide Residues Committee

# Contacts

## **Pesticide Residues Committee Secretariat**

Room 308, Mallard House, Kings Pool,  
3 Peasholme Green, York, YO1 7PX.

Or contact the Information Services section  
of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (telephone  
01904 455775, fax 01904 455733) or email  
information@psd.defra.gsi.gov.uk  
www.prc-uk.org

## **Pesticides Safety Directorate**

Contact details as above.  
www.pesticides.gov.uk

## **Other contacts:**

### **Advisory Committee on Pesticides Secretariat**

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs,  
Mallard House, Kings Pool, 3 Peasholme Green,  
York, YO1 7PX.

Fax: 01904 455722

Direct line: 01904 455702

Switchboard: 01904 640500

Email: a.c.p@psd.defra.gsi.gov.uk

www.pesticides.gov.uk/acp\_home.asp

### **Food Standards Agency (England)**

Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Branch  
Chemical Safety and Toxicology Division, Aviation  
House, 125 Kingsway, London. WC2B 6NH.

Telephone: 020 7276 8542

E-mail: helpline@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

www.food.gov.uk

### **Department of Health**

Website: www.dh.gov.uk



www.prc-uk.org