

## PESTICIDES ON YOUR SALAD LINKED TO PERVERSIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDER?<sup>1</sup>

Cynthia Liu<sup>©</sup>

Pesticide residues accumulating in children of female farm workers appear to contribute to developmental and cognitive delays, according to a long-term study under way in Salinas, CA--otherwise known as the world's "salad bowl." The study, administered by the Center for Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas (CHAMACOS), has been under way for over ten years now. Pre-natal, pregnancy, and post-birth tests include samples of umbilical cord blood and sustained interviews with the children. Preliminary results are disturbing:

*"...at age 2, the children of mothers who had the highest levels of organophosphate pesticide metabolites in their blood had the worst mental development in the group. They also had the most cases of pervasive developmental disorder. ..."These include signs like the child is afraid to try new things, can't stand anything out of place, and avoid looking others in the eye. This is considered to be autism spectrum behavior."*

Workers in the field and those living in "Big Ag" farming communities experience direct contact with agricultural pesticides. Wearing gloves, coveralls that could be left at the site, and washing hands and produce from the field before eating all had substantial impact on reducing pesticide residue, but workers seldom had access to any of the above. Pregnant women who work in the fields and absorb or ingest pesticides are especially vulnerable; at the same time, "the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found evidence that the pesticides contaminating kids around the country, regardless of proximity to agriculture, is high enough to raise questions about the impact those pesticides may have on their growing brains."

The CHAMACOS results highlighting women who are agricultural workers are alarming. Additional research into environmental toxins and their impact on children's health will be conducted throughout the U.S. by the National Children's Study, a National Institutes of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, and Centers for Disease Control joint project.

Though absorption of pesticides and other environmental toxins in the air, water, and diet may be a few steps removed for children whose parents do not work on big industrial farms, nevertheless the interconnectedness of what we breathe and eat puts all of us, and our most vulnerable, at risk. All the more reason to commit to organic produce from local family farms, or to safely grow your own greens.

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<sup>1</sup> care2 causes daily, December 27, 2010