Avoiding pesticide residue on fruits and veggies

Chensheng (Alex) Lu, associate professor of environmental exposure biology at Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH), discusses the problem of pesticide residue on fruits and vegetables in a new video on the website of Environmental Working Group (EWG), a leading environmental health research and advocacy organization. The video appears in conjunction with the release of EWG's Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce 2013.

In the video, Lu cites his 2008 study that monitored pesticide levels in children who normally ate non-organic fruits and vegetables but who were given only organic over a five-day period. "During that five-day period, most of the pesticides [in the children's urine] disappeared," Lu said. "We believe the most vulnerable population would be small infants and children, because of their small body weight." Possible negative health effects from pesticides include impaired mental development or problems with motor skills.

Lu recommends that families seek information about which fruits and vegetables have the highest pesticide residue levels—EWG's Shopper's Guide lists a "dirty dozen" on its website, for example—so they can decide when to buy organic instead of regular.