WHY IS CADMIUM IN MY FOOD?

Cadmium (Cd) is a natural metallic element that concentrates in phosphate rock.

Phosphate rock is used as a feedstock for industrially produced fertilizer. Cadmium concentrations vary by geography. Idaho, for example, has higher concentrations than other fertilizer-producing states.

Plants take up cadmium into their leaves, stems, roots, and tubers, seeds, grains, and fruits. How much plants take up depends on plant type and environmental factors. Amounts uptaken vary a lot depending on the type of plant and the environment it grows in.

I’M EATING METAL. SO WHAT?

Cadmium is a known carcinogen by inhalation, but the primary route of exposure for the non-smoking population is through ingestion via food and water. It accumulates in and may permanently damage the kidneys, liver, and bones. Because cadmium stays in the body for long periods of time, exposure to the metal is cumulative and our body burden increases with age.

DOES ANYONE CARE?

The EU is far ahead of the U.S. and Northwestern states in regulating the amount of cadmium allowed in fertilizers and our foods. The EU recently adopted stringent limits for the concentrations of cadmium allowed in fertilizer. The U.S. allows much higher concentrations of cadmium in fertilizers and foods.

WHAT CAN I DO?

As a Consumer

Start by letting your grocery stores and markets know that you’re concerned with cadmium levels in vegetables. You can also lobby your local representatives by letting them know that this is an issue you care about.

As a Gardener

You can prevent cadmium exposures by growing your own vegetables. Two practices that will reduce plant uptake of cadmium are to: restore the quality of your soil; and plant cover crops that remove cadmium and other heavy metals from the soil. For more information about these practices and about cadmium exposure from vegetables, visit www.pprc.org.

Keep growing and eating vegetables!

The information in this fact sheet is not intended to discourage you from growing or eating vegetables. Vegetables are critical to a healthy diet and to a healthy life.

Learn More!

If you’re interested in learning more about cadmium in your food, check out our series of FAQs on Cadmium in Fertilizer at www.pprc.org:

• Cadmium in Fertilizer: Cadmium Contamination in Plants
• Cadmium in Fertilizer: Limits and Laws
• Cadmium in Fertilizer: Reducing Cadmium Exposure in Gardens

www.pprc.org