

## **Excessive chemicals in fruits and vegetables: An investigation into the right to health<sup>1</sup>**

*For years, the people of Taiwan have lived under the shadows of toxic foods. There have been numerous incidents of excessive pesticide residues in fruits and vegetables that have made their way into the market. The series of mishaps have raised questions of possible government negligence and inadequate inspection. Control Yuan Members launched an own-motion investigation to assess pesticide residue control, the timeframe for testing and the supervision by government authorities.*

Pesticides are a common and effective means in agricultural practices for pest control. In 2010 alone, the total amount of pesticides used was 7,851 tons. To ensure consumer safety, the Council of Agricultural Affairs has established a set of regulations to govern different aspects of pesticides from production, input, output to selling and auditing. The law also provides a cap on pesticide residues in fruits and vegetables. In practice, however, a lack of timely result often fails to prevent the harvesting, selling and consumption of fruits and vegetables with excessive chemical residues. In addition, the Council fails to conduct random inspections of produce and mandate delayed harvest for fruits and vegetables that failed the test. However, these random inspections fail to reflect the eating habit in general, because rather than sampling produce from average farmers who provide the main supply of fruits and vegetables being consumed, a disproportionate amount of samples came from the production and marketing team and the training programs of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP).

The Control Yuan has proposed corrective measures to the Council of Agricultural Affairs and issued a letter to the Executive Yuan, urging its subordinate agencies to make the necessary improvements. The Council of Agricultural Affairs has promised to minimize the lead-time for test result and publish the report before the actual harvest. The Council will also revise the SOP to move the sampling lead-time to five days and ten days for vegetables and fruits respectively. The samples will then be delivered to a toxic testing facility within 48 hours. The Agriculture and Food Agency has promised to hold meetings on a regular basis to assess the effectiveness of the regulations. Meetings will be held to discuss possible revisions if problems arise during implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Case no. 1000800294