

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 1993

Letters to the Editor
The New York Times
229 West 43rd Street
New York, N.Y. 100036

To the Editor:

Michael Fumento's views on pesticides ("Mother Nature's Pesticide Factory," June 9, 1993) conflict with the federal government's historic commitment to insuring the safety of the food supply.

More than 300 animal carcinogens are being used on our food supply. Yet Mr. Fumento blithely says it is "questionable" whether "chemicals that cause tumors in rodents ... will cause tumors in humans." A similar argument is made by every industry lobby seeking to avoid federal regulation of dangerous chemicals, including the tobacco lobby.

While the risk assessment techniques he criticizes can certainly be improved, the fact remains that identification of animal carcinogens is the most useful and widely accepted method of identifying substances that cause cancer in humans. Moreover, the only alternative to animal tests -- testing pesticides directly on humans -- would be unethical and, because of the 15 to 20 year lag between exposure and cancer, impractical. In the face of this unavoidable uncertainty, common sense dictates that we should eliminate animal carcinogens from the food supply where we can.

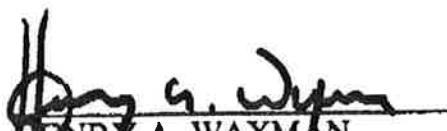
Nor is it logical to lower our guard against synthetic chemicals because some natural substances also cause cancer. This is a classic non sequitur. Rather than embrace carcinogenic pesticides, the answer is to reduce exposure to all carcinogens in the food supply to the extent possible.

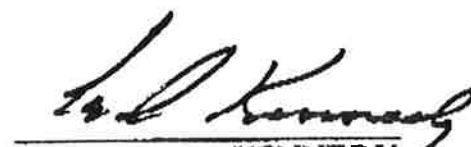
It is also strange that Mr. Fumento takes solace in the fact that "half of all synthetic chemicals tested in animals have caused tumors." Most Americans would find this proposition alarming. The high incidence of animal carcinogenicity in synthetic chemicals means we need to be more cautious -- not less -- about adding these substances to the food supply.

Under present law, fresh fruits and vegetables are permitted to contain numerous carcinogens, often presenting serious health risks. Legislation that we have introduced would establish a health-based standard for all pesticides in food, whether raw or processed, as well as special safeguards for the protection of children. Under this approach, pesticides that are animal carcinogens could be used if their residues on food are small enough to make any risk to human health very unlikely.

Reforming our laws in this way will encourage the best long-term solution to the pesticide problem, by reducing the excessive use of toxic substances in the American food supply.

Sincerely,


HENRY A. WAXMAN
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Health and the Environment


EDWARD M. KENNEDY
Chairman, Committee on
Labor and Human Resources