

Pesticides

If you grow or process produce, make sure you use pesticides correctly during growing, harvesting, packing and storage.



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What are pesticides?

Pesticides are agricultural chemicals used to treat pests and diseases during production, growing and storing your produce.

These include insecticides, fungicides and herbicides (weed control) you may use during growing of produce; and also insecticides, fungicides or fumigants that may be used during or after packing produce.

What is an MRL?

MRL stands for maximum residue limit. An MRL is the highest amount of an agricultural or veterinary (agvet) chemical residue that is legally allowed in a food product sold in Australia. MRLs help regulatory agencies check whether a chemical has been used correctly to control pests and diseases in food production.

What is the requirement?

Any chemical residues remaining on produce must be within the permitted MRL for that chemical in that produce.

This means you need to be sure the chemical is allowed to be used on the specific produce (i.e. registered for use on that produce) and that it is applied correctly.

Where a chemical specifies a withholding period or pre-harvest time between application and harvest, these directions must be followed. In this way, any residues left on the produce should meet the MRL requirements.

The MRL requirements are under [Standard 1.4.2 Agvet](#) chemicals of the Food Standards Code.

Getting it right – reducing your risk

As best practice, things you can do to reduce the risk of pesticide residues exceeding the MRL are:

- Buy chemicals new from commercial suppliers (approved sellers), and make sure you get the material safety data sheets and follow the instructions for use and withholding periods between application and harvest. Do not buy second hand chemicals.
- Store chemicals in a safe area, away from food handling areas and water sources.
- Try to minimise spray drift (e.g. from wind) so the chemical does not land on nearby crops that may not be allowed to contain residues of that chemical, or may have a lower MRL.
- Test soil to check for persistent chemicals and heavy metals.

Need more information?

- Contact the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority for information on buying and using agvet chemicals, and your state/territory food regulatory authority to discuss how MRLs apply to your produce.
- Contact your state/territory [food regulatory authority](#)
- [Primary Production and Processing Standards \(Chapter 4\)](#)
- [Fresh Produce Safety Centre – Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety 2022](#)