

Frequently Asked Questions about PFOA and Agricultural Products

The Department of Environmental Conservation is working with other state agencies to determine the nature and extent of PFOA contamination before taking the step to test local agricultural products.

The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets has provided the following information about the possible impacts to agricultural products based on the scientific literature available.

What are potential impacts to corn or hay crops grown on soils with elevated levels of PFOA?

Studies show that corn and hay have the ability to take up PFOA and can accumulate this contaminant to levels many times higher than the soil concentration, even when PFOA soil concentrations are low. Generally the higher the concentration of PFOA in the soil, the higher the concentration could be in the plants.

What are potential impacts to milk from a cow ingesting feed and water containing PFOA?

The scientific literature suggests that if lactating cows and sheep are switched to clean feed and water sources, within five days the level of PFOA in their milk should be reduced.

What are potential impacts to meat from a dairy animal that has consumed PFOA contaminated feed or water?

The scientific literature suggests that cattle and sheep should be given clean feed and water for at least 21 days prior to slaughter to minimize exposure to PFOA.

Is it OK to eat vegetables from my garden?

While no direct testing of garden soils or vegetables has been done yet, scientific studies show that PFOA uptake differs among types of produce. While leaves and stems of most plants apparently accumulate PFOA from soil they are grown in, the storage compartments (grain, fruit, tubers) show much lower PFOA levels – the higher the soil concentration of PFOA, the higher the concentration of PFOA in the plants.

Root and leafy vegetables also tend to adhere soil to the surface of the produce. If PFOA is found in soil, thoroughly washing root and leafy green vegetables with bottled water will further reduce exposure to PFOA from growing produce in soil contaminated with PFOA and/or watering produce gardens with PFOA contaminated water. One could also peel root vegetables prior to consumption.

Are the eggs from my home chicken flock OK to eat?

Chickens will take up PFOA from contaminated feed, water and ingested soil. PFOA may stay in the body of chickens for more than 30 days, even after being switched to a PFOA-free diet and environs. PFOA will transfer to eggs to a level that is proportional to their exposure, primarily in the yolk of contaminated eggs. Chickens should be given clean feed, water and environs for 30 days to minimize exposure to PFOA in eggs.

Can I have my soil and agricultural products tested?

The Department of Environmental Conservation is working with other state agencies to determine the nature and extent of the contamination before taking the step to test local agricultural products. This approach allows the State to identify the impacted areas and provide assistance to residents within those areas. The Agency of Agriculture is developing a plan for sampling agricultural commodities within the impacted areas.

What about maple syrup?

No information is available in the scientific literature regarding uptake of PFOA in maple trees. The Vermont Agriculture and Environmental Laboratory (VAEL) is developing a method to test for PFOA in maple syrup and, potentially, sap. Once the nature and extent of contamination is determined, the Agency of Agriculture will develop a sampling plan to test maple sugaring operations within the impacted areas.

Contaminated water and livestock –

If your groundwater source used to water livestock is contaminated with PFOA, you need to obtain a source of clean water:

1. Fill a livestock tank or similar food grade container with the clean water and use that as your source for livestock - OR -
2. If your kitchen sink water has a PFOA-removing filter on it, you may attach a hose to that water source and use that for livestock -OR -
3. Check your yellow pages for local bulk water delivery companies that supply clean water.

If you have further questions about PFOA and agricultural products, contact:

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