

Divide in Food Quality: Hidden Health Crisis

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News and videos about pesticide use, chemically soaked fruits and vegetables, and adulterated foods and snacks have raised public concerns. With a growing population, Farmers rely more on pesticides for crops and vegetables.¹ According to estimates, pesticides produce over one-third of agricultural products.² Prolonged exposure to these chemicals has been linked to a range of diseases like Parkinson's disease, neurological conditions, and cancer. Research also found damage to DNA, oxidative stress, cytokine cascade activation, apoptosis, and other tissue abnormalities seen in liver, kidney, lung, and brain tissue from in-vitro and in-vivo studies.¹

Eating high-quality, naturally grown fruits and vegetables is a distant dream for most people. In India, where 65% of the population resides in rural areas, access to high-quality fruits and vegetables is primarily concentrated in tier 1 cities. Supermarkets in these areas are key in marketing and supplying consumers with certified organic and other food products. They offer comprehensive knowledge of organic food through various channels, such as standard certification, Participatory Guarantee Systems, and farmer-focused narratives.³ Retailers try to provide organic food in a way that fits the lifestyles of urban consumers.

However, they are out of reach for the economically disadvantaged, who are left with contaminated and unsafe options.

Furthermore, the cost-effectiveness of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods like grains, added sugars and fats often influence the eating habits in lower socioeconomic positions.⁴

Obtaining adequate quantities of wholesome and safe food is essential for maintaining life and fostering well-being. More than 200 diseases, from cancer to diarrhoea, are brought on by contaminated food that contains dangerous bacteria, viruses, parasites, or chemical chemicals. Additionally, it feeds a vicious cycle of illness and malnutrition that primarily affects the sick, old, and young children. According to WHO, An estimated 600 million – almost 1 in 10 people in the world fall ill after eating contaminated food, and 420 000 die every year, resulting in the loss of 33 million healthy life years (DALYs). In low- and middle-income countries, US\$ 110 billion is lost yearly in productivity and medical expenses resulting from unsafe food.⁵

Access to good quality food is every individual's right, regardless of socioeconomic status. This public health problem requires a multifaceted approach which involves government, private institutions, NGOs, and social media platforms.

Government: Strict enforcement of rules and regulations to ensure high-quality standards.

Private institutions and NGOs: Investing in infrastructure to support food distribution and incentivising supermarkets to serve economically disadvantaged areas

Social Media platforms: Creating awareness and making informed choices.

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