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**PRESS RELEASE**

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# Farmers & Consumers Kept in the Dark As Toxic Metals Found in Minnesota Fertilizer

## Local Ag Group Calls for Ban on Waste-Derived Fertilizers

Minneapolis – May 3, 2001. As "spring fever" takes hold and farmers and gardeners are preparing their soil for planting, many Minnesotans are unwittingly purchasing fertilizers made from industrial toxic waste. Contamination of many popular fertilizers with industrial waste is much more widespread than previously thought. This means that farms and gardens are ending up as dumping grounds for the waste, according to *"Waste Lands: The Threat of Toxic Fertilizer,"* a new report released locally today by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) in Minneapolis.

In tests commissioned by Washington [State] Safe Food and Fertilizer and the California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG) Charitable Trust, each of the twenty-nine 29 fertilizers gathered from around the country were tested positive for at least one of and found to contain twenty-two 22 toxic metals, most of which are known to be harmful to human health. Test results for twenty 20 fertilizers showed that they exceed levels of concern for federal land disposal criteria. This means that if these fertilizers were destined for disposal, rather than being recycled into products, they *could not* be sent to a hazardous waste landfill.

IATP collected samples of As part of the sampling of fertilizers from around the country, laboratory tests of two fertilizers purchased in Minnesota -- BCA Products, Inc. and Voluntary Product's Liquid Iron ---– and both exceeded the levels of concern for land disposal. (BCA for cadmium, chromium and vanadium; and Liquid Iron for cadmium, chromium and nickel.)

"It seems absolutely criminal to me that we can put these products on the lawns where our children play, or on the land where we grow our food, yet they are too toxic for a hazardous waste landfill!" said Jackie Hunt Christensen, food safety project director for IATP. "Because there are no state or federal requirements to provide complete information on product labels, the public has no way of knowing that these products may contain high levels of persistent toxins."

Fertilizer products become contaminated when manufacturers buy toxic waste from industrial facilities to obtain low-cost plant nutrients, such as zinc or iron. Such industrial wastes are often highly contaminated

with persistent toxic chemicals, including heavy metals and dioxins. These and the other substances found in the tested fertilizers are known or suspected to cause cancer, reproductive harm, neurological damage, and a variety of other dangerous health effects, including kidney and liver damage, skin irritation, and gastrointestinal ailments.

Spreading these contaminants on farm soils is of particular concern because lead, cadmium, mercury and other contaminants persist and even accumulate in soil for decades where they may be absorbed by food crops. A California Department of Food and Agriculture assessment of the health risk posed by toxic fertilizers says that eating food grown with contaminated fertilizers will be the greatest single source of exposure to these contaminants for commercial products.

In addition to the two fertilizers bought in Minnesota, three products marketed by Minnesota-based Cenex and purchased in Idaho and Montana, were sampled. All three exceeded the land disposal criteria for cadmium, chromium and vanadium. One sample also exceeded the level for nickel.

"Cenex is of particular concern because this is at least the third time the company has been accused of selling fertilizers with a lot of heavy metals," noted Christensen. "For what is supposed to be a farmer-led cooperative, Cenex doesn't seem to be paying much attention to what is put in the ground and may end up in our food." That just doesn't seem right for what is supposed to be a farmer-led cooperative. Ffarmers in Quincy, Washington first brought a lawsuit against Cenex, now part of Farmland Industries, in 1992 for allegedly distributing fertilizers adulterated with heavy metals.

Other fertilizers sampled, such as Scott's Winterizer and Turfbuilder, are lawn care products with elevated levels of some metals and which are available nationwide.

The test results come as the U.S. EPA is reviewing comments on a proposed rule to limit heavy metals and dioxin for zinc fertilizers and label these fertilizers for toxic substances.

Due to the high levels of toxic substances found in these fertilizers, IATP and the report authors are calling on states to ban the use of hazardous wastes to make fertilizers and calling for fertilizer labels to list the presence and quantity of all ingredients, including toxic substances.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy is a non-profit, independent organization that promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology and advocacy.

The complete report can be found at Waste Lands. The Threat of Toxic Fertilizer

Background:

Samples of granular fertilizer produced by BCA Products of Sleepy Eye, MN, and Liquid Iron were purchased by IATP and tested by Frontier Geosciences, an EPA-accredited independent laboratory based in Seattle. The BCA product contained cadmium at 3.41 parts per million (ppm), 42 ppm of chromium, and 80 ppm of vanadium. The Voluntary Purchasing Group's Liquid Iron product contained 0.27 ppm cadmium; 13 ppm of chromium, and 39.8 ppm of nickel. The Land Disposal Rule (LDR) limits are as follows: 2.2 ppm cadmium; 1 ppm 1 ppm chromium; 11 ppm vanadium; 2 ppm nickel.

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