

# Understanding PFAS

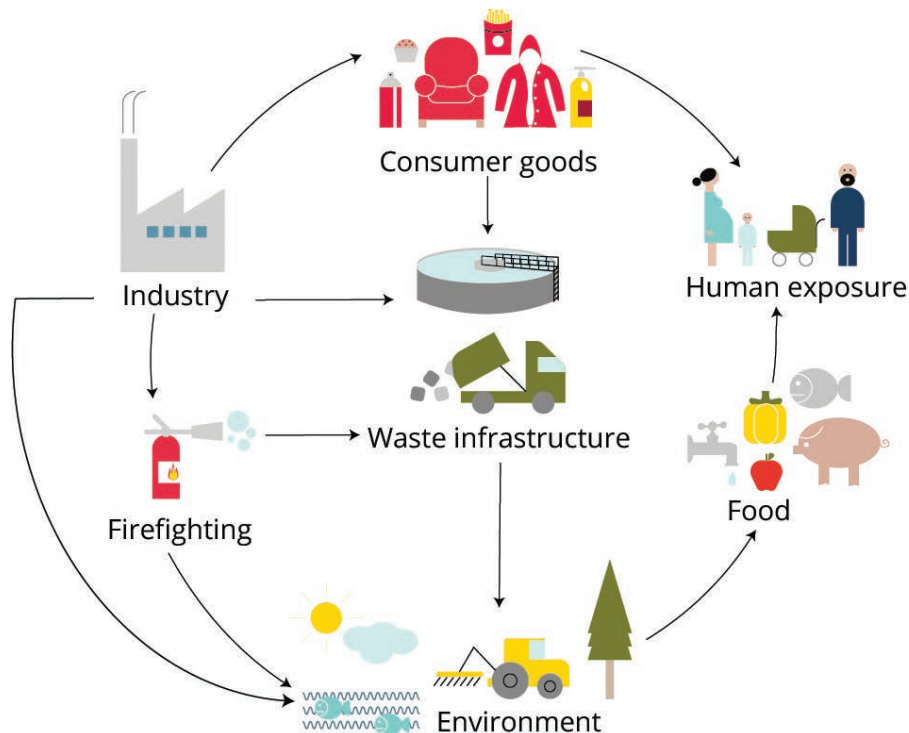
## For the Farmer & Gardener

### What are PFAS?

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are a group of man-made chemicals that have been used since the 1940s in household products and industrial settings for their ability to repel oil, grease, water, and heat.

### Keep in mind

- PFAS are getting a great deal of press because we are only recently learning the extent of their presence in Maine.
- There are many ways you can be exposed to PFAS, including your clothing, cooking utensils and pans, drinking water, personal care products, and materials in your home. Produce from a farm or garden impacted by PFAS may be one potential source of PFAS exposure.
- Research is ongoing and there is a lot we still don't know about PFAS. Scientists of all types from Maine and elsewhere are working to bring more clarity and facts to light. In the future, this research will help us to more fully assess the risks posed by PFAS exposure.
- Uncertainty can be stressful. If PFAS exposure affects you or your neighbors, please reach out to Maine 211 or call 2-1-1 for support resources.



## How have PFAS impacted farms?

Due to their widespread use, PFAS have made their way into our waste stream. Since the 1980s, sludge from waste treatment facilities has been used in agriculture as a low-cost fertilizer source. This was considered a beneficial use at the time and farmers were unaware some of the sludge they were spreading contained PFAS. Because they are resistant to breakdown in the environment, these compounds have remained in the soil, been taken up by plants, made their way into animals who eat those plants, and in some cases leached into both surface and groundwater.

## How could PFAS make their way to a home garden?

Potential sources of PFAS in the home garden include:

- Being located on land that was once farmland with a history of sewage sludge application
- Amendment with topsoil from farmland with a history of sewage sludge application
- Amendment with sewage sludge, compost, or animal manure containing PFAS
- Irrigation with water from a source that contains PFAS.

## Human health concerns

PFOA and PFOS are two of the better studied PFAS compounds and are known to cause human harm in relatively small quantities. Therefore, eating food or drinking water contaminated with PFAS is a concern.

## For more information

### Understanding PFAS and Your Home Garden:

[extension.umaine.edu/gardening/understanding-pfas-and-your-home-garden](https://extension.umaine.edu/gardening/understanding-pfas-and-your-home-garden)

### Guide to Investigating PFAS Risk on Your Farm:

[extension.umaine.edu/agriculture/guide-to-investigating-pfas-risk-on-your-farm/](https://extension.umaine.edu/agriculture/guide-to-investigating-pfas-risk-on-your-farm/)

### Assessing PFAS Contamination on Dairy Farms in Maine:

[extension.umaine.edu/agriculture/assessing-pfas-contamination-on-dairy-farms-in-maine/](https://extension.umaine.edu/agriculture/assessing-pfas-contamination-on-dairy-farms-in-maine/)

### Maine Department of Agriculture and Conservation's PFAS page:

[maine.gov/dacf/ag/pfas/index.shtml](https://maine.gov/dacf/ag/pfas/index.shtml)

### Maine Department of Environmental Protection PFAS page:

[maine.gov/dep/spills/topics/pfas/](https://maine.gov/dep/spills/topics/pfas/)

## For farm and garden related PFAS questions

University of Maine Cooperative Extension

**Email:** [extension.PFASQuestions@maine.edu](mailto:extension.PFASQuestions@maine.edu)

**Phone:** 207.581.3188, 1.800.287.0274 (in Maine)

## For health-related questions

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

**Email:** [pfas.mecdc@maine.gov](mailto:pfas.mecdc@maine.gov)

**Phone:** 207.287.8016

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[eea.europa.eu/publications/emerging-chemical-risks-in-europe](https://eea.europa.eu/publications/emerging-chemical-risks-in-europe)

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