



Alert!

A Bimonthly
Update
From



Food Irradiation

Food Irradiation Conference: A Study in Spin

If there was an Academy Award for “Best Performance by a Corporate Spin Artist,” the *Food Irradiation 2001* conference held here in Washington in February would have produced numerous deserving nominees.

Drum roll, please...

Nominee #1: Dennis Olson - Vice President, Titan Corporation. A former food safety professor and researcher at Iowa State University, Olson recently joined the for-profit world as chief of the Titan Corporation’s food irradiation operations. Despite having written extensively about the chemical changes that occur in irradiated food, Olson proclaimed that food can be irradiated “without changing the nature of the food.” A Public Citizen representative in attendance reminded Olson of many scientific articles he’s had published on the subject, such as the 1999 *Journal of Food Science* article that documents how the irradiation of pork increased the concentration of at least 10 chemicals.

Nominee #2: Ray Durante - President, Food Safeguards Council. A ubiquitous nuclear industry lobbyist on Capitol Hill, Durante’s keynote speech was a *tour de force* of corporate spin. Among his proclamations: “Nothing changes in the food if it is irradiated properly.” Tell that to orange juice, Ray, which loses 48 percent of its beta carotene and 13 percent of its vitamin C.

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Omaha Steaks & Huisken Meats: False Advertising or Negligence?

Either way you look at them, the websites run by Omaha Steaks and Huisken Meats lead consumers to believe that these companies sell some of the safest meat available in this country. What they don’t disclose is how this meat becomes virtually pathogen-free - - through the use of irradiation.

Based in Chandler, Minn., Huisken is one of the nation’s largest producers of irradiated food. The company’s pre-packaged hamburger patties are reportedly on sale in more than 1,000 stores in 14 states, including California, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Huisken’s beef products are irradiated at a facility in Sioux City, Iowa, owned by the Titan Corporation, a San Diego-based defense contractor that uses linear accelerators originally designed for the “Star Wars” program to irradiate food.

Huisken complies with federal law by placing the phrase “Treated by Irradiation” on its ground beef packages. However the company’s Web site states that its ground beef is “electronically pasteurized.” Pasteurization is completely different process from irradiation because pasteurization rapidly heats and then cools food to kill food-borne bacteria. It does not load food up with carcinogens or so-called unique radiolytic products. Attempts to call irradiation the same as pasteurization violates common sense and might be against the law

Even worse, if a consumer purchased ground beef patties from Omaha Steaks’ catalog or visited through the company’s website, they would not know that those patties were irradiated until they opened the copious packaging that the food is shipped in. While

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Public Citizen Helps Form New Coalition

This year, Public Citizen has been working with more than 20 consumer, environmental, family farmer, animal welfare and labor groups to form a new coalition. The Global Safe Food Alliance will focus on problems caused by the increasing corporate control and globalization of our food supply. The goal is to mobilize a large, broad-based, grassroots movement to advocate for a food supply that is safe, wholesome and humanely produced in a sustainable manner that benefits consumers, workers, farmers, animals, and the environment. Some of the issues the GSFA plans to address are how to better protect against mad cow disease, stopping the privatization of meat inspection, and ending the use of chemical interventions and irradiation to sterilize filthy meat.

For more information about GSFA, contact Patty Lovera, (202) 454-5132, plovera@citizen.org.

In The Grassroots

Chicago Fights Food Irradiation

A new group, the Illinois Food Safety Coalition, is organizing to stop irradiation in the Chicago area. The area is already home to four plants that irradiate spices and medical equipment, and now IBA wants to start irradiating food at its plant in the suburb of Schaumburg. And, SureBeam has announced its plan to build a linear accelerator (“e-beam”) facility in the suburb of Glendale Heights. The group has been busy educating local elected officials and the public about the dangers of irradiation facilities and urging consumers not to buy irradiated food.

Visit their website: www.illinoisfoodsafety.org



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the company complies with federal law by placing the phrase “treated by irradiation” on its ground beef packages, it is acting with deceiving people, because the company knows that irradiated food is not selling well.

Omaha Steaks has publicly acknowledged its desire to avoid the disclosure. Omaha Steaks marketing director Vickie Hagen was quoted in *The New York Times* on Feb. 28, saying that the company is “a little nervous about the word ‘irradiation’ as far as consumers’ perception. . . . People hear it and start thinking something more negative.”

Based in Omaha, Omaha Steaks annually sells about \$200 million worth of high-end meat and other food products through the mail and at retail stores. It irradiates all ground beef products, according to the company. Those products are irradiated at a facility in Sioux City, Iowa, owned by the Titan Corporation, a San Diego-based defense contractor that uses linear accelerators originally designed for the “Star Wars” program to irradiate food.

Public Citizen recently filed false advertising complaints with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) against these two companies. The FTC has yet to respond. Huisken Meats has returned the word “irradiated” to its website, but the company continues to use the euphemism “electronically pasteurized.”

The labeling of irradiated food has become a controversial issue as more irradiated products have reached the market in recent months. Federal law requires irradiated food to be labeled “Treated by Irradiation,” but the law is under review by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The National Food Processors Association and other food industry groups are lobbying the FDA and Congress to allow irradiated food to be labeled “electronically pasteurized” or “cold pasteurized” – euphemisms that do not accurately describe what is done to the food. 

Spread the Word!

Pass *Food Irradiation Alert!* along to your friends and families, and let them know they can subscribe, too!

USDA Funds Indoctrination Campaign

The USDA has awarded a \$600,000 grant to Dr. Christine Bruhn, Consumer Marketing Specialist and Director of the Center for Consumer Research at the University of California, Davis for the purpose of developing marketing techniques to convince the public of the virtues of irradiating food. Dr. Bruhn, a prolific cheerleader for the food irradiation industry, will be working with the state health departments and public universities in nine states where irradiated food is being test-marketed.

The nine states are Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Texas. According to the contract that Dr. Bruhn has signed with the USDA, she and the state health departments will be developing educational material and videos promoting food irradiation.

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Nominee #3: Paul Frenzen - Demographer, U.S. Department of Agriculture. When asked why the percentage of supermarket shoppers who told the Food Marketing Institute that they would buy irradiated food dropped from 56 percent in 1999 to 38 percent last year, Frenzen called it "a statistical aberration." Frenzen's spin resonates with the thinking at USDA, which is spending \$600,000 on a nine-state "education" campaign to convince people why they should eat irradiated food.

Nominee #4: Richard Hunter - Deputy Health Officer, Florida Department of Health. One of several government health officials who have transferred their loyalty from citizens to corporations, Hunter is often quoted in food industry press releases and frequently appears at irradiation events. In his written remarks, Hunter said: "Studies have found that consumers are not innately opposed to food irradiation." Hogwash. Numerous polls, including one conducted recently by CBS News, show that about three-fourths of Americans do not want to eat irradiated food. ☹

Global Food Irradiation Standards Under Attack

If you've never heard of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, get to know it.

The Codex — or "food code" — Commission sets global food safety standards for more than 160 nations (including the U.S.), representing about 97 percent of the world's population. Operating under the auspices of the United Nations and World Health Organization, the Codex holds invitation-only meetings in far-flung places throughout the world from which consumer, labor, environmental and human-rights advocates are routinely barred.

The Codex is now working on a proposal that would eliminate virtually every assurance that irradiated food will be of good quality, be handled by trained workers, and be processed under safe and clean conditions in government-inspected facilities. The international dose limit for food irradiation would also be removed. The proposal, which is about halfway through the approval process, will be debated at the next Codex meeting in July in Geneva. ☹

**Take
Action!**



Share your concerns with:

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**Send an E-mail
To Your Choice for
"Best Performance By A
Corporate Spin Officer"**



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ACTION ALERT: Tell the FDA Not To Approve Any More Irradiated Foods

First it was spices, then pork, then chicken, then beef, and then in the year 2000 a flood of foods ranging from eggs to juice to sprouting seeds. The FDA's continual approval, without a scientific basis, of irradiation as a treatment to kill food-borne pathogens including E. coli, Salmonella, and Listeria may result in the ability of corporations to use this technology on nearly two-thirds of the food we rely upon for our health.

Public Citizen is calling on the agency to revoke all food irradiation approvals since 1983 and place a moratorium on the approval of all petitions and proposed rules allowing the irradiation of various foods. The FDA, by its own admission, never expected more than 10% of our diets to be irradiated.

In light of these recent approvals, the agency must refrain from any new approvals until it has determined a 100-fold safety factor for each unique radiolytic product (URP) found in irradiated food.

Moreover, the Health and Human Services Department must appoint an independent panel that includes no individuals who have participated in the FDA's irradiation approval process to investigate the FDA's role in regulating irradiation since 1968. This panel should re-examine the full body of research into the safety of eating irradiated food, and support new

research into the toxicology of URPs and their safety for human consumption prior the approval of new foods.

*You can help make this moratorium happen!
Please send a letter to...*

Secretary Tommy Thompson
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201
(202) 619-0257
Toll Free: 1-877-696-6775

Dear Secretary Thompson:

As a concerned parent (or however you characterize yourself), I am writing to urge the Department of Health and Human Services to place a moratorium on the FDA's approval of irradiated foods.

Additionally, I am requesting that the Department appoint an independent panel of experts, who have no relationship with the FDA's food irradiation approval process or the food irradiation industry, to re-examine the full body of research into the safety of eating irradiated food, and support new research into the toxicity of unique radiolytic products prior the approval of new foods.

The mission of the Department of Health and Human Services is to protect the health of Americans, and to serve as a brake on corporate efforts to expand profits at the expense of our health and well-being. Please fulfill this mandate and support a moratorium on irradiated foods.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Address

Public Citizen
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**Stop Food
Irradiation!**