



Read the Fine Print: Irradiated Food Must Be Labeled

Irradiation exposes food to the equivalent radiation dose of up to 1 *billion* chest x-rays to kill bacteria and increase the shelf-life of food. In the process, radiation changes the chemical composition of food, creating chemicals known or suspected to cause cancer and birth defects, such as benzene and toluene. It also destroys up to 96 percent of some vitamins and other nutrients that are essential for proper nutrition.

The FDA did not follow its own protocol to legalize irradiated food and never conducted long-term studies to determine the human health effects of eating irradiated food.

For these reasons, Public Citizen strongly believes that FDA must withdraw all approvals to irradiate food. Until then, all irradiated foods and food products that include irradiated materials should bear a label telling consumers that the food has been subjected to this dangerous process.

Currently, only fresh items sold as whole must carry the radura, which looks like this:



Fruits And Vegetables (Regulated by the FDA)

Raw fruits and vegetables, like apples, that are irradiated must have the irradiation symbol and statement on the front of the package or, if unpackaged, on a sign near the apples.

Meat (Regulated by the USDA)

Packaged meat products irradiated in their entirety must bear the statement "Treated with [or by] irradiation". This statement must be placed in conjunction with the radura. Products

that include the word "irradiated" as part of the product name do not have to use the radura, but must make the word irradiated no smaller than one-third the size of the product name.

Eggs & Sprouting Seeds (Regulated by FDA)

Fresh shell eggs must be clearly labeled. No egg products may be irradiated at this time.

Sprouting seeds (includes alfalfa, mung bean seeds among others) may be irradiated.

Irradiated food has never been successfully marketed in grocery stores precisely because it must be labeled. According to a 1997 CBS poll, 77 percent of consumers do not want to buy irradiated food and would not knowingly do so. Consequently, stores have hesitated to stock irradiated food on their shelves.

Exceptions to the Rules

Exception #1

If irradiated foods are mixed with non-irradiated foods and made into juices, sauces, baby foods, or even a "fresh" fruit salad, the product does not have to be labeled as irradiated.

Exception #2

Multi-ingredient products that include a

meat product that was irradiated in its raw state (no cooked food can currently be irradiated), such as a frozen lasagna, must only state in the ingredients list that the product contains irradiated meat; no radura is required.

Exception #3

No irradiated food has to be labeled if it is served at nursing homes, retirement homes, hospitals or hospices, restaurants, and even your local schools and universities.

Unfortunately, agribusiness and the nuclear industry are colluding to eliminate labeling requirements to make it easier to sell irradiated foods. In 1997, the Congress passed the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act, which included a provision stating that the irradiation disclosure no longer had to be bigger than the words in the ingredients list. Still, "Treated by Irradiation" is warning enough to cause conscious consumers to buy alternative products and deter retailers from selling irradiated products.

Trade representatives for agribusiness and the nuclear industry are pressuring the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to remove the labeling requirements altogether. FDA requested comments from citizens and the response was tremendous – about 20,000 people wrote in support of labeling – sending a clear message to the FDA that consumers do not want to eat irradiated food and want the right-to-know if food has been irradiated. FDA has postponed a rulemaking until after the election.

Recently, however, the industry lobbied Congress and attempted to attach some language to the funding bill for the U.S. Department of Agriculture that would allow the use of such euphemisms as "cold pasteurization" and "electronic pasteurization" instead of "Treated with irradiation". This effort to soften the language and hoodwink Americans into believing that irradiation is safe failed.

The weak labeling laws we have today only provide limited protection of a consumer's right-to-know. And industry pressure is mounting. If the FDA does not continue to require labeling, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is unlikely to require it because the USDA is "harmonizing" all of its food regulations with the FDA.

With every attempt to keep information from consumers, the industry makes it harder for us to make informed choices about the food we eat.

Please write your senators and representatives and tell them that until FDA withdraws its approval for food irradiation,

Congress must continue to require irradiated food to bear the words, "Treated with irradiation" and the radura so you can make an informed choice about irradiated food.

Dear Member of Congress:

I am writing to request that you contact the Food and Drug Administration to request that they withdraw its approval of irradiated food. Until then, I am asking you to ensure my right to refuse irradiated food by not altering FDA's existing labeling requirements that use of the terms "treated by [or with] irradiation" accompanied by the radura symbol.

A number of reports have shown that the studies FDA relied upon for its approval of the process were faulty and studies conducted later had conflicting results. Until we are certain that the use of this technology is absolutely safe, the federal government should not allow the sale of irradiated food to the public.

Furthermore, irradiation destroys valuable vitamins and enzymes in our food, which are further reduced by cooking. I want to eat healthful food. I don't want to be forced into relying on vitamin supplements to make up the difference for these nutritional deficiencies.

Irradiation also creates new chemical compounds in the food, which we know virtually nothing about. I do not want to be a guinea pig for an experiment that tests the safety of irradiated foods.

Sincerely,

Your name & address



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