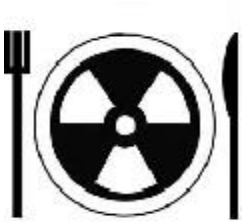
Public Citizen 30 YEARS
Protecting Health, Safety & Democracy



Latin America: The Irradiation Nations of the Future?

Since the dawn of exploration and trade, the North has always looked to the South for its resources and its riches. Latin America is a textbook example, where millions of acres of land once sustainably farmed and ranched by indigenous peoples are now used to grow cash crops for multinational food conglomerates driven by nothing more than the bottom line.

Institutionalized over the centuries, the abuses inflicted on the people, the culture, and the environment of Latin America will only deepen if corporate executives and government officials succeed in their designs to add irradiation to their toolbox. While the failure of irradiation may not be an option for the framers of global free trade regimes, its success is not an option for hundreds of millions of people struggling to maintain their economic independence and a healthy, balanced way of life.

Mass irradiation of the world's food supply has become a global agenda for governments and transnational corporations alike. Irradiation can drastically extend the shelf life of food and mask the contamination of products, thus facilitating international trade and resulting in higher profits for the industrialized food industries.

These goals are fostered by the unlikely partnership of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the World Health Organization (WHO), intergovernmental proponents of using modern war technology to combat simple food safety issues humans have dealt with since the dawn of time.

These bodies have been instrumental in establishing and increasing international approval of a process that is both potentially harmful to consumers and wholly inadequate in addressing the root causes of food security issues.

In fact, the globalization of food irradiation will increase food insecurity around the world by moving agriculture policies even further away from sustainable and self-sufficient farming, thus wreaking havoc on both developing economies and diverse ecosystems.

Although experiments conducted all over the world have indicated that the irradiation of food causes serious health

problems and significant loss of nutrients, 50 countries have approved the commercial irradiation of select food items.

Moreover, intergovernmental organizations are facilitating the increase of global production and trade of irradiated food. Rather than allocating research funding and skills to further investigate the health risks involved, a large proportion of time and money is spent on feasibility studies and marketing analyses, in a push to win consumer acceptance and increase sales.

To this end, the FAO, IAEA, and WHO have created ICGFI – the International Consultative Group on Food Irradiation – to monitor, fund, and promote food irradiation developments around the world.

Not surprisingly, many of the "experts" in the Consultative Group are representatives from the nuclear industry or individuals with close business ties to the food irradiation industry. ICGFI currently has 46 country members, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru.

Another offspring of the FAO and WHO is Codex Alimentarius, a scientific sounding title that simply means "food code". The Codex Commission has 177 country members, including 31 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The purported goal of the Codex Commission is to set global standards and regulations for food safety, and in 1979, it devised general standards for irradiated foods and food irradiation facilities. These standards allow for a maximum irradiation dosage of foods at the astronomical level of 10 kiloGray, in spite of numerous studies that have shown the toxic effects of irradiated food on test animals and humans.

Not only is this international standard based on insufficient and contradictory scientific evidence, but it is currently under consideration to be expanded so as to allow the irradiation of food without any upper limit on the dosage of ionizing energy.

Trade at any Cost

While the Codex Commission heavily emphasizes its scientific orientation toward food safety regulation, its wider goal is to speed up the harmonization of national standards and in doing so facilitate international trade. The World Trade Organization's Agreements on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) cite the Codex Commission as the body to be consulted for international standards on food safety.

> Food irradiation on a global scale will increase the power of transnational corporations, and will threaten the economic livelihood of indigenous farming communities, the survival of complex ecosystems, and the health of future generations.

The implications of this are that countries may be forced to trade irradiated food in disregard of their actual platform on food irradiation and the sovereign right to take preventative measures to protect the health of their population.

Moreover, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has already produced numerous disasters on the environment, economy, and public health and safety of member states. A liberalization and harmonization of irradiated food laws, coupled with the legal dynamics of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) would likely result in food conglomerations demanding the widescale irradiation of food throughout the Americas.

Increased global trade in irradiated

food will result in the further industrialization, consolidation, and globalization of the food production industries and an unbalanced focus on export commodities. Agriculture in developing countries will continue to expand toward the production of monoculture cash crops that can be irradiated and shipped at low cost to the industrialized world.

Likewise, industrialized countries will increase their dumping of irradiated surpluses on developing countries, further damaging the economy and health of the majority of the world's population.

Food irradiation on a global scale will increase the power of transnational corporations, and will threaten the economic livelihood of indigenous farming communities, the survival of complex ecosystems, and the health of future generations.

A prime example of the globalization of the irradiation industry is found in the recent efforts of SureBeam Corporation of San Diego, California to expand its business overseas. SureBeam is a subsidiary of Titan Corporation, the defense contractor that developed Star Wars technology for shooting down missiles. SureBeam has secured agreements to build extensive irradiation networks in Saudi Arabia and Brazil, is doing business with Mitsubishi in Japan, and is now negotiating deals in Australia.

Moreover, SureBeam has announced that it is currently focusing its efforts on expanding its irradiation business in Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Defense systems have always been a hot seller on the global market, and now companies such as Titan are also capitalizing on "free trade" to corner the emerging world market for irradiated food.

Case Study: Brazil

With a vast landmass and a climate that accommodates four growing seasons, Brazil has the potential to become a one-stop shopping point for multinational food companies. Its fruit and vegetable market is in excess of 84 million pounds annually, and it is the world's third largest producer of beef and chicken. The development of food irradiation plays a large role in Brazil's quest to further expand its export market, allowing Brazil to increase the shelf life of food products, and ship them at low cost to Northern countries where tropical fruits are in high demand.

Brazilian legislation and business deals alike have aided the development of the irradiated food market. The Brazilian government has cleared 117 types of food for irradiation – including the category of "any food," which may be irradiated for any reason and at any radiation dose. This amounts to more irradiation approvals than any other country in the world, in addition to the world's most liberal legislation on irradiation dosage.

> The U.S. Department of Agriculture envisions Brazil becoming 'the fruitbasket of the world.'

Moreover, SureBeam of San Diego and Tech Ion Industrial Brasil of Sao Paulo have joined forces to create what they claim will be the largest, most comprehensive food irradiation network in the world. Brazil already has eight irradiation plants in operation, and 22 more are in the works – enough facilities to turn Brazil, in the words of a high-ranking U.S. Department of Agriculture official – into "the fruitbasket of the world."

With such a system, Brazil would be able to irradiate some 6 billion pounds of food per year. That explains why this USDA official stated that global trade, as envisioned by international organizations and transnational corporations, would be

"impossible" without food irradiation.

Such an expansion of the food irradiation industry will harm the sustainable agricultural development of Brazil and the economic status of its farmers, damage Brazil's environment, and produce increasing health risks for ever larger percentages of the world's population via the wide-scale export of irradiated foods.

With the consolidation of food production and trade in the hands of a few powerful transnational bodies, Brazilian farmers do not stand to benefit financially from the proliferation of food irradiation. Moreover, the same disastrous effects on local economies and sustainable development will occur in other Latin American countries if food irradiation continues to expand.

The Lay of the Land

Current Status of Food Irradiation in Latin American Countries

Argentina…
has three food irradiation facilities located in Buenos Aires and Salta, and irradiation approvals for 13 categories of food. The country began irradiating food in 1970.

Brazil…
currently has eight food irradiation facilities and another 22 in the planning and construction stages. Any food may be irradiated in Brazil, with no upper dose limit. The country has been irradiating food since 1985.

Chile…
has one food irradiation facility in Santiago, and approvals for 20 food items. The country began irradiating food in 1983.

Costa Rica…
has approvals for 18 food types.

Cuba…
has one food irradiation facility in Havana and approvals for 18 food categories. The country began irradiating food in 1987.

Ecuador…
has been an ICGFI member since 1989.

Mexico…
has three food irradiation facilities and approvals for 64 food categories. The country has been irradiating food since 1988.

Peru…
opened a food irradiation facility in Lima in 1996 that irradiates spices, food additives, and animal feed.

Uruguay…
has had an irradiation approval for potatoes since 1970.

Sources

ICGFI – www.iaea.or.at/icgfi

Codex Alimentarius Commission – www.codexalimentarius.net

Titan Corporation – www.titan.com

Tech Ion Industrial Brasil – www.techion.com/br

World Trade Organization – www.wto.org

Public Citizen
Critical Mass Energy and Environment Program

For more information, contact us at:
(202) 546-4996
cmep@citizen.org
www.citizen.org/cmep