

MINNESOTA VOICES FOR CHOICES
2005 LEGISLATIVE CAMPAIGN

Defending your Right to Know About Irradiated Food in School Lunch

Organizing Kit

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Issue Overview

On May 29, 2003, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) lifted its ban on irradiated ground beef in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and in January 2004 irradiated ground beef was subsequently made available to schools for the first time. State Education Departments purchase commodity products which now include irradiated ground beef, from the federal government (USDA) and offer the commodities through their statewide distribution system to school districts. If a state decides not to carry irradiated ground beef, the product would not be available through the NSLP but could be purchased through an alternate source. Minnesota's Department of Education (MDE) was one of only three states to order irradiated ground beef from the USDA for the 2004-2005 school year and 96 Minnesota school districts placed orders.

The decision to serve irradiated beef is made annually by individual school districts. School who elect to serve irradiated beef will find the boxes arriving at schools clearly identified as irradiated. Unfortunately, parents and students may not find themselves equally informed. Schools serving irradiated beef are encouraged to tell parents, not required. The USDA originally predicted irradiated ground beef would cost 13-20 cents more per pound than non-irradiated ground beef but initial bids reflected a price hike of 29-80 cents more per pound. Inaccuracy was not isolated to price predictions, marketing materials used by the USDA to promote the use of irradiated beef to schools glossed over controversy and contained blatantly incorrect, outdated information. Citing cost and safety concerns, officials from all three states canceled their orders for irradiated beef for the 2004-2005 school year.

Since irradiation kills most bacteria in meat it has been promoted to our schools as a "safe" approach to food-borne illness. This offers little reassurance when you consider that most incidences of contamination in school food occur during storage and preparation, where irradiation is ineffective. Irradiation exposes foods to extremely high doses of ionizing radiation in an effort to destroy bacteria. In the process, nutrients are destroyed and new chemicals are created, some of which are known toxins. While there is no scientific consensus on the safety of consuming irradiated foods, there are numerous studies which link the consumption of these foods to a variety of health problems in humans and animals. Recent research has shown that one unique type of chemical created by irradiation, alkylcyclobutanones, promotes cancer development and genetic damage in rats and genetic damage in human cells.

Irradiation is a controversial technology, and its inclusion in the USDA's school lunch system has been a topic of concern to parents, scientists and health professionals worldwide. Unanswered questions regarding safety must be formally addressed before irradiated ground beef is fed to school children in any state. The NSLP feeds our nation's most vulnerable children: therefore it is vital that meals served at school are healthy, nutritious and safe. Minnesota must adopt legislation to protect children from being unwilling participants in this risky experiment.

Currently, there is state legislation which not only ensures every parent the right to know about irradiated food in school lunch but also prevents school officials from making a unilateral decision without input from the communities they serve.

Contact your State Senator at (651) 296-0504 or (651) 296-2887, tell them you support **S.F.1450**
To contact your Representative call (651) 296-2146 or 1 (800) 657-3550 & tell them to support **H.F.1795**.

This campaign is spearheaded by Minnesota Voices for Choices, a grassroots group founded by parents concerned about irradiated food. For more information contact Jody at mnvoicesforchoices@msn.com or visit <http://www.mnvoicesforchoices.org>

E-alert :

E-mail is an extraordinarily quick, easy and inexpensive way to contact members. Please feel free to customize the following sample to suit your individual group.

Dear Friends,

On May 29, 2003, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) lifted its ban on irradiated ground beef in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and in January 2004 irradiated ground beef was subsequently made available to schools for the first time. Minnesota's Department of Education (MDE) was one of only three states to order irradiated ground beef from the USDA for the 2004-2005 school year and **96 Minnesota school districts placed orders**. Though the orders for irradiated beef were never filled many parents and even principals were surprised to learn their schools ordered irradiated beef and they were not informed.

Irradiation is a controversial technology, and its inclusion in the USDA's school lunch system has been a topic of concern to parents, scientists and health professionals worldwide. Unanswered questions regarding safety must be formally addressed before irradiated ground beef is fed to school children in any state. The NSLP feeds our nation's most vulnerable children: therefore it is vital that meals served at school are healthy, nutritious and safe. Minnesota must adopt legislation to protect children from being unwilling participants in this risky experiment.

Currently, there is state legislation which ensures your right to know about irradiated food in school lunch. The Irradiation Right to Know Bill serves the following objectives:

Before a school purchases irradiated food or uses irradiated food in a food service program, the district or school governing board at a regularly scheduled board meeting must formally adopt a policy on purchasing and using irradiated food in its food service program. Any policy a board adopts must include:

- Parental notification at least 30 days prior to purchasing irradiated food in a food service program, thus enabling the communities they serve an opportunity with which to respond to the plan.
- Ensures **all menu items** containing irradiated foods are clearly labeled with the phrase "treated with irradiation" or "treated by irradiation".
- Ensures that irradiated and non-irradiated foods are not mixed together.

This bill represents a common sense solution which not only ensures every parent the right to know about irradiated food in school lunch but prevents school officials from making unilateral decisions regarding irradiated food without input from the communities they serve.

Contact your state legislators and tell them to support the Irradiation Right-to-Know Bill.

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Irradiation Talking Points:

- Current regulations do not require school meals prepared with irradiated food to carry identifying labels. This deliberately circumvents parental awareness while undermining any ability to refuse foods treated with radiation by sending a bag lunch.
- 91% of the comments to the USDA opposed allowing irradiated food in school lunch.
- Considering all the recent studies and coverage about children's health, obesity, and toxins in our food, now is an ideal time to rethink our school nutrition policies.
- Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan have implemented From Farm to School Programs. These programs connect schools with local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing health and nutrition education opportunities and supporting local small farmers. Minnesota farmers and schools would benefit from implementing a similar initiative
- Irradiated food has not been proven safe to eat. There has not been enough long-term, comprehensive research on the health effects of consuming irradiated food, especially in children. Recent research has shown that one type of chemical created by irradiation promotes cancer development and genetic damage in rats and genetic damage in human cells.
- Irradiation depletes food of vitamins- sometimes significantly. It can destroy up to 80 percent of vitamin A in eggs and 48 percent of beta carotene in orange juice. Moreover, some vitamins undergo accelerated losses in storage if the food has been irradiated, compounding the problem.
- Low-income families are the most likely to consume a high percentage of their daily food intake from the school meal programs (breakfast, lunch, and snack). These children are a more susceptible population because they may be undernourished, and they are the most in need of a healthy meal. It is reprehensible to use our most disadvantaged children to create a market for a technology that consumers have rejected in grocery stores around the country.

Newsletter Blurb:

A blurb regarding pending legislation in your online e-zine or published newsletter can be a tremendously effective tool in getting the word out. Whether large or small, simple or more elaborate. Feel free to modify the information in this kit as you deem appropriate and contact us if you would like more information or assistance.

Postcards:

Pre-addressed postcards are fast and easy way to communicate with legislators. Distribute them to customers, friends and family; let us know how many you need. If you run out: additional postcards are just an e-mail away.

Flyers: *Duplicate and distribute!*

Irradiated Food in School Lunch



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This bill represents a common sense solution that gives parents, students and communities the information

Contact your State Senator & ask them to support **S.F.1450** &
Tell Your State Representative you support **H.F.1795**.

To contact your legislators go to <http://www.mnvoicesforchoices.org> and click on "Contact Your Representatives" or call (651) 296-2146 or 1 (800) 657-3550 for your Representative and (651) 296-0504 or (651) 296-2887 for your Senator.

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