

September 28, 2004

Mr. Peter Young, Director
National Agricultural Library
10301 Baltimore Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705-2351

Dear Director Young:

We are writing to request that a meeting be convened between your staff at the National Agricultural Library (NAL) and representatives of consumer groups to discuss the content of Irradiation Resources page of the Healthy School Meals website maintained by the Library.

As you know, the consumer group Public Citizen has requested that alternative viewpoints be included on your website, especially since you have included information from non-governmental organizations that are proponents of irradiation. We first made such a request on August 4, 2004.¹ While we have received assurances from your staff that our request is being reviewed,² we still have not been informed about a disposition to our request – nearly two months after our initial inquiry. We have also repeatedly offered to meet with your staff to discuss this matter further, but none of the offers has been accepted.

This is an important issue. Even though the Farm Security and Rural Development Act of 2002 (the Farm Bill) lifted the prohibition on irradiated commodities being used in the National School Lunch Program, the technology remains very controversial. When USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service solicited comments from the public on how to implement that section of the Farm Bill, by an 11 to 1 margin, commenters opposed lifting the prohibition. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service funded an irradiation education project in Minnesota in 2002 that chose to present a one-sided perspective on irradiation. Because of that, one of the selected school districts dropped out early in the project because the school superintendent believed he was being placed in the position of promoting irradiation.³ The other two school districts involved opted not to serve irradiated meat products even though they participated through the entire duration of

¹ E-mail from Tony Corbo, Legislative Representative, Public Citizen to schoolmeals@nal.usda.gov, August 4, 2004.

² E-mails from Desire Stapley, Team Leader, Healthy School Meals Resource System to Tony Corbo, Public Citizen, August 16, August 24, September 14, 2004.

³ Chmelynski, Carol. "Schools Can Now Serve Irradiation Meat," *National School Board News*, June 3, 2003.

project and were offered irradiated product at no additional cost.⁴ Furthermore, when these two school districts had the opportunity to buy irradiation ground beef products through USDA's Commodity Program for the 2004/2005 school year, neither one of them ordered it.⁵ One of the critiques leveled against the project from these two school districts was that not enough information was presented to present an alternative view of irradiation.⁶

Because irradiation remains to be a very controversial technology, there was a special section (Section 118) included in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 on this issue. That provision calls for the Secretary of Agriculture to provide information on irradiation to states and school districts. Since it has become obvious to us that NAL's Healthy School Meals website is going to be a major conduit for such information, we believe that the public would be well-served if the entire picture is presented on irradiation. At the present time, the NAL website is one-sided, and it contains information that is outdated and incorrect. The NAL has already established a precedent for presenting dissenting views on irradiation.⁷ We would like to assist in correcting the deficiencies in the Healthy School Meals website.

Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please feel free to contact Wenonah Hauter at (202) 454-5150. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Andrew Kimbrell, Executive Director
Center for Food Safety
660 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Suite 302
Washington, DC 20003

Wenonah Hauter, Director
Public Citizen's Food Program
215 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003

cc: Senator Barbara Mikulski
Senator Paul Sarbanes
Representative Steny Hoyer
Representative Barbara Lee
Representative George Miller
Undersecretary Joseph Jen

⁴ Minnesota Department of Education. "Minnesota School Food Safety and Irradiation Education Project: Final Report," Appendix A, Timeline/Organizational Chart, October 2002-September 2003, p. 8.

⁵ Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Response to Freedom of Information Act request, August 17, 2004.

⁶ Minnesota Department of Education. "Minnesota School Food Safety and Irradiation Education Project: Final Report, December 2003," Appendix B, pp. 10-11.

⁷ See <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio/research/fsheets/fsheet05.htm>