



Food Irradiation and Europe's Family Farms

The Industrial Revolution Began the Steady Decline of Family Farms Around the World. Now, the Latest Stages of the Nuclear Age and the Green Revolution Threaten to Finish Them Off.

Q: What is Food Irradiation?

A: Food irradiation is the “treatment” of foods with high doses of radioactive cobalt-60 or cesium-137 or near speed-of-light electrons fired by linear accelerators – the equivalent of up to 1 billion chest X-rays. Irradiation sets off a chain reaction within food, changing its molecular structure and nutritional content. Proponents claim that irradiation makes food safer by killing bacteria, but irradiation creates unidentified chemical compounds that have never been proven safe for human consumption.

Q: Do Consumers Want Irradiated Foods?

A: Consumers do not want irradiated foods. Consumers would rather food be produced in hygienic conditions, thereby preventing bacterial infestation, instead of irradiated after infestation has occurred. There are numerous suspected health concerns associated with irradiated foods. Nutritional content declines, as does the amount of protein. In addition, scientists in Europe and the United States

have found serious health conditions in lab animals that ate irradiated foods – including premature death, genetic abnormalities, reproductive problems, suppressed immune systems and several other ailments. Recent evidence links chemical byproducts formed in irradiated foods to cancer development and tumours in rats, and genetic damage in human cells.

Q: I am a Family Farmer. Why Should I Be Concerned?

A: Food irradiation, like genetically modified organisms and multinational agribusiness, threatens your way of life. Irradiation is a vital tool for corporations that depend on production in the developing world and on factory farms to make their profits. Irradiation can drastically extend the shelf life of food, kill invasive insects and mask the contamination of meat products. This

facilitates international trade in food and leads to higher profits for large, industrialised food producers that move into the developing world.

This could devastate family farmers as production



is shifted overseas and cheap imports flood the European market under the WTO's free trade agreements. Family farmers and small producers cannot compete with overseas production and the large factory farms that drive prices below their cost of production.

The trade relationship between Brazil and Europe is an excellent example. The following table details Brazil's relationship with irradiation and the European

The Brazil Connection	
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Brazil's Irradiation Laws	Any food at Any "suitable" dose
EU fruit and vegetable imports from Brazil (2000)	1.006 billion euros

Union.¹ Brazil's government has approved the irradiation of every food category, from nuts to fish to bananas, at any dose. Brazil is also a leading exporter of fruits to the EU. If cheap irradiated fruit imports are allowed into the EU, under neo-liberal multilateral trade policies, Europe's small growers will be threatened by driving down prices and encouraging overseas production.

Irradiation, by favouring large corporate farms, advances agricultural industrialisation. Industrialised agriculture uses massive amounts of herbicides and antibiotics to boost yields. Small farms that do not produce cheaply in bulk are shut out of the market. Irradiation gives corporate agribusiness more power over the global food supply.

Q: Who is Pushing for Irradiation in Europe?

A: This list details the agencies, countries and corporations at the heart of the global food irradiation movement.

1. Agencies:

- The International Atomic Energy Agency of the UN is responsible for encouraging countries to adopt "peaceful" nuclear technologies, including irradiation. The agency is far less concerned with public health and safety, than

preserving the nuclear industry.

- The World Health Organisation supposedly protects global health standards. It has relied on faulty studies in declaring the safety of irradiated foods, while ignoring significant evidence concerning the dangers of these products.

2. Countries that Allow Extensive Irradiation:

- Belgium: poultry, potatoes, frozen shrimp, onions, egg whites, frog legs, etc.
- France: chicken, dates, egg whites, animal blood, vegetables, etc.
- Italy: garlic, herbs, potatoes, onions, spices, etc.
- Netherlands: dried fruit, seasonings, cereal flakes, legumes, shrimp, etc.
- United Kingdom: grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, chicken, seafood, etc.

3. Irradiation Industry Leaders:

- Titan/SureBeam, based in San Diego, California, is famous for working on America's "Star Wars" missile defense system. SureBeam, which "treats" food with linear accelerators, markets its services across the world.
- Gammaster was founded in 1968 in Holland. It now has irradiation facilities across the world, including France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and the Netherlands.
- IBA markets itself as "an answer to all food safety issues." It controls about half of the international food irradiation market (a global turnover of approximately 225 million euros) with 37 facilities across the US, Europe, and Asia.

¹ "External and Intra-European Union Trade." European Commission, 2002. p 74.



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