

Sanitation Not Irradiation

"Instead of focusing on the primary causes of meat contamination -- the feed being given to cattle, the overcrowding at feedlots, the poor sanitation at slaughterhouses, excessive line speeds, poorly trained workers, the lack of stringent government oversight -- the meatpacking industry and the USDA is now advocating an exotic technological solution to the problem of food borne pathogens. They want to irradiate the nation's meat. ... The American Medical Association and the World Health Organization have declared that irradiated foods are safe to eat [but introduction has been] impeded, however, by a reluctance among consumers to eat things that have been exposed to radiation. ... The Beef Industry Food Safety Council -- whose members include the meatpacking and fast food giants -- has asked the USDA to change its rules [on having a special radiation label] and make the labeling of irradiated meat completely voluntary. The meatpacking industry is also working hard to get rid of the word 'irradiation,' much preferring the phrase 'cold pasteurization.'

Steven Bjerklie, the former editor of Meat & Poultry thinks it will reduce pressure on the meatpacking industry to make fundamental and necessary changes in their production methods, allowing unsanitary practices to continue. 'I don't want to be served irradiated feces along with my meat,' Bjerklie says."

Eric Schossler, *Fast Food Nation; The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), pp. 217 – 218

Nutritional Depletion

Dr. Donald B. Louria, chairman of the department of preventative medicine and community health at the University of Medicine and Dentistry in New Jersey-NJ Medical School, acts as a consultant in infectious diseases at Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases in New York City. He thinks that the "unanswered questions about nutritional loss and potential chromosome damage" that swirl around irradiation need to be answered posthaste. Even the FDA admits that a significant number of nutrients are removed during the irradiation process, including thiamine, folic acid, and vitamins A, B2, B3, B6, B12, C, E, and K, in addition to essential polyunsaturated fatty acids.

*Dana Moskowitz
"Let Them Eat Shit"
City Pages, Vol. 19, 2/25/98*



Radura :
International

Marcia van Gemert was the toxicologist at the FDA in charge of evaluating irradiation and all food additives when the current push toward ever-more-vast irradiation was initiated. She rarely grants interviews and says since leaving the FDA she has "tried very hard to stay out of it," since the fight about irradiation has left the laboratories for the more fractious world of politics and commerce. She does say openly that "at the time we were not happy with the data. The data was very poor. My constant concern was for radiolytic products."

*Dana Moskowitz
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No Guarantees

A study published in the journal Emerging Infectious Diseases in June 2001 estimated that irradiating half of all ground beef, poultry, pork and processed meat would amount a 6% reduction in foodborne illness each year.

The CDC says that 20% of foodborne out breaks are caused by poor hygiene of food preparers, such as washing hands before touching food. Irradiation cannot safeguard against this type of contamination.

Irradiation is also ineffective against prions, the infectious proteins thought to cause mad-cow disease

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School Lunch Decision

*Radiation Treated Food Gets the Green Light;
Parental Notification is Voluntary*



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Background on Irradiation

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), even though the proposal evoked a 91% opposition during its public comment period. In January 2004 irradiated ground beef was subsequently made available to American 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. 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 to fill the orders placed by 96 Minnesota school districts.

Initially, the USDA predicted irradiated ground beef would cost schools 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 confined to price predictions, the marketing materials used by the USDA to promote the use of irradiated beef in 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 current school year.** Many parents and even principals were surprised to learn their school ordered irradiated beef and they were never informed.

The decision to serve irradiated beef is made annually by individual school districts. Since irradiation kills most bacteria in meat it is 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 completely ineffective. Proper sanitation, storage and cooking are always the best means of preventing food borne illness.

Continued

What's more unsettling; irradiation depletes nutritional value and induces vitamin loss. Up to 80 percent of vitamin A in eggs and 48 percent of beta carotene in orange juice can be destroyed. Some foods treated with radiation can even undergo accelerated vitamin losses during storage. These factors pose the greatest threat to low-income families who rely on the school lunch programs and whose children may already be undernourished.

In addition, there is not enough long-term, comprehensive research on the health effects of consuming irradiated food and it hasn't been proven safe to eat. Recent research has shown one class of chemicals created by irradiation, alkylcyclobutanones, promotes cancer development and genetic damage in rats and genetic damage in human cells. Children are among the most sensitive population to toxins because proportionally, they consume more food, air, and water pound for pound than adults do.

Even more troubling, irradiated food in school lunches does not have to be labeled, circumventing a parents' right-to-know what their children are eating at school and eliminating their right to make informed choices.

Irradiation is unnecessary, unwanted, and expensive. Dozens of grocery stores have pulled irradiated beef from their shelves because of low sales; ***school children should not be used to create a market for a technology that consumers have overwhelmingly rejected in supermarkets around the country.***

"It will take four to six decades to demonstrate a statistically significant increase in cancer due to mutagens introduced into the food supply by irradiation...When food irradiation is finally prohibited several decades worth of people with increased cancer incidence will be in the pipeline."

*Dr. George Tritsch, Roswell
Cancer Research Scientist, Roswell Park Memorial
"Food Irradiation"
Nutrition, 16: 698-701, 2000*

Right -to-Know Legislation

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.

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

House Public Information Office - Call information for assistance with finding your representative and senator.
Phone: (651) 296-2146 or 1 (800) 657-3550
TTY: (651) 296-9896

**If you prefer email log on to
mnvoicesforchoices.org we have set up
convenient legislator e-mail links along with
a sample letter.**

***Industrial kitchens such as hospitals and restaurants are not required to identify irradiated foods, tell your legislators to extend the language to include disclosure of all irradiated foods*