Food Irradiation Alert!

Public Citizen's Monthly Food Irradiation Newsletter

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The End of Fresh Food?

Watch out! The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is very quietly establishing a new regulation that will have major impacts on our fresh food supply. They are proposing to establish a regulation allowing a wide range of imported fruits and vegetables to be nuked. Irradiating imported fruits and vegetables has a number of economic benefits for large *multinational agribusinesses*:

· Irradiation increases shelf-life of fruits and vegetables by two to three times, allowing longer distribution routes, which means that fruits and vegetables look fresh even though they are old and their vitamin content has been depleted.

· It allows multinational interests to grow produce "south of the border" where they can pay workers slave wages.

· These corporate interests can use pesticides banned in the United States, such as DDT.

· They can escape environmental regulations, for example, safeguards that are designed to reduce water pollution.

· The technology allows agribusiness to mask filthy practices, such as no toilet facilities in fields, that increase bacterial contamination.

· Irradiation will allow agricultural interests to import cheaper and less wholesome food to the U.S., putting more family farmers out of business.

Tell the USDA you oppose this proposed regulation. Write or e-mail your comments. (see page 4).

Also In This Issue:

Labeling for Irradiated Food not Guaranteed

Irradiated food has never been successfully marketed in grocery stores because it is required to be labeled. According to a 1997 CBS poll, 77% of consumers do not want to buy irradiated food and will not knowingly do so. Thus, stores have hesitated to stock irradiated food on their shelves.

Unfortunately, over the past three years, agribusiness and the nuclear industry have colluded in removing labeling requirements so that irradiation could be commercialized. In 1997, the Clinton Administration passed the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act, which included a provision stating that the irradiation disclosure no longer had to be bigger than the words in the ingredients list. Still, "Treated by Irradiation" was warning enough to cause conscious consumers to buy alternative products and deter retailers from selling irradiated products.

In 1999, trade representatives for agribusiness and the nuclear industry petitioned the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to remove the labeling requirements. FDA requested comments from citizens and the response was tremendous—about 20,000 people wrote in support of labeling—sending a clear message to the FDA that consumers do not want to eat irradiated food and want the right-to-know if food has been irradiated. FDA has postponed a rulemaking until after the election.

The weak labeling laws we have today only provide limited protection of a consumer's right-to-know. Only grocery stores are required to label irradiated food, not restaurants, schools, and other institutions. The basic FDA rule of thumb for labeling irradiated food sold in grocery stores is this: if consumers expect a food to be raw and unprocessed, then there must be an irradiation disclosure. Unfortunately, this provides a giant loophole for the food industry and often keeps consumers in the dark.

With every attempt to keep information from consumers, the industry makes it harder for us to make informed choices about the food we eat.

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NUKESPEAK

Corporations Capitalize on Consumer Confusion

Food industry executives know they've got a problem on their hands. A big problem. You can almost hear them fretting over it in their boardrooms.

"How can we convince consumers that treating food with radiation is good for them? I mean, everybody knows that radiation can kill you. Hey...what if we call it something else? Something that sounds safe. Something familiar to them. Something they can trust..."

That something is *pasteurization*. And while pasteurization and irradiation both kill harmful microorganisms in food, that's where the similarities stop.

Minnesota's Huisken Meats, which recently started selling irradiated ground beef patties at more than 150 grocery stores in five Midwestern states, announced on its website (www.huiskenmeats.com) that the meat has undergone "the irradiation process (more properly called electronic, or cold pasteurization)."

It is inappropriate to compare a process that quickly heats and cools milk to a process that exposes food to the equivalent of tens of millions of chest x-rays—more than enough to turn nutritious, good-tasting food into vitamin-depleted, chemically altered mush that can smell like a wet dog.

While it is against federal law not to label irradiated food sold in grocery stores as such, companies such as Huisken have been permitted the media to blur the facts about the irradiation process and its harmful effects on our food supply.

As if corporate propaganda isn't bad enough, publicly funded universities—which are increasingly privately funded—are getting into the act, too. In May, around the time the irradiation company Titan signed a research deal with Texas A&M University, professor Elsa Murano of the school's Center for Food Safety put out this patently incorrect statement about irradiation in a widely circulated press release, "It is similar to the energy used in microwave ovens."

Facile comparisons of e-beam irradiators to microwave ovens are so much hokum. Microwave ovens use non-ionizing radiation, meaning that the radiation is not powerful enough to obliterate the chemical bonds that hold atoms and molecules together.

All forms of irradiation, however, use ionizing radiation, meaning that when the radiation strikes food, electrons are sent careening in all directions.

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Identifying Irradiated Food

If the FDA does not continue to require labeling, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is unlikely to require it because the USDA is "harmonizing" all of its food regulations with the FDA. The requirements are as follows:

Fruits, vegetables and grains (regulated by the FDA)

Raw fruits and vegetables, like apples, that are irradiated must have the irradiation symbol and statement on the front of the package or, if unpackaged, on a sign near the apples.

If these apples are used to make juice, applesauce, baby food**,** or even a "fresh" fruit salad**, the product does not have to be labeled as irradiated.**

If you buy the apples from a food service institution like a cafeteria or café or school, **they do not have to be labeled.**

Meat (regulated by USDA)

Packaged meat products irradiated in their entirety must bear the statement "Treated with [or by] irradiation". This statement must be placed in conjuction with the radura. Products that include the word "irradiated" as part of the product name do not have to use the radura, but must make the word irradiated no smaller than 1/3 the size of the product name.

Meat served in facilities like restaurants, hospitals or school cafeterias does not have to be labeled.

Multi-ingredient products that include an irradiated meat product, such as a frozen lasagna, must only state in the ingredients list that the product contains irradiated meat.

Would you know if this product was irradiated, without this magnification?

Buy Irradiated Meat... Support Global Nuclear Proliferation

It may be too freaky to believe, but consumers who buy irradiated meat that's been "treated" at an irradiation plant in rural southwest Florida are indirectly supporting the spread of nuclear technology throughout the world—to China, Turkey and other countries deemed too risky to possess nuclear secrets.

Don't believe it? Try not to choke on the details of this truly bizarre—and alarming—connection.

In Florida meat is being irradiated with radioactive cobalt-60 at a facility owned by Food Technology Service Inc. The company's major stockholder is Ontario, Canada-based MDS Nordion, the world's leading supplier of cobalt-60. Until 1992, Nordion was owned by the government of Canada, via Atomic Energy of Canada, Ltd. (AECL).

Though MDS Nordion is a private company, it maintains an intimate business and financial relationship with AECL. Four years ago, for instance, MDS Nordion partnered with AECL and the government of Canada to build two nuclear reactors to ensure a long-term supply of radioactive isotopes.

Long story short: Food Technology Service is making money for MDS Nordion, which is making money for Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd, which is seeding the world with nuclear technology.

AECL has become nothing short of notorious for its 50-year record of exporting nuclear know-how and equipment—sometimes to countries and leaders who, one could argue, shouldn't have the key to splitting the atom. AECL has sold:

· Plutonium to India, which was reportedly used to detonate the country's first nuclear bomb.

· A nuclear reactor to Argentine dictators, who sent officials to Iran a decade later in hopes of helping to build a reactor there.

· Two reactors to China, who has long been accused of smuggling nuclear secrets to Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan.

· A reactor to Pakistan, who now has The Bomb.

Concerned about nuclear proliferation? Don't buy irradiated meat from Food Service Technology. Look for the "Nation's Pride" and "New Generation" labels...and walk on by.

Sources: Campaign for Nuclear Phaseout; Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility; Food Technology Service Inc. Annual Reports; MDS Inc. Annual Information Forms; Maclean's (1/31/00); Multinational Monitor (9/95); Nucleonics Week (12/11/86).

Food Irradiation Facts

· The amount of radiation used to irradiated meat, 7kGy, is equal to the amount of radiation projected by 1.4 billion television sets!

· Irradiation destroys 20-80% of Vitamin A, C, E, and B-complex. (Depending upon the food item and length of exposure.)

· Irradiation is a one shot deal. 100 Salmonella bacteria remaining in food will multiply to 1 million after 6 hours in the human gastrointestinal tract. Irradiation does NOT protect you against food poisoning!

· Fresh chicken can be irradiated at up to 4.5 kiloGrays -- equivalent to 150 million chest x-rays.

· Food borne disease can be prevented by the use of basic sanitation practices in slaughter and processing facilities.

Nuke Speak *continued from page 2*

The intended goal of killing harmful bacteria by ripping apart their DNA may be accomplished, but the process also creates carcinogens such as benzene and formaldehyde, as well as little-understood chemicals called "unique radiolytic products," which can destroy cell membranes and make people more susceptible to cancer, diabetes, heart disease, liver damage, muscular breakdown, and other serious health problems.

Corporate executives know better than to compare irradiation to pasteurization; they're hoping that the consumer doesn't.

Manufacturers attempt to hide the radura by putting it on the back of the box.

ACTION!

The Campaign now represents over one million activists and 180 groups working to stop the irradiation of our food. These groups range from the Cancer Prevention Coalition and the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals (AFL-CIO) to the Organic Consumers Association.

And we're winning! Citizen protests have resulted in Wal-Mart backing away from its proposal to sell irradiated food. We will continue our state-based actions across the nation. Contact us to find out how to get invloved!

Numerous activists around the country have held actions that made consumers, stores selling irradiated meat, and the media sit up and take notice!

Tell the USDA not to allow irradiation of imported foods!

The USDA wants to allow the irradiation of imported fruits and vegetables to prevent bugs like fruit flies and the mango seed weevil from threatening American agriculture.

This could be the beginning of the end of fresh fruits and veggies in the U.S.

Fully 1/3 of our fruits and vegetables are imported—because labor is cheaper and environmental laws are more lax in the developing countries where this food is grown, multinational corporations want to move more food production outside of the U.S. This threatens the quality of the food we eat and the ability of small farmers to make a living.

This proposal is a backward way of addressing still another problem, the possible elimination of methyl bromide (a deadly pesticide that also depletes the Earth's protective ozone layer) for "phytosanitary" uses. Both control methods are fraught with problems.

COMMENTS ON THIS RULE ARE DUE JULY 25.

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SAMPLE LETTER:

Docket No. 98-030-1
Regulatory Analysis & Development, PPD
APHIS, Suite 3C03
4700 River Road Unit 118
Riverdale, MD 20737-1238

DATE
RE: Docket No. 98-030-1

Dear USDA-APHIS:

I am writing to comment on your proposal to allow the use of irradiation to prevent fruit flies and the mango seed weevil living in imported fruits and vegetables from threatening American agriculture.

Other, less expensive, methods of controlling pests are available. Irradiation is a technology that is fraught with problems and should not be allowed as an alternative treatment.

The USDA's Agriculture Research Service has reported that irradiating food results in major losses of vitamins A, C, E, and the B complex. Radiation has been used to kill odorous bacteria in imported fish unfit for human consumption. I do not want to buy rotten food. Only fresh, wholesome food that has not been treated with irradiation (also known as cold pasteurization) should be imported into the U.S.

There are better and less harmful alternative methods for controlling pests hitchhiking a ride to America. Please do not allow this rule to be made into law.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Address

Please Send a Copy Of Your Comments To Public Citizen.