



FOOD IRRADIATION FACT SHEET

Irradiation Myths

Myth: Informed consumers are willing to purchase irradiated products.

The overwhelming majority of submissions responding to Application A443 for the irradiation of tropical fruit were opposed. Of the submissions received by FSANZ in response to the final round of consultation 675 opposed and 16 supported. The application was approved despite public opposition.

In the 1989, a moratorium was placed on food irradiation in Australia due to strong public opposition. The moratorium had been in effect for 10 years, when the government changed food standards in 1999 with little public awareness or consultation.

Myth: Irradiation is used in numerous countries.

While the process of irradiation is approved in numerous countries, proponents rarely mention the fact that, as the European Commission points out: "In practice,

the use of this technique is rather limited although it is authorised in many countries."

(source: European Commission: www.europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/irradiation/index_en.htm)

Myth: Irradiation will provide Australia access to wider markets.

• **Problems with the first exports of irradiated Queensland mangoes to New Zealand have put in question whether New Zealand will import Queensland mangoes next season.**

"Nine tonnes of mangoes were imported recently as the first shipment of irradiated food to arrive here for human consumption, and many developed black spots or blotches..."

The Queensland grower did not know that her fruit had been irradiated and was "appalled to learn from the Herald that her fruit was irradiated before breaking out in blemishes..."

"She was worried that the irradiated mangoes could damage the reputation of her orchard and spoil any chance of exporting fruit to New Zealand by more traditional means."

(source: NZ Herald 08.01.05 Matthew Dearnaley: *Zapped mango imports break out in blotches*)

• **Not only have the EU recently banned any further irradiation approvals, the EU also only accepts products irradiated at approved facilities. No Australian facilities are approved by the EU.**

• **Irradiation approvals will also provide overseas producers access to Australian markets, potentially opening up Australian agriculture and horticulture to competition from cheaper imports. (See "Australia to import irradiated Philippine fruits" July 15, 2003 Philippine Daily Inquirer)**

• **Australian produce can gain access to markets through alternative, on-chemical and non-irradiation, trade protocols. Australians are pioneering production practices such as organics, which do not permit irradiation, and modified atmosphere which can extend product shelf-life and market accessibility without irradiation. There are numerous alternatives to irradiating food.**

• **Furthermore, most countries authorising the use of irradiation do not require it as a quarantine measure. (FSANZ FAR 18/12/02 Application A443 : Irradiation of Tropical Fruits- Breadfruit, Carambola, Custard Apple, Litchi, Longan, Mango, Mangosteen, Papaya, and Rambutan - Attachment 6, p 106-108)**



Myth: Labelling will allow consumers to know which products are irradiated.

In Australia there are many loopholes in labelling legislation.

Irradiated products may enter the human food chain directly or indirectly, most are not labelled.

- **Herbs, spices, herbal infusions and tropical fruits have been approved.** Of these, despite FSANZ statements that mandatory labelling applies, only those which are packaged require individual labeling. Others products are to have signage nearby at point of sale.
- **Therapeutic products and pharmaceuticals may be irradiated.** These require no labelling as they are not legally “food.” This is particularly deceptive where the “therapeutic” product is available for sale as a commercial consumer item.

Australian herbal tea manufacturer Hilde Hemmes has several classes of herbal products in her product line – many of them are irradiated, some of them are labelled. Hilde Hemmes’ “Superior Quality” herbal teas now carry a label stating that they are “Treated with ionising electrons” (irradiated). It has been confirmed that some of Hilde Hemmes’ “Therapeutic Quality Teabags “ are also irradiated. However, as they are classified as “Therapeutic” products and not “food” they are not labelled. Though they differ in color, the packages of these products are almost identical in layout and design. Though legal, the lack of labelling is deceptive to the consumer. The consumer has no way of knowing that both of these products are irradiated, and will most likely assume that, when one package is labelled “irradiated” the package that is not labelled is not irradiated.

- **Cereal and grain fed to meat animals and beehives may be irradiated.** There is no labelling requirement for secondary entry into the human food chain. Pet food may also be irradiated without labelling.
- **Unlabelled irradiated products may easily find their way to supermarket shelves. They may be imported from a country where labelling requirement or food irradiation approvals differ from our own.**

The European Union calls on member states to regularly audit irradiated products and labelling.

The Report from the Commission on Food Irradiation for the Year 2002 from the Commission of the European Communities (Brussels, 25.2.2004 COM(2004) 69 final) found numerous irradiated products that were not labelled, many of which were also not approved for irradiation in the EU.

“In 2001, UK authorities found that 42% of certain dietary supplements on its market were irradiated....the treatment of most of these products by ionising radiation is not allowed in the EU.” (p.16)

In 2002, “checks on dietary supplements found that 29.4% of the products checked were irradiated.” (p. 16)

Overall, the EU check found that 2.7% of food samples checked were irradiated but not labelled and some of them not authorised for irradiation.” (p.14) While some countries found few unlabelled irradiated products, others had many. Of those who participated in the 2002 audit, the greatest percentages of unlabelled irradiated products were found in:

Ireland	12.9%,
the Netherlands	6.2%,
UK	2.9%,
Finland	2.4%,
Germany	0.8% .

(pps. 7- 15)

Source: *The Report from the Commission on Food Irradiation for the Year 2002 from the Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 25.2.2004 COM(2004) 69 final*

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