



Food Irradiation Watch Food Supplement

Winter 2005

Food Standards up for review

A brief by Robin Taubenfeld

Noticed the angry farmers taking to their tractors in the streets of Tasmania recently? Amongst the many challenges that face our nation's farmers and food consumers is the accuracy of food labelling. We need to be concerned because until we know where our food is coming from, we can't really know what's in it, as labelling laws differ overseas.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) makes the regulations which govern what type of technology can be used on food, what sort of labelling will be required, what sorts of food will be available on the market. Basically they regulate what we eat. Each Australian state and territory plus the federal governments of Australia and New Zealand are represented on FSANZ's Ministerial Council.

Here's a few delicious morsels of info about what's going on in the food regulation world today. If your appetite has been wetted, check out the FSANZ website for more details:
www.foodstandards.gov.au

CoOL Labelling – Do you know where your food comes from?

FSANZ is considering revising the regulations about Country Of Origin Labelling (CoOL) for food including some unpackaged products. According to Food Standards Australia New Zealand on July 28, Parliamentary Secretary for Health Aging Christopher Pyne, announced that the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council would consider the final

country of origin labelling proposal at its meeting in Sydney on 28 October 2005.

Compulsory CoOL Labelling would allow consumers to make more informed choices about what they purchase and could facilitate consumers choosing local products or more environmentally sustainable production of foods. The inclusion of unpackaged goods is significant as unpackaged goods, such as fruit, have generally been exempt from individual labelling.

“Stakeholders” are divided about CoOL labelling's merits, some wanting labelling to be voluntary or less rigorous. The consumer, as a stakeholder, could only benefit from being informed.

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According to the Australian Consumer's Association Food Policy coordinator, Clare Hughes, “Australian consumers are interested in where their food is coming from. This might be because they want to choose to support local businesses or because they are concerned about the safety of food originating from particular countries.” (05/05/05 - www.choice.com.au/)

The consumer's right to choose depends on clear and understandable labelling.

Studies in the US show that “consumers would overwhelmingly choose domestically produced food and would even pay more for it.” (*Food Alert!* Public Citizen Feb/March 2005)

FSANZ will be considering a “Final Assessment Report” about CoOL labelling in September before presenting it to the Ministerial Council in October. Consultation on the discussion paper will be from 10 August until 2 September 2005. And remember, we are all “stakeholders”!

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the CoOL discussion paper or commenting on other food regulation proposals, contact FSANZ:

In Australia: info@foodstandards.gov.au
phone (02) 6271 2222
fax (02) 6271 2278

In New Zealand: info@foodstandards.govt.nz
phone (04) 473 9942
fax (04) 473 9855

As Health ministers from each state and federal government are on the Ministerial Council, you can also contact them for more information or to voice your concerns. **See the action section on back for details.**



GMO's are GO! Genetically Modified Foods up for approval

Many genetically modified foods and processing aids are already approved for consumption in Australia and New Zealand. Information and documentation about these products often uses language that is not always straightforward or easily understandable to the untrained eye! Look for phrases such as "insect-protected" or "herbicide resistant" and beware, an enzyme used in processing food is not "food" and therefore may fall under different standards and regulatory guidelines.

Make sure you contact Food Standards Australia New Zealand to express your concern.
www.foodstandards.gov.au

Current Genetically Modified Food applications:

1. Approved by FSANZ - Up for Ministerial Discretion: Application A543 - Food from Insect-protected, Glufosinate Ammonium-tolerant Corn Line 59122-7.

Dow AgroSciences applied on 8 July 2004 seeking approval for food derived from insect-protected, glufosinate ammonium-tolerant corn line DAS-59122-7 under Standard 1.5.2 – Food Produced Using Gene Technology in the Code.

"The genetic modification involved the transfer of the following synthetic genes derived from bacterial genes into the corn plant:

- the maize-optimised synthetic cry34Ab1 and cry35Ab1 genes derived from *Bacillus thuringiensis*, which express the insect-specific protein ã endotoxins Cry34Ab1 and Cry35Ab1; and
- the plant optimised synthetic phosphinothricin-acetyltransferase gene, pat, derived from *Streptomyces viridochromogenes*, which expresses the enzyme phosphinothricin-acetyltransferase (PAT), conferring tolerance to the herbicide glufosinate ammonium."

FSANZ has recommended approval of the sale and use of the sale and use of food derived from corn line DAS-59122-7 in Australia and New Zealand. This recommendation is now at the discretion of the FSANZ Ministerial Council to either review or let be gazetted into regulation.

www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/A543GMcornFAR_FINAL.doc

2. Final Assessment Pending: Public Submissions welcome: Application A553 Food Derived from glyphosate-tolerant cotton line Mon 88913 Deadline for public submissions: 6pm (Canberra time) 14 September 2005

Monsanto Australia Limited applied on 17 November 2004 for approval for food derived from herbicide-tolerant cotton line MON 88913 (Roundup Ready (r) Flexcotton). "The genetic modification involved the transfer into the cotton plant of the epsps gene derived from the bacterium

Agrobacterium sp. Strain CP4. The epsps gene encodes the enzyme 5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase (CP4 EPSPS), which confers tolerance to the herbicide glyphosate.

A Draft Assessment of the Application, including a detailed safety assessment of food from herbicide-tolerant cotton line MON 88913, has been completed and public comment is now being sought to assist in the Final Assessment of the Application." www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/A553GMcottonDAR_FINAL.doc

3. Draft Assessment Pending: Public Submissions welcome: Application 564 - Food derived from insect-protected corn Deadline for public submissions: 6pm (Canberra time) 14 September 2005

Syngenta Seeds Pty Ltd is seeking approval for food derived from corn line MIR604, which has been genetically modified to be resistant to three species of corn rootworm. If approved, food from this corn line will be able to enter Australia and New Zealand as imported products. The application is for use of MIR604 corn as a food only. At present, GM corn cannot be grown commercially in either country. If FSANZ accepts this application, it will undertake a safety assessment of the new GM corn to ensure that it is as safe for consumers as its non-GM counterpart. www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/A564GMcornIAR_FINAL.pdf

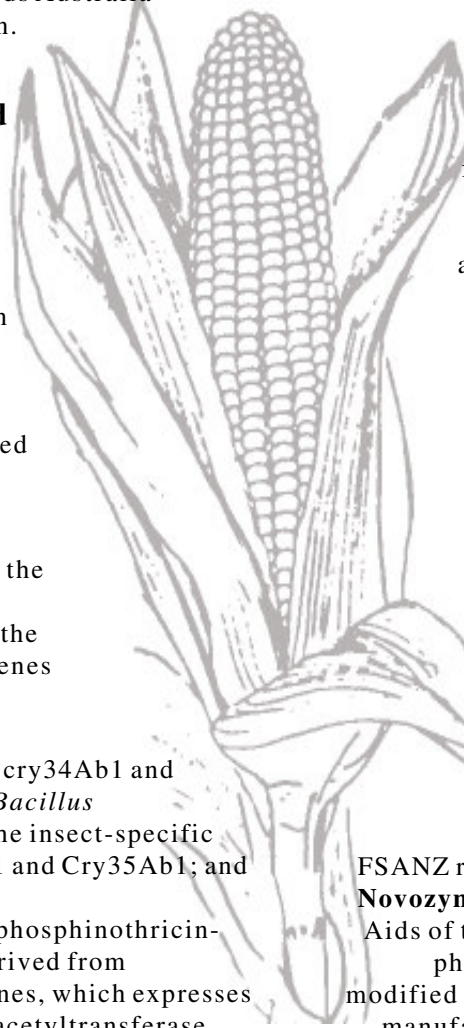
4. GMOs in "Food Processing"
Draft Assessment Pending: Public Submissions welcome: Application A561 Phospholipase A1 as a processing aid (Enzyme) Deadline for public submissions: 6pm (Canberra time) 14 September 2005

FSANZ received an Application on 26 April 2005, from **Novozymes** A/S, to amend Standard 1.3.3 – Processing Aids of the Code to approve the use of a new enzyme, phospholipase A1, produced from a genetically modified strain of *Aspergillus oryzae* for use in cheese manufacture. Phospholipase A1 is produced, using recombinant DNA techniques, from the host microorganism *Aspergillus oryzae* containing the gene coding for phospholipase A1 from the fungus *Fusarium venenatum*.

www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/A561PhospholipaseA1IAR_FINAL.doc

Our Concerns: Herbicides in our food.

Glyphosate and Glufosinate are herbicides used widely in agriculture. Foods are being genetically engineered by the chemical companies that produce these herbicides to tolerate their products. A bacteria is often used as the vector to transfer the genetic material to the crop species DNA. The use of Glyphosate tolerant species poses the risk that higher levels of herbicide residue may occur in our foods and the environment, and may lead to poisoning, cell mutation (cancer) and/or birth defects. Glufosinate is particularly persistent in the environment. (See Pesticide News at www.pan-uk.org for more info).



Radiation is not a food additive

as the world remembers Nagasaki and Hiroshima, we look at the nuclear industry's spread into food and agriculture

On August 6 and 9, the world reflected upon 60 years since the United States' dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan – the beginning of the nuclear age. The devastation caused by the bombs led the US to search to improve the image of nuclear technology by promoting its “peaceful” uses. One of these was the irradiation of food.

It is no secret that in the current political climate, the name of the game is nuclear expansion, and that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an active promoter of the nuclear industry not a watchdog for nuclear safety.

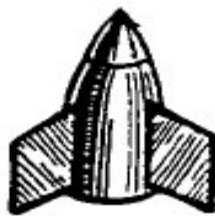
The IAEA works hand in hand with organisations including the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to promote itself as an organisation that is working to use science and technology to feed the poor and find solutions world problems. In doing so, it furthers its mandate of “fostering ... nuclear technologies” which it claims are beneficial for human development. (IAEA *Bulletin*, March 2005)

The IAEA is now promoting nuclear technology to both irradiate and genetically mutate food.

Irradiation is the process of exposing products to radiation as a sterilisation technique. While first world consumers are skeptical of the benefits and safety of irradiated food, the IAEA and its partners are promoting the process in third world countries.

In 2003, the European Union banned further irradiation approvals and anti-food irradiation campaigns are growing stronger in Europe, the US and Australia.

The IAEA, however, talks about the process as well-accepted. No wonder, however, when their research, such as “Public



Acceptance and Market Development of Irradiated Food in Asia and the Pacific” was conducted with the aim of “achieving wide acceptance of irradiated foods by the public and promoting domestic and inter-country trade of irradiated products.” (IAEA/FAO Coordinated Research Project (CRP) 2001, p1)

The IAEA/FAO online newsletter *Food and Environmental Protection* is a great source of information on their current work promoting food irradiation around the world. www.iaea.org/programmes/nafa/d5/public/fep-n1-8-1.pdf

There are alternatives to irradiation, including clean, safe, worker friendly food production practices. It is no surprise that the IAEA is working to promote nuclear sterilisation or decontamination of third world products, a major source for global multi-national food ingredients, rather than working with communities to eliminate the true source of poor production practices: cost-saving by agri-business and unequal distribution of resources.

Crops made from 'radiation-mutated' (genetically engineered) seed are also now on the market.

In Vietnam,

The IAEA has supported the use of nuclear techniques to induce genetic variations for the improvement of local landraces of rice...

These new local varieties, with enhanced agronomic characteristics and export quality, are resulting not only in higher productivity, but in more competitive prices on the world market. (IAEA *Bulletin*, 03/05, p.18)

The two varieties are known as TNDB-1000 and THDB.

Mr. Pham Van Ro, senior rice breeder at the Cuu Long Delta Rice Research Institute (CLrri) explains, “This was the first time that radiation-induced mutations were

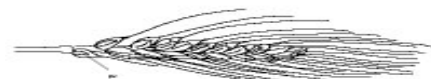
used for variety development in the Mekong Delta. Because of their rapid success and accept-ability by farmers, induced mutations through nuclear techniques have become one of the main methods for crop improvement at CLRRI (Ibid, p. 19)

The nuclear irradiation of food is a direct descendant of the “Atoms for Peace” program developed after WW2. X-ray beam and Electron beam irradiation are also commercial uses of technology developed for military purposes. The use of radiation to mutate crops is an extension of the nuclear experiment.

The nuclear cycle begins here in Australia, with the mining of uranium. It continues here with visiting nuclear warships in our ports, the use of nuclear materials in our reactor, in smoke alarms, and in three nuclear irradiation facilities. It culminates on our dinner tables as irradiated food.

For their place in the nuclear cycle and the damage they can do to our food, our local economies and agriculture, food irradiation and crop mutation are not peaceful technologies.

When numerous alternatives exist, neither extending the shelf life of food, nor sterilising products are legitimisations of the nuclear industry - the deadliest industry on earth.



International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed ElBaradei:

“It has always been hoped that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand as constant reminders of why preventing the further use and proliferation of such weapons — and why nuclear disarmament leading to a nuclear weapon-free world — is of utmost importance for the survival of humankind and planet Earth,” (Reuters, August 8, 2005)

