



Food Irradiation Eye

keeping an eye on food irradiation in Australia and the world

Sept-Oct 2005

Crack out the champers - National Food Irradiation Survey Launched. Irradiation-Free Food Guide On It's Way!

In the second week of September Food Irradiation Watch sent out the first batch of letters surveying the practices and attitudes of food producers to irradiation.

The results of the national survey will form the basis of a consumer guide to irradiation-free foods. The guide will appear on our revamped website and will be launched in paper copy form in December.

Thanks go out to our hardworking team whose mammoth effort included compiling a comprehensive database on Australian food producers, running around after printers, tirelessly folding

letters and stuffing envelopes and keeping the snack food coming while we worked!

Food Irradiation Watch are asking for supporter donations for the production of the guide, which will resemble the popular Greenpeace True Foods Guide. It will include information about the practice of irradiation of food and a brand-name guide to common



Donations can be made by cheque to:

**Food Irradiation Watch
PO Box 5829,
West End,
Brisbane QLD, 4101**

We apologise, but donations to us do not qualify for tax deductability.

Food Irradiation Team Strategy Weekend

The Food Irradiation team took a day out in August to attend a day-long strategising workshop facilitated by Friends of the Earth's Stephanie Long. The whole team got together for perhaps the first time, to plan our next year's work. It was a valuable session for clarifying the direction of our consumer-based campaign and the role of parliamentary lobbying within the big picture. A great day was had by all and thanks to Fran for hosting the event. Ring or email us if you'd like to get involved.



Fire Near Nuclear Plant Outside Brisbane Raises Questions

After the strategy session we passed by the site of the Narangba Steritech nuclear irradiation plant. The previous week the Binary Chemicals plant, 100 metres down the road, had exploded, spewing toxic chemicals into the air and a nearby tributary of Saltwater Creek. The Binary chemicals accident demonstrated how unprepared emergency services and local council are for disaster situations. The council made a vain attempt to prevent the green sludge entering the creek by bulldozing a dam. One month later the police and fire services have still not examined the site because it is too toxic. What emergency response might we expect for a nuclear accident there?

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US: Irradiation of Oysters, Mussels, Clams Approved

In August the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that it is amending the food additive regulations “to provide for the safe use of ionizing radiation for control of *Vibrio* species and other foodborne pathogens in fresh or frozen molluscan shellfish” such as oysters, mussels, clams.

Wenonah Hauter, director of the Food Program for the campaign group Public Citizen, is skeptical. Calling the FDA’s decision to permit the use of irradiation on oysters, clams and mussels “misguided,” Hauter says despite years of consumer resistance to eating irradiated food, “the government continues to forge a path down which very few consumers are willing to tread.”

“Grocery stores rarely carry irradiated meat because it doesn’t sell. The National School Lunch Program has yet to order a single pound of irradiated ground beef despite the federal government’s 2003 approval of such purchases for the program,” said Hauter. “Several food irradiation facilities have closed their doors in the past two years due to lack of business.”

“Few studies have been done on the effects of irradiating shellfish,” she says, and one study cited by the FDA risk analysis study as demonstrating the effectiveness of irradiation



Although irradiation is effective in killing contaminating microorganisms, it may mask the fact that the food had high levels of spoilage or insect infestation prior to treatment: the microorganisms or insects are killed but their carcasses, faeces or toxins remain. - Australian Academy of Science

www.science.org.au/nova/030/030box02.htm

Sustainability

The production of food rightly holds an important place in all societies - it keeps us alive. Yet food production is, in reality, no longer about survival in Australia.

We often hear stories of scarcity and drought, of needing to “green” the desert to make more agricultural land, of Australia not being able to sustain or maintain a larger population. The reality is that Australia already produces more than enough food for its current population, that distribution of resources such as water are not always equitable, and that the paradigm the scarcity stories are based on is one in which ever-increasing production and spiraling need are the only things valued. Do we need to create an economy based on developing export markets and increasing corporate control of food? Or is this the time to develop and promote a new vision of sustainability?

Food Facts: From 1997-98 to 1999-2000, around 65 percent of the commodities produced on farms were exported. The export figures for 1999-2000, in farm-gate terms, are as follows:

Beef Cattle	63%
Wheat	69%
Barley	79%
Other Coarse Grains	21%
Canola	78%
Pulses	75%
Cotton	95%
Milk	56%
Rice	65%
Sugarcane	76%
Sheep and lambs	42%
Wine	36%
Wool	98%

(DAFF, Stocktake, 2005 p.28-70)

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry book “Australian Agriculture and Food Sector Stocktake” is a must-read for anyone interested in the direction that Australian agriculture is taking and the current government’s vision of where agriculture must go.

It is clear from “Stocktake” that the term sustainability is used to denote “economic” sustainability, with the implication that the only way to be sustainable is to have a constant increase in market and profit. Environmental sustainability and social justice in production and land use do not seem to be part of the equation.



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Excerpts from “Stocktake”:

Water: “Increased trading of water...is contributing to a more economically efficient allocation of the reserves between competing users. Such trade proved to be particularly useful in ensuring that scarce water was available for higher value end uses in the 2002-03 drought.” (DAFF p.6) (Throughout these water “scarcity” periods Roxby Downs – or Olympic Dam, uranium mine (now owned by BHP) was allowed to use 42, 000,000 litres of water from the Great Artesian Basin for free!)

Working conditions: “Australia’s processed food and beverage industries are unlikely to be globally competitive with out being able to attract new capital investment on an ongoing basis. In a world where capital is highly mobile, the ability to attract investors will depend on ...perceptions that the economy is soundly managed, and labour reforms aimed at achieving more flexible workplace arrangements. An important potential impediment to the expansion of food manufacturing that is relatively intensive, however,

is that Australian labour costs are relatively high compared with those in many other countries, particularly in the Asian region.” (DAFF p.17) (The processed food and beverage industry is Australia’s largest manufacturing industry (DAFF p.5) – how will these food workers feed their families?)

We are seeing the end of the family farm as the Australian marketplace is being shifted to fall in line with global centralised food production practices which value “efficiency” often at the price of the environment or humane treatment of animals. In August 2005 the Australian Bureau of Statistics released figures showing the upsizing of farms, while at the same time the total number of farms in declining.

Biotechnology: “Biotechnology offers potentially significant benefits for agricultural productivity and natural resource management. Some of Australia’s major competitors, such as the United States, Canada, Argentina and Brazil, already make substantial use of genetically modified (GM) crops, and China is making large investments in the technology. Around eight million farmers in 17 countries are growing GM crops. Australia could be place at a competitive disadvantage if it does not manage the adoption of GM crops appropriately.” (DAFF p.19)

We need to be concerned when our government’s preferred direction for food and agriculture is one that facilitates corporate control over resources, including people in the workforce: it puts a clean, health and safe environment for consumers, workers and animals at risk.

One example is the altering of the Australian palate and the increasing number of cattle feedlots in Australia. “By 2002, there were about 600 accredited feedlots in Australia....As Australian consumers acquired a taste for grain-fed beef, the proportion of cattle finished in feedlots for the domestic market rose from around 20 per cent to 40 per cent between the mid and late 1990s. Supermarkets are drawing an increasing proportion of their beef requirements from feedlots” (DAFF p.28). Grain fed animals consume the bulk of world soybean production, and in the US, feedlot cattle producing 20 times the amount of effluent of the human population there.

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Sustainability and food

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below: cattle feedlots are a source of effluent pollution



left: These fish died when oxygen levels in the water dropped due to nutrient pollution from piggeries upstream.

Further Reading:

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry, "Australian Agriculture and Food Sector Stocktake" Commonwealth of Australia, 2005. ISBN 0 9642 53985 5

Choice Magazine www.choice.com.au

Sierra Club. 2005. "Clean Water: That Stinks" at www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater/that_stinks/

Grace Factory Farm Project www.factoryfarm.org/

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005. *Australian Farming in Brief*. ABS Catalogue No. 7106.0 www.austats.gov.au

Intensive piggeries are often the target of EPA prosecutions for pollution in Australia and abroad. They increase nitrates in waterways, cause local air pollution and threaten public health (Sierra Club 2005). In 2001, the USEPA forced five piggeries to supply bottled water for local residents because activities at the farms had so badly contaminated the local drinking-water. Pollution from factory farms is exacerbated by changing weather patterns and increasing storms such as that expected to come with climate change: Hurricanes and storms in North Carolina have caused widespread river contamination and massive fish kills. (www.riverlaw.us)

The animals in intensive farms often suffer for efficiency. Practices such as tail docking and teeth clipping in pigs, and debeaking in hens are the intensive farmers' solution to the cannibalism, self-mutilation and fighting brought on by close confinement and lack of exercise or normal socialisation denied intensively raised food animals.

And routine dosing of factory farmed animals (to enhance production) is contributing to increase antibiotic resistance of bacteria - at great risk to human health.

A model for food and agriculture production based on economic efficiency does not reflect the values of consumers. A 2000 study by Choice magazine found that consumers are buying more organic food than ever before. With big supermarkets launching their own organic brands, that trend is set to continue. People want clean food - but the priorities of the government indicate that they want the market driving the consumer.

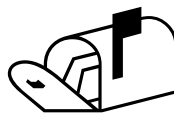
Over the next few editions we will be discussing the notion of sustainability and agriculture. Please feel free to write in your comments or to open up a topic for discussion. Contact us on: foodirradiationwatch@yahoo.com.au and check out discussion on our website: www.foodirradiationinfo.org

ACTION: Join our labelling campaign

One of the most important things you can do as a consumer is speak up! Most stores are eager to please their customers and want to hear about the products you buy and items you want to buy that aren't sold there. Sustainable food is increasingly popular, and stores that aren't providing it yet may just be out of the loop, or unsure of where to start.

The next time you go to your local supermarket, deli, restaurant or café, ask to speak to the manager. Ask if they sell any locally-grown food. Encourage them to sell more, and to post information about the farms the food is from.

Look out for our guide on how to eat irradiation-free!



For the latest campaign news, fact sheets and further information contact:
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