



# Food Irradiation Eye

*keeping an eye on food irradiation in Australia and the world*

August-September 2006

## New guide set to help consumers avoid nukes in their food

**In April, Food Irradiation Watch launched Australia's first "Irradiation Free Food Guide". The guide was put together to help people make informed choices about foods that may have been exposed intentionally to nuclear radiation.**

The Guide was launched at a Gala event in Brisbane, featuring musicians and an anti-nuke quiz, and a morning tea in Melbourne with help from Friends of the Earth and FI Watch collective members.

Food Irradiation in Australia is carried out by the Steritech corporation, who have three plants, in Dandenong (VIC), Wetherill Park (NSW) and in Narangba (QLD). They use gamma rays from a nuclear source (Cobalt 60), ostensibly to improve food sterility, however irradiation's ability to do so is questionable.

Irradiation has along history of public opposition in Australia. During the 1980s opponents successfully thwarted Steritech's attempt to gain permits to irradiate food and permission was granted in 1999 after a dubious public consultation process.

Sadly for consumers, irradiated food is actually less healthful than non-irradiated food, as the

process destroys vitamins. Irradiated food has been found to contain new radiation-induced compounds that have not been adequately tested for safety and have been linked to cancer.

Tropical fruits, herbs and spices have been approved for irradiation in Australia. While the United States permits many foods for irradiation, consumers in Europe have rejected the technology and a moratorium has been placed on it there. Despite this, unscrupulous vendors have been forcing irradiated products onto the market as a 2004 survey of health supplements in the UK found that 50% of them were irradiated illegally and/or not labelled. However, increased

trade with the US has meant that some sectors of Australian industry would like to see irradiation become accepted as the norm, increasing Australia's commitment to nuclear technology in all it's guises.

The Irradiation Free Food Guide is a pocket guide to companies opposed to irradiation. It rates the most popular brands based on their company policy and provides some interesting background about the process and the many alternatives.

You can get a copy by sending your address to Food Irradiation Watch, PO Box 5829, West End, QLD 4101 or by emailing us at [foodirradiationwatch@yahoo.com.au](mailto:foodirradiationwatch@yahoo.com.au)

If you would like to help us distribute the guide through your local health food cooperative, or simply make a donation to help us get them out, let us know.



**HAPPY SHOPPERS:** The Irradiation-free Food Guide tells consumers which companies have written policies opposing food irradiation.

**Due to popular demand, the Irradiation Free Food Guide is now in it's second print run! So far 15,000 copies have been distributed across Australia.**

## Zapped Aussie Mangoes Cause Shock in New Zealand

**Food Advocates are dismayed at the failure of the standards system, when unlabelled irradiated Australian mangoes were discovered on sale in three outlets in New Zealand on March 10.**

According to Bob Tait, Co-director of Friends of the Earth NZ, the mangoes were marketed under the AustralianGold brand. Mr. Tait found a discarded box with one small sticker on it stating that the mangoes were irradiated, in an alley by the store. There were no signs in the store, nor any labels on the mangoes

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**MARKET VISIBILITY:** The New Zealand Greens campaign against the importation of Australian irradiated mangoes.

You can send this ecard from their site: [www.greens.org.nz/food-revolution/ecard\\_irrad\\_food.asp](http://www.greens.org.nz/food-revolution/ecard_irrad_food.asp)



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that informed shoppers that they had been irradiated. He also found two other stores in the Fresh World chain selling the unlabelled irradiated mangoes.

Spokesperson for Food Irradiation Watch, Robin Taubenfeld, said in a joint statement with Friends of the Earth Brisbane, that the discovery of unlabelled irradiated fruit in New Zealand indicates a failure of the food standards code to protect consumers.

" We already had concerns that labelling laws themselves were inadequate, this discovery indicates that the system is ill-prepared to enforce those laws.

"Consumers deserve and want to know the truth about their food; most have serious reservations about food irradiation. It is a questionable practice and the public is not being adequately informed.

In New Zealand, the scandal has been reported in the NZ Herald, and FoE(NZ) have laid formal complaints with the NZFSA and the Public Health authority in Auckland.

Mr. Tait stated that, "The importers, Turners and Growers, are active in a joint venture in Australia to build even more irradiation plants. Their importation of irradiated mangoes without specific labelling, and the failure of the retailers to display any signage to give consumers a basis for informed choice, shows a contempt for consumer rights, as well as for the Food Safety Code legal requirements. We are seeking prosecutions.



Further investigations have revealed that the Queensland company marketing the mangoes, Pinata, was unaware their products would be irradiated.

In December 2004 a shipment of irradiated mangoes exported from

Queensland to New Zealand quickly went blotchy and unsale-able, despite their good condition when they left the farmer's gate. The farmer had not been informed their fruit would be irradiated.

*The farmer had not been informed their fruit would be irradiated.*

It is believed that the mangoes were irradiated at the Steritech nuclear irradiation plant in Narangba/ Deception Bay, north of Brisbane raising questions about the affect irradiation will have on Australian farmers who may be ambivalent about the process.

Ms. Taubenfeld said, "The revelation that some links in the production chain are not being informed, suggests that unscrupulous middle people may be damaging the reputations of Australian farmers by using processing aids that jeopardize the products marketability and consumer appear in order to push the nuclear industry."

Irradiated mangoes must be labelled under the Australian and New Zealand Food Standards Code.

Food Irradiation Watch has made a complaint to Australia New Zealand Food Standards Authority and relevant ministers.

## Are Irradiated Mangoes Safe?

In light of the recent trial marketing of irradiated Australian mangoes to New Zealand, Food Irradiation Watch. In 2003 Public Citizen published an overview of studies of the health effects of irradiated mangoes in which they found a number of inconsistencies with the research process and evidence that irradiated mangoes are not good for you. The report was made in submission to a Health Canada proposal to amend food laws to allow more irradiation. Public Citizen found the test data used by the standards body to contain inadequate analyses, flawed and inappropriate science, and studies that have actually detected adverse health effects in test animals that have eaten irradiated foods.

Public Citizen reviewed a number of tests where rats were fed a diet of 15% irradiated mangoes, irradiated at a dose below that prescribed by Health Canada. Some of the inconsistencies they found included:

- abnormal growth of sex organs of female rats
- albumin and protein levels that might indicate liver problems, including hemolytic anemia, liver necrosis or liver cancer.
- decreased mating index and weight loss for female rats
- rats fed irradiated mangoes gave birth to 24 percent more dead pups than rats fed unirradiated mangoes
- In the dominant lethal study, female rats fed stock diets containing 15 percent irradiated mangoes registered 5 percent more dead implants

They also noted that, If the researchers made any effort to explain these abnormalities, it was not detailed in their report. (2003:p3)

The Public Citizen report concluded that " Plainly, these studies do not demonstrate that mangoes irradiated at the proposed doses are safe for human consumption."

The complete report can be viewed at:

[www.citizen.org/documents/healthcanadacomment.pdf](http://www.citizen.org/documents/healthcanadacomment.pdf)

## AUST: Narangba community court action over toxic industrial site

In June 2006 the community living in the vicinity of the Narangba Industrial Estate (NIE) began a class action against the state of Queensland over years of contamination and illness resulting from the proximity of hazardous industries to their homes.

The issue came to a head in August 2005 when a fire at Binary Chemicals spewed smoke and liquid into the local air and water. Many locals have experienced health problems since

that occasion, some have been experiencing the ill effect of the estate for a lot longer.

The disaster released a toxic cocktail of chemicals into the air and water and caused mass illness in the local area.

In August 2006 the QLD EPA released a report vindicating the claims of locals who were told that everything was safe at the time of the fire. Chemicals released included: 2,4 D, diuron, glyphosate. Also Chlorpyrifos which is banned in the US and Bifenthrin which is banned in Europe.

Some of these chemicals are still being produced by other corporations at NIE.

The site is also home to a Polychlorinated Biphenyl destruction facility and a nuclear irradiation plant.

The Narangba Industrial Estate houses Australia's 3rd nuclear irradiation plant, the first specifically to be built for irradiating food. The Steritech plant was the site of an 8 month community protest camp in 2002. The community remains strong in opposition to the hazardous industries in the estate and committed to closing Steritech and the other hazardous industries down.

[www.brisbane.foe.org.au/narangba.htm](http://www.brisbane.foe.org.au/narangba.htm)

**What's the IAEA up to?  
Taking irradiation to the two thirds world**

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) promote the supposedly 'peaceful uses' of nuclear technology in the world. A part of their work involves promoting, researching and training people to use food irradiation in conjunction with the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Together they produce a newsletter, named *Food and Environmental Protection* which largely deals with their many training and research activities.

A lot of the IAEA's activities focus on the two thirds world, where irradiation plants are being built ostensibly to facilitate trade, presumably with the U.S, but where there is less consumer rejection of the technology and lower standards of literacy. Europe has been a hard market for them to crack, presently they will only deal with 5 permitted irradiators, despite the existence of over 70 plants world wide, the US having the most.

One development of concern to consumers is their research into the application of irradiation to fresh cut fruit and vegetables, which they are conducting in Pakistan. The IAEA have been researching the effect of irradiation on more than 30 types of vegetables and sprouts in an effort to legitimise irradiation as a hygiene measure in the huge prepared meals sector for Western markets (the IAEA



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is also doing research into the irradiation of prepared meals). Some of the fruits showed changes in 'sensory attributes'. Other tests have shown that irradiation markedly changes the taste, colour and smell of meat, being described as off.

These packaged food tests did not measure for loss of nutritional

value. We know from past experiments by bodies independent of the IAEA that significant loss of vitamin content can be one of the outcomes of irradiating fruit and vegetables. In addition, the studies that have linked irradiated food with cancer and birth defects in rats have been ignored by the research bodies.

Interestingly, the research into irradiating prepared meals found that further interference in the food, including adding "antioxidants such as vitamin C, vitamin E and flavonoids" was necessary to make the food acceptable. The excessive inputs of energy, additives and processes would obviously increase the production costs for third world producers and not deliver any health benefits to consumers. Eating two month old irradiated food with 'reduced microbial count' is hardly a benefit when weighed against eating clean and freshly prepared foods.

The IAEA and the FAO seem to have forgotten that the primary function of food is not to extend it's shelf life, or increase it's marketability to the US, but to feed people and make them healthy.

**Finally, the IAEA's greenwashing of irradiation as a health and hygiene benefit overlooks it's links to the dirty, dangerous nuclear industry.**

"In Europe the outbreaks [of Foot and Mouth disease in 1999] transformed public sentiment about the food system. British Environment Minister Michael Meacher told a news conference, "We need a fundamental rethink of what we expect farming to produce. It will certainly be more localized, it will be less internationalized, less dependent on chemicals, more organic." In Germany the food scares sparked a dramatic about-face on agricultural policy. After the first reports of mad cows in the German herd, the German prime minister replaced the agricultural minister with an environmentalist, who revamped German agricultural policy to include, among other things, a big push for organic farming. The European Union as a whole is poised for similar systematic reforms that will reach beyond quick-fix solutions like animal quarantines and meat irradiation."

*Brian Halweil, Worldwatch Institute,*

**Bush Brokers Mango Irradiation Deal with India**

In March this year US President George Bush brokered a billion dollar mango export deal with India, breaking a 17 year impasse over India's mango pests.

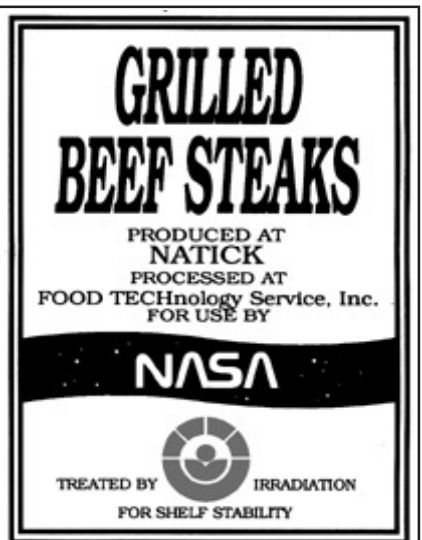
The deal hinges on India's willingness to irradiate their mangoes to reach the lucrative US market. The USAID's Partnership for Food Industry Development will facilitate the deal.

"The United States is looking forward to eating Indian mangoes," said Bush. sources: USDA, USAID



**The sticker on these mangoes, irradiated at Narangba and exported to New Zealand reads: "Irradiated to Protect New Zealand's Environment"**

**SPACE FOOD?: Good enough for astronauts, most consumers can't stomach irradiated foods.**



## Biological Farmers of Australia launches their 'Say No to GMO' campaign

Scott Kinnear, Director of Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) announced on July 21 the official launch of the 'Say No to GMO' campaign at the Organic Expo in Sydney.

GM crops grown on a commercial scale around the world are currently, Soya, Corn, Canola, Sugar beet, Potato and Cotton. Over 90% of Cotton grown in Australia is now GM.

Kinnear comments "GM foods on the market have not undergone adequate testing to ensure they are safe to eat and that they will not harm the environment over the long term.

"Overseas experience brings concerns that GM will cost Australia overseas trade markets, cost farmers through increased dependence on herbicides and lead to the loss of organic farming communities due to contamination that is almost impossible to control.

"The BFA feels that GM is taking farming in a direction that is irrelevant to the environment and consumers. There is a strong demand for organic food, and research has shown that organic farming has multiple long-term environmental and social benefits. The use of GMO's is banned in certified organic food and farming," he adds.

The BFA has started a petition to help governments in their decision to halt the growing of GM crops, which can, along with further information about the campaign, be accessed via the BFA website:

[www.bfa.com.au](http://www.bfa.com.au)

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**on the clean food calendar:**

**Sept 12 & 14** Food Additive Guru Sue Dengate Bellingen & Lismore, NSW [www.fedupwithfoodadditives.info](http://www.fedupwithfoodadditives.info)

**Sept 30** Festival for Tomorrow: A Field Day of Sustainable Living, Milton, NSW [lomas52@yahoo.com.au](mailto:lomas52@yahoo.com.au)

**Oct 7** All Things Organic Expo, Rosehill Racecourse, Sydney [elizabeth@swizzlestick.com.au](mailto:elizabeth@swizzlestick.com.au)

**Oct 13-15** Living Now Expo, Brisbane, RNA Showgrounds

**Oct 1** Brisbane Organic Growers' Organic Fair 9-3pm at 102 McDonald Road, Windsor, QLD

**Nov 9 - 12** Conscious Living Expo. Perth, WA [advertising@consciousliving.net.au](mailto:advertising@consciousliving.net.au)

**Nov 18-19** Limestone Coast Better Life Festival. Mount Gambier, SA [www.betterlifefestival.org.au](http://www.betterlifefestival.org.au)

## Nestle to remove artificial colours from Smarties in the UK but not Australia

Nestle UK is to remove all artificial colours from their Smarties product amid safety concerns arising from a recent study at Liverpool University. The Study identified a possible harmful cocktail effect on the nervous system of artificial colours and other additives. Two of the colours examined were Brilliant Blue (133) and Quinoline Yellow (104). Like many other artificial colours, these are made from coal tar.

The colours being dropped from the Smarties range include Brilliant Blue and Quinoline Yellow as well as Sunset Yellow (110), Ponceau (124) and Carmoisine (122). As well as behavioural concerns about Brilliant Blue, it is listed as a cancer risk by the US Environment Protection Agency.

The move by Nestle is part of a major shift by the entire industry. The Co-op and Iceland Supermarket chains and Marks & Spencer have already removed artificial colours and additives from own-label products. Last year Birdseye frozen foods giant in the UK removed additives and Nestle have already removed artificial colouring from Fruit Gums, Jelly Tots and Fruit Pastilles.

Nestle UK says it is responding to calls from consumers for more natural ingredients but Nestle Australia has no plans to introduce similar changes. According to a spokeswoman, this is because they have received no consumer complaints.

*The Food Intolerance Network is an excellent source of independent information about the effects of food on behaviour, health and learning ability in both children and adults.*

[www.fedupwithfoodadditives.info](http://www.fedupwithfoodadditives.info)



The IAEA have a new website devoted to their food program. It has searchable databases on 'clearances' (ie. what foods have been permitted and where). There is also a database of the world's food irradiation facilities. Of note: most outside the US are in the 2/3s world.

<http://www-naweb.iaea.org/nafa/fep/index.html>



Those crazy people at Free Range Graphics have been at it again bringing us Episode 2 of 'The Meatrix', exposing the reality of industrialised food production, or factory farming

[www.themeatrix.com](http://www.themeatrix.com)

### Ireland rejects GE potatoes

THE world's largest chemicals company BASF has scrapped controversial plans to conduct trials of genetically engineered potatoes in Ireland. More than 100 farm and food industry groups, the local council and MPs from all the parties opposed the trial. [greenpeace.org.au/truefood](http://greenpeace.org.au/truefood)

### ACTION:

In the second half of 2006 FI Watch are working to extend the GREEN category of our Irradiation free Food Guide and YOU can help us!

Simply write to your favourite brands asking them:

- \* do they irradiated any of their products or ingredients?
- \* do they have an irradiation-free policy?
- \* would they like to join the growing number of concerned companies and be included in our next Guide?

*Cheers and healthy eating, from the FI Watch collective!*

For the latest campaign news, fact sheets and further information contact:  
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Food Irradiation Watch is an affiliate member of Friends of the Earth Australia

