



Food irradiation eye

the newsletter of the fi watchdog in australia

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Food Irradiation Awareness 2005 The 2004 Food Irradiation Awareness Tour - where to from here...

In late November 2005, the Food Irradiation Watch team embarked on a "national" (East Coast!) speaking tour. The "Food Irradiation Awareness Tour" enabled us to reach out to a national audience raising interest in food irradiation amongst consumers, food producers, politicians and organisations, in the regions we visited - Victoria, ACT, NSW, Queensland - and further afield. Groups in SA and WA, regional NSW and Qld, supported the tour helping spread the word about food irradiation to regions we were not able to visit.

Our international connections were also strengthened with the presence of the Tour's international keynote speaker Wenonah Hauter, Director of Public Citizen's Critical Mass and Energy Program, United States. Public Citizen has a long history of consumer advocacy and has been a major player in the campaign to stop food irradiation in the USA and worldwide. In conjunction with the Tour, Public Citizen released a report Food Irradiation: Australia and Beyond, From Narangba to the Cold War and Back, which is available on the Food Irradiation Watch website.

Australian speakers on the tour included: Fran Jell, from the East Narangba Community Action Group and Food Irradiation Watch, Andre Leu, from the Organic Federation of Australia, Bonny Bauer, from the Qld Organic Producers Association and Weston-Price Foundation, and Robert Pekin from Food Connect.

Tour activities varied from region to region, including, public meetings in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns and Atherton, a parliamentary forum in Canberra, other meetings with politicians and organisations, workshops, strategy meetings, actions, and media interviews.

The Tour provided some exciting networking opportunities, as campaigners met representatives from environment, political, health and consumer organisations around the country. Some highlights were speaking at the Mind, Body and Spirit Expo in Sydney at the invitation of the Natural Health Society, and the forum in Parliament House, Canberra, co-sponsored by Qld Senator John Cherry and Victorian MP Maria Vamvakinou. Both audiences were engrossed by Wenonah, speaking from an international perspective, Fran, speaking as a local living near an irradiation plant, and Andre, speaking on organics and alternatives to irradiation.

Another highlight was meeting all the people who helped make the tour a reality or agreed to have meetings with our speakers. The tour was run entirely by volunteers, and could not have happened without the help, great organising skills and patience of: friends in Friends of the Earth, Fitzroy, Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra, the Organic Federation of Australia, the Search Foundation, the National Council of Women (NSW) Nuclear Free Australia, Northey Street City Farm, Ya Basta Community Centre, the Beerburum CSA, the Maleny Food Co-op, the Cairns food co-op, Qld. Organic Producers Association, and the support of the ACF, the Australian Consumers Association, the Australian Democrats, the Australian Labor Party, the Greens, Greenpeace, Environmental Advocacy, the Natural Health Society, Happy High Herbs, ENUFF Byron, and community radio stations 2XX (Canberra), 3CR (Melbourne) and 4ZZ (Brisbane).

We even got to meet the CEO of Horticulture Access Solutions (formerly Surebeam) who is intending to build an X-ray beam irradiation plant in Cairns.

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Right: US Advocate group Public Citizen's own Wenonah Hauter toured many East coast locations for the Food Irradiation Watch Speaking Tour in November 2004. Wenonah Hauter has worked extensively on energy, food, water and environmental issues at the national, state and local level. Public Citizen play a key role in the global opposition to food irradiation and have provided enormous support to our campaign here in Australia.



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food irradiation: unsafe, unnecessary, unwanted

Food Standards up for review a brief brief by Robin Taubenfeld

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is currently accepting submissions on proposals that may affect the labeling or



defining of irradiated products. Submissions for the Initial Assessment report of Proposal P 272 - labeling requirements for food for catering purposes and retail sale - are due Feb 23. Submissions for Proposal P291

"review of novel food standard" is due March 2. Though you may not have time to respond to these initial reports, it is important to keep these proposals in mind as they come up for further public consultation. A draft and final assessment should be made on these reports/proposals, so the public should have a chance to respond to them later.

Novel Foods are considered to be "New Foods" - ones that are not "traditionally" in our diet, or ones that a new process alters significantly. In the UK irradiation is considered a "Novel Process".

This report and this category clearly has implications for the labeling of products that are "therapeutic". Therapeutic goods are currently not required to be labeled as irradiated, and we would hate to see irradiated products that are "new" to our diet slip through as novel foods in Australia.

The novel foods proposal is available on line at:

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/standardsdevelopment/proposals/proposalp291reviewof2805.cfm>

The Labeling requirements proposal P272 incorporates many areas of catering and retail of food, including, hospital and institutional food, food from "Delivered Meal Organisations" (DMOs) and exemptions for labeling for certain retail and catering situations. Under Food Standard 1.2.1 Labeling exemptions exist for catering purposes and food for retail sale when: Food that is other than in a package, food is in inner packages not designed for sale without an outer package..., the food is made and packaged on the premises from which it is

sold, the food is packaged in the presence of the purchase, the food is whole or cut fresh fruit of vegetables, except sprouting seeds or similar products, in packages that do not obscure the nature or quality of the food, the food is delivered packaged, and ready for consumption, at the express order of the purchaser, the food is sold at a fund raising event. (Initial Assessment report of Proposal P 272 p20) .

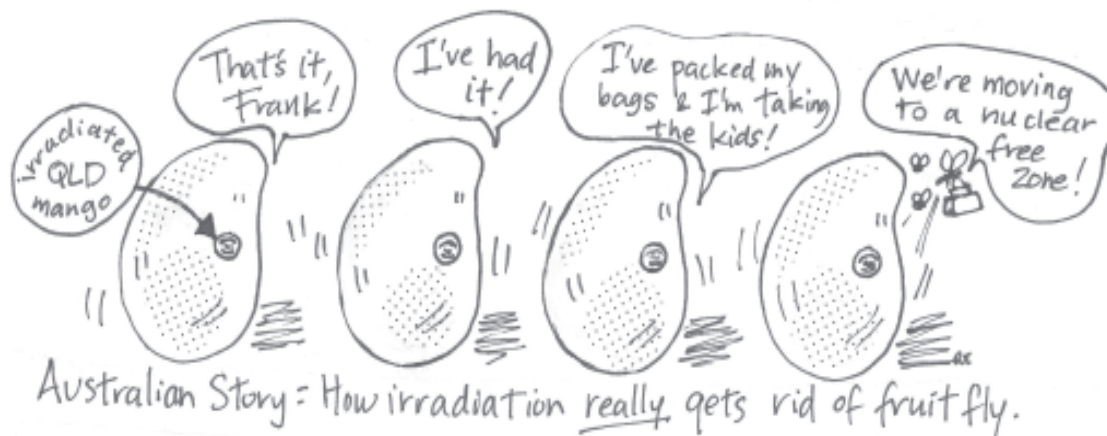
There are requirements, however, for food for retail sale that is exempt from labeling. (Hence irradiated fruit, while not requiring a label is supposed to be accompanied by signage nearby at point of sale)

While this review does not attempt to change the exemptions, it attempts to limit or expand them, depending on the retail and catering situation. We

really need to see the defined exemptions changed to get all irradiated products labeled.

The application raises some important points to consider, however, as far as responsibility and method or information dissemination. As fruit is exempt from labeling, but requires a display statement nearby at point of original sale - it is not clear to me that a caterer - food provider - or restaurant will know that irradiated fruit is irradiated - if they were not the direct purchaser. How will they be able to be responsible for informing the public? There is a suggestion throughout the standard that being able to see food is a criteria for judging its suitability. Unfortunately, genetic modification and irradiation are invisible processes. There is also a proposal to limit the information requirements for food for catering purposes when exempt from bearing a label to information (p 52) that would seem to negate even the requirement to notify the caterer of an irradiated - but not labeled product - being irradiated. Meat carcasses for catering are also considered likely to be exempt from labeling as they are likely to not be packaged. With the irradiation of meat possibly on the cards in Australia, we need to be vigilant about loopholes which make it easier for industry to deceive - or disinform - the public.

The labeling proposal is available on live at:
http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/P272LabellingReqIARFINAL.pdf





Mangoes Irradiated in Brisbane get mixed reception in New Zealand:::

"Queensland mango growers are upset that their fruit was irradiated and exported to New Zealand - without their knowledge - before erupting with big black blemishes."

Nine tonnes of mangoes were imported recently as the first shipment of irradiated food to arrive in New Zealand.

Queensland grower Del Norman, from Townsville, was appalled to learn from the Herald that her fruit was irradiated before breaking out in blemishes.

"That fruit should not be off," she said. "It should be still holding quite well if it's been refrigerated properly and I would say the irradiation is what's done it - most definitely."

"I find that's pretty alarming. I didn't even know it was in New Zealand for a start. I didn't even know it was being irradiated and I am more than alarmed - if not totally alarmed - that it's breaking down after that time."

Mrs Norman said the batch number on a box supplied to the Herald by the Friends of the Earth, which has been monitoring the mangoes at the Fruit World chain of shops in Auckland, showed it was picked and packed on December 13.

She said a consignment picked the next day remained in very good condition within

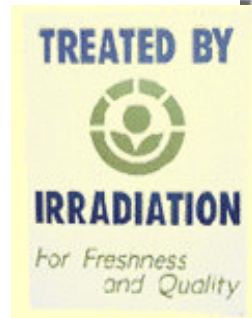
Australia. She was worried that the irradiated mangoes could damage the reputation of her orchard and spoil any chance of exporting fruit to New Zealand by more traditional means.

The mangoes had already been treated with the insecticide dimethoate against Queensland fruitfly for the Australian market, and she wondered why they needed to be irradiated.

Friends of the Earth NZ spokesman Bob Tait, who campaigned against Steritech attempts to build a food irradiation plant here, wondered whether high doses of radiation from the isotope cobalt 60 may have chemically altered the dimethoate already in the fruit, or if the blemishes were caused by a pathogen too small to have been damaged by radiation, or by some secondary infection which would have lost its natural immunity because of sterilisation.

The mangoes bore a small yellow sticker saying: "Irradiated to protect the New Zealand environment."

Excerpted from 'Zapped mango imports break out in blotches' - New Zealand Sun Herald, January 8, 2005.



US NEWS: Irradiated food soon to be radioactive??? Read for yourself then take action!

A few days before Christmas, the Food and Drug Administration quietly announced that they were granting an industry petition to increase the permitted energy level of X-rays used to irradiate food. At this higher level, it is possible for the components of the food to become "activated" (become radioactive). The industry claims that any radioactivity will be short-lived. But we think it is unacceptable that consumers should be asked to accept any technology that creates radioactivity, no matter what the level. Additionally, the FDA has not required adequate studies of the changes, chemical or otherwise, that this increased dose could cause in food.

The higher doses will allow large portions of food to be irradiated in one blast - such as shipping containers from overseas. Thus increasing the already enormous amount of imported meat and produce that floods U.S. markets. This trend has forced tens of thousands of American farmers and ranchers out of business.

The FDA has a long history of ignoring the well-documented health problems associated with irradiated foods, which can be exposed to the equivalent of up to 1 billion chest X-rays. Numerous health problems have been observed in lab animals fed irradiated foods, including premature death, stillbirths, mutations, tumors, organ damage and stunted growth. And, chemicals formed in irradiated foods called 2-ACBs have been linked to colon cancer promotion in rats and genetic damage in human cells.

To learn more about food irradiation, visit our website at <http://www.citizen.org/cmep/>

Food irradiation - Industry decision or consumer choice?

Anna Barnes of Food Irradiation Watch

The first shipment of irradiated Australian mangoes recently arrived in New Zealand (NZ). Irradiated at nuclear irradiation company, Steritech's facility in Narangba, Queensland, nine tonnes were imported for pre-Christmas sales by Fusion Marketing and are being sold by the Fruitworld chain of stores. The manager of Fruitworld, Ronald Chan was reported in the NZ *National News* as having researched food irradiation on the 'internet' and could see nothing wrong with the irradiated mangoes. While industry and regulating bodies impose this controversial food technology onto the public how is the consumer responding? Would consumers knowingly feed their families food that has been sterilized with highly radioactive material known as Cobalt-60?

Scientific studies since the 1950s have proven beyond doubt that consumption of irradiated food causes serious health effects. However, food irradiation is approved in forty countries including Brazil, Canada, France, Pakistan, USA and more recently Australia and NZ, mainly for products such as dried herbs and spices and teas. Radioactive exposure for food irradiation is measured in kilograys. While in the USA, Australia and NZ have a dose maximum of 30 kilograys, all other countries allow only 10 kilograys. To provide some understanding of the comparison, 30 kilograys is the equivalent of almost 1 billion chest X-rays.

FSANZ (Food Standards Australia New Zealand) admits that the public is genuinely concerned about food irradiation. They see this lack of acceptance as a 'problem' and believe that this arises from consumers not having sufficient information to determine the safety of irradiated food products. Despite FSANZ's official objective to educate consumers on food irradiation they provide only one-sided information which is in favour of irradiated food. They have also failed to conduct any independent tests yet continue to promote the technology as safe.

For the promoters of food irradiation, lack of consumer acceptance of food irradiation is a 'problem'. According to a survey by the Australian Consumer Association, 93% of consumers opposed food irradiation when the moratorium was placed in the late 1980s. Consumers seem also just as unaccepting in the UK. In 1989, a survey by the Neilson/Henry Centre for Forecasting showed that 70% of consumers did not want to buy irradiated produce, and a further 20% were uncertain. In the same year, a French supermarket ran an experimental promotion of irradiated strawberries highlighting the extended period that the fruit would stay 'fresh'. From the sales figures, it became clear that 60% of shoppers did not buy the strawberries. Another survey in 1990 of 200 UK food retailers, caterers and manufacturers revealed that the majority would not handle irradiated food.

If Australia continues to follow in the footsteps of the United States we may see many more food products such as eggs, vegetables and fresh meat irradiated. Irradiation of meat in the United States has led to opposition from the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals. Vice Chairperson, Mr Arthur Hughes said "The meat industry wants to use irradiation as an excuse to push inspectors out of their facilities", he also added "Irradiating meat is the meat industry's answer to filthy meat processing practices that leave meat contaminated with faeces, urine and pus. Consumers will be the losers, because no one will be around to ensure the food supply is safe." Consumers are also rejecting irradiated meat. More than 80 grocery stores and meat markets in Florida and Wisconsin have stopped selling irradiated meat due to consumer resistance.

Although herbs and spices are approved for irradiating within the UK, irradiation company Puridec have ceased to supply herbs and spices for general consumption due to the resistance by supermarkets and consumers for irradiated foods. However, many irradiated products continue to illegally find their way onto the supermarket shelves unlabelled in the UK. Tests taken from food shops in March 2001 by the BBC revealed that unlabelled products were actually irradiated. Out of 18 samples of shellfish sent by trading standards officers for analysis over a five-year period, seven were irradiated.

Consumers aren't alone in their rejection of irradiated food. Skepticism of irradiated food is also shared by schools, producers, organic associations and government bodies worldwide.

In the US, the Bush administration approved irradiated meat for their schools lunch program. In response 10 school districts including Los Angeles and Washington DC rejected irradiated meat with some placing an outright ban on irradiated food. During the public submission process 91% of comments opposed the irradiation of meat. Only 3 school districts placed orders for irradiated meat – Minnesota, Nebraska and Texas. However, their orders were later withdrawn due to the higher cost of irradiated products and the inadequate information provided by the federal government.

The European Parliament placed a temporary ban on the approval of any further food irradiation applications in December 2002 in response to scientific research which showed that a range of toxic chemicals formed in irradiated foods caused genetic mutations. Ironically the day after the EP announcement Australia approved the irradiation of tropical fruits.

In Australia, nuclear irradiation company, Steritech Pty. Ltd applied to FSANZ for the irradiation of herbs, spices, herbal teas, black teas, oil seeds and nuts under Application A413. Producers in the black tea industry lobbied heavily against having their black tea irradiated. Of the public submissions received by FSANZ 94% were opposed to the application. Despite such strong public opposition FSANZ gave approval for the irradiation of herbs, spices and herbal teas.

Community group, Food Irradiation Watch recently hosted a national awareness tour on food irradiation covering venues in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns and Atherton. The tour was successful in reaching the broader Australian public and lobbying to build support against the irradiation of food. Significant outcomes of the tour include; the Organic Federation of Australia proposing that products which contain imported irradiated herbs be no longer certified as organic, and the formation of a parliamentary food irradiation working group which will focus on raising questions in parliament and lobby for labeling legislation to ensure adequate and informative labeling of irradiated products. For example, labeling issues include; irradiated fruit to be individually labeled and a broader definition of “food” identified to include all things entering the human food chain including the labeling of irradiated therapeutic goods.

In 2003 the Australia Senate also passed a motion that recognized that the European Union in December (2002) imposed a moratorium on the further approvals of food irradiation due to research about the possible health effects, particularly in relation to cyclobutanones and that Food Standards Australia in the same month expanded the list of foods that can be irradiated in Australia to include a range of tropical fruits. The motion also recognized that “a number of community campaigners chose to fast in protest against the approval of food irradiation in Australia, arguing that fasting is safer for their health than eating irradiated food”. The Senate also called “on the Federal Government to urgently commission research on the health effects of food irradiation and to follow the lead of the European Union in not approving any further foods for irradiation until such research is completed”.

With such an established rejection of food irradiation the question remains – who actually wants this technology? Food shops in Australia and New Zealand are already selling irradiated food and other unlabelled consumable products. Without clear labeling and consumer education the question is whether the right to choose irradiated food will be yours or not.

References:

- Irradiated mangoes now in NZ shops*, National News, 23 December 2004, James Gardiner.
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Australian Democrats Senate Motion, 14 August 2003, Senator John Cherry



From front page:

The outcome of all this activity was the development of an enthusiastic network of people keen to follow the issue and commitment from various organisations to take the campaign to the next level. Notably,

- * The Organic Federation of Australia is looking into to decertifying products with are suspected to contain imported irradiated herbs.
- * A number of politicians supportive of our campaign have formed a parliamentary food irradiation working group which will focus on raising questions in parliament, lobby for labeling legislation to ensure adequate and informative labeling of irradiated products. For example, labeling issues include; irradiated fruit to be individually labeled, broader definition of food identified to include the labeling of irradiated therapeutic goods.
- * Public Citizen has committed to raising funds to support the employment of food irradiation campaigners in Australia. This will make it much easier to coordinate the campaign in a “professional” manner and will allow activists to focus more clearly on the issue.

The tour also helped us clarify campaign goals or direction for the future.

We have identified the following campaign strategies, which we hope to work on over the next year:

- * Consumer and Retailer Campaign To inform consumers of the danger of irradiated foods and to encourage retailers to not stock irradiated products.
- * Producer Campaign Work with producers to promote alternatives to irradiation.
- * Legislative Campaign Work with government and stakeholders to legislate clear, truthful and nonbiased labeling of all irradiated products that enter the human food chain.
- * Related Nuclear Issues Campaign Lobby to amend the Environmental Protection Act and Integrated Planning Act in Qld to ensure a state based environmental assessment of proposed nuclear development.

The campaign is at a very exciting stage. Awareness of food irradiation is increasing, consumer rejection is on the rise, and campaigners in both Australian and New Zealand are networking successfully to bring the issue to the public.

Irradiated Qld mangoes for sale in New Zealand: In New Zealand, recent shipments

of Qld mangoes irradiated at Steritech's Narangba nuclear irradiation facility were found to have gone blotchy. (see NZ herald article in this newsletter or on our website) Qld farmers were shocked to find that their mangoes had been irradiated before being exported and are concerned about the reputation of their produce. Friends of the Earth NZ are monitoring the situation.

Australian Herbal teas and remedies being irradiated: For example in Australia, health food shops are starting to refuse stocking irradiated products such as Hilde Hemmes Herbal teas and their therapeutic product range. Australian campaigners will be working on product specific awareness raising to make sure producers and retailers know that consumers don't want to buy irradiated products.

Food Irradiation can be stopped!

It is important to remember that in 2002 when the application for irradiation of tropical fruit was under consideration, the overwhelming majority of respondents opposed food irradiation. The breakdown for the second (and final) round of public consultation is as follows: 657 submissions opposed, 16 in support. FSANZ chooses to disregard public opposition to food irradiation, but we don't!

The submission results are a clear sign that informed people will oppose food irradiation. Despite the regulatory bodies, we have the opportunity to work with the community as consumers and alternative producers to lobby for change on a political and economical level. The government might approve irradiation, but no food producer or retailer is going to want to market irradiated food if they know we won't buy it.

We encourage everyone to start asking questions of their retail outlets and to vote with your pocketbooks!

Producers and retailers are currently benefiting from labeling regulations which do not require unpackaged irradiated products to be individually labeled, do not require labeling of irradiated "therapeutic" products, do not require the use of the words "irradiation" or "radiation" where labeling is required and allow a positive statement to be written about the process on labels.

We believe that labeling should be required on all irradiated products that enter the human food chain and that labeling should be neutral. If the industry and government are convinced of the benefits of the technology, they should be willing to label irradiated products fully, accurately, and without bias. We challenge them to do so!

Once we have complete and truthful labeling in place, we will see how many consumers will choose to stomach irradiated food.

Help Wanted!

What you can do: We welcome your involvement in the campaign and your feedback on the issues. We are currently looking for volunteers or financial support to: create an updated media kit, produce easy to use fact sheets, to create an info display for retail outlets, network with community organisations, to lobby politicians throughout Australia, to survey industry groups on irradiation, to update or website, to help with our newsletter, to edit a tour video, and to help organise a Food Irradiation tour for 2005 which incorporates New Zealand.

Why not start a Food Irradiation Watch group, organise an event, or spread the word in your own region. We can send you materials, PowerPoint presentations, leaflets, petitions, videos. We can help you organise a talk - or find a relevant speaker - or we may be able to visit you ourselves!



left:
campaign
appearance
outside
Steritech's
Narangba
facility



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