


Food Irradiation





Since food irradiation was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1963, consumers have had many concerns and questions about this controversial food technology. Irradiation is the process of exposing food to ionizing radiation that kills harmful bacteria the food may contain. The radiation breaks chemical bonds in molecules, killing all pathogens. However, the food is not exposed long enough to become "radioactive."

The FDA has approved its use on spices, fruits, vegetables, pork, poultry and red meat. Irradiation has also been used for disinfecting medical supplies, cosmetics, contact solution and baby pacifiers. Although the process is approved, it is not widely used, due to lack of consumer acceptance and cost.

Irradiation is viewed by some traditional health organizations as a way to solve problems caused by wide-spread food borne illnesses, including those from salmonella, listeria or E. coli bacteria. Other groups think irradiation is a dangerous process. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, a local food safety advocacy group, has stated their concerns about how to best protect our food supply. At the Twin Cities Natural Food Co-ops, we continue to be concerned about food irradiation, and will not knowingly sell irradiated products in our stores.



Our Concerns About Food Irradiation

Food Safety Opponents of irradiation are concerned about the human-health impacts of vitamin depletion and possible carcinogens in the treated foods. No human studies have been conducted to assess the long-term safety of irradiated food, and consumers are understandably wary.

Foods can also become recontaminated after being irradiated. Beneficial microorganisms that inhibit re-growth of pathogens can also be killed in the process.

Irradiation of perishable foods should not be a substitute for proper hygiene and safety measures on farms and in packing facilities, or for adequate cooking, handling or storage in restaurants or home kitchens.

Changes in Food Molecular changes in the food may promote the formation of "free radicals," (highly reactive molecules that attack healthy tissues, weaken cell walls and can lead to disease and degeneration) and may form new potentially toxic compounds. However, all foods contain some free radicals. Irradiation also depletes some foods of vitamins C, K, E and B complex.

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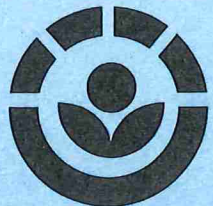
It must be noted, however, that many eminent scientists, health organizations and government agencies have concluded that irradiated food can be safely consumed.

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Labels

Labeling Current labeling requirements are that irradiated products should be labeled with the symbol of a circle with a plant inside. However, irradiated foods sold in restaurants, school lunches, or as ingredients in processed food, are not required to be labeled. This drastically reduces informed consumer choice.



Environmental Safety The Nuclear Regulatory Commission reports that there have been 54 nuclear accidents at 132 irradiation facilities around the world in the past 25 years. Several U.S. irradiation plants have experienced worker-safety violations and accidents. Trucking cesium and other nuclear materials also increases the safety risk. To irradiate food on a large scale, more irradiation facilities would have to be built, increasing the risk of accidents.

Agriculture Using irradiation to kill pathogens after food is packaged removes the incentive for farmers and packing plants to practice proper hygiene and safe food handling. Some opponents of irradiation charge that treating foods with ionizing radiation is an "end-of-pipeline" attempt to achieve safe food while also making it easier for factory farms to comply with food-safety regulations.

Alternative treatments such as steam-cleaning technologies and Hazards Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures are said to be safer, yet equally effective.

Farmers es

What Consumers Can Do to Avoid Irradiated Products

- ▶ **Buy organic.** Food products treated with radiation cannot currently be labeled "organic." Participate in the comment process for National Organic Standards to make sure that this does not change.
- ▶ Current labeling requirements for irradiated products have many loopholes, limiting your choice as a consumer. **Share your concerns** about this with food manufacturers.
- ▶ **Buy local food** as much as possible from a food source you trust. Foods that are shipped long distances are more likely to be irradiated.
- ▶ **State your concerns** to packing and food preparation facilities.

If you are concerned about food irradiation, contact:

Campaign for Food Safety

(formerly Pure Food Campaign)

860 Highway 61, Little Marais, MN 55614

218-226-4164, Fax: 218-226-4157

e-mail: alliance@mr.net

Irradiation FAQ:

Food and Water

389 Vermont Rt. 215

Walden, VT 05873

802-563-3300

<http://www.irradiation.com/food.htm>



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Valley Co-op
215 N. William St.
Stillwater: 651-439-0366

Mississippi Market
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St. Paul: 651-690-0507
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622 Selby Ave.
St. Paul: 651-224-1300

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14015 Grand Ave.
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