

WHAT IS FOOD IRRADIATION?

Food Irradiation is the process of exposing food to high doses of radiation, generally for sterilisation purposes.

Food irradiation is now legal for some foods in Australia and New Zealand.

In Australia, approved sources of ionising radiation are: Gamma-rays from Cobalt-60 or electron beams, and X-rays.

WHAT FOODS MAY BE IRRADIATED?

So far, Food Standards Australia New Zealand has approved for irradiation:

- Herbs,spices,and herbal teas
- Tropical fruits including: breadfruit, carambola, custard apple, lychee, longan, mango, mangosteen, paw-paw and rambutan



Irradiated products may also enter the food chain through sources, which are not legally classified as "food" such as:

- Therapeutic products and pharmaceuticals
- Cereal and grain fed to meat animals.

Recent Australian trade agreements with the US may result in many other products being approved.

ARE IRRADIATED PRODUCTS LABELLED?

Labelling laws are inadequate. Many products are not labelled at all. See overleaf.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) makes regulations about food. Each state, territory, and federal government is represented on the FSANZ Ministerial Council. Here's a list of your State and Federal decision makers on the Council.

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WHAT IS WRONG WITH FOOD IRRADIATION?

Numerous scientific studies have exposed the harmful effects of food irradiation.

Irradiation causes vitamin and amino acid depletion in food. It changes the molecular structure of food forming toxic chemicals linked to: cancer, organ damage, genetic mutations, immune system disorders, tumors, stunted growth, reproductive problems and nutritional deficiencies.

There are many problems with food irradiation - see overleaf for more detail.

Source: Public Citizen, Questioning Food Irradiation, April 2003, www.citizen.org/cmep

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES. ?

Irradiation is unnecessary because many clean and healthy alternatives exist.

Treatments vary according to the type of food and include:

- Cold storage
- Cold treatment
- Heat/steam, vapour treatment
- Hot water dips
- Atmospheric control with oxygen, carbon dioxide or nitrogen
- Physical disinfestation, i.e. cleaning, washing
- Hygienic and safe production practices
- Pest exclusion zones
- Early harvesting
- Organic production

FOOD IRRADIATION IN AUSTRALIA

In the 80's, a strong community campaign played a vital role in raising awareness about Food Irradiation. In 1989 a moratorium was placed on Food Irradiation in Australia.

10 years later, with little public consultation, a new food standard was approved which allows irradiation on a "case by case" basis.

Community action against food irradiation

Local residents first discovered Steritech Pty Ltd's plan to build a nuclear irradiation facility at Narangba, 30 minutes drive north of Brisbane, in 1999. The plant was designed to have a capacity of 3.5 million curies of radioactivity, using highly radioactive Cobalt 60 rods, and would be the first in Australia equipped to irradiate food on a massive scale.

A network of local residents, anti-nuclear campaigners, food lovers, and environmentalists from around Australia formed to oppose the plant and food irradiation. They ran a highly visible and colourful campaign to stop the establishment of the nuclear irradiation industry in Queensland. When legal avenues failed, the community maintained a protest camp against the plant for 8 months. Unfortunately, the plant opened its doors in mid 2003.

There are now three nuclear irradiation plants operating in Australia, all run by Steritech Pty Ltd.

So far, herbal teas, mangoes for export to New Zealand, beehives, pharmaceuticals and numerous other commercial products have been irradiated at these plants.

An X-ray beam food irradiation plant is now being proposed for Cairns.

EVERY STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS INVOLVED IN DECISION MAKING - SO YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



For the latest campaign news, fact sheets and further information contact:
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Food Irradiation is happening NOW in Australia

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