You can help keep our food clean, green and nuclear-free

- Refuse to buy irradiated products
- Support products that are irradiation free
- Contact companies to voice your concern
- Ask your favourite brands to go irradiation free
- Contact your MP > Call for better labelling > Demand a ban!
- Contact Food Irradiation Watch to join the campaign!

Food Irradiation Watch is a volunteer-based, not-for-profit community network working out of Brisbane, Australia. FI Watch is concerned about the food safety, social, economic and environmental impacts of irradiation.
We need your support to keep our food irradiation free! Visit our website or contact us to find out how you can get involved, make a donation, or form your own group.

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Irradiation-free Food Guide

Your guide to shopping irradiation free

Food Irradiation, föd ir-rā´di-ā"shon, *n.*
The process of exposing food to high doses of radiation

FOOD IRRADIATION WATCH

An Introduction to Food Irradiation

The tropical fruit on the front cover can all be irradiated in Australia

Irradiation is the process of exposing food to high doses of ionising radiation.

So far, the following foods have been approved for irradiation in Australia: herbs, spices, herbal infusions (teas), and nine tropical fruits (mangoes, paw paws, lychees, longans, mangosteens, rambutans, carambolas, breadfruit and custard apples).

In the US, a wide range of foods including meat, vegetables, and beef for some school lunches can be irradiated. With Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) following international trends in the liberalisation of food regulations, Australia appears headed down a similar path to the US.

Despite numerous scientific reports which clearly show the harmful effects of consuming irradiated food, FSANZ promotes food irradiation as a beneficial technology. By contrast, the European Union (EU) has placed a hold on further approvals, pending more research.

There are currently three commercial irradiation plants operating in Australia. All use a nuclear by-product, Cobalt-60, to produce the gamma radiation used to irradiate food and other products.

There are many reasons to avoid irradiated food. These include the associated health risks and the social and environmental impacts of the irradiation industry. Moreover, these risks are unnecessary, given that numerous alternatives exist.

Labelling laws are inadequate, making the choice to avoid irradiated food difficult.

It is your right to choose what you and your family eat!

Why we need to be irradiation free...

Irradiation can harm your health

Numerous scientific reports have highlighted health risks associated with irradiation.

Irradiation changes the molecular structure of food, forming toxic chemicals linked to genetic damage, vitamin deficiency, immune system disorders, tumours, stunted growth and reproductive problems.

Ionising radiation forms new chemicals called "radiolytic products", some of which are unique to irradiated food. These have not been adequately studied. One of them, 2-ACBs, has been shown to promote cancer-development and cause genetic damage in rats, as well as genetic and cellular damage in human and rat cells. (1)

Irradiation damages vitamins, proteins, essential fatty acids and other nutrients in food - sometimes significantly. For example, it can destroy up to 80% of vitamin A in eggs and 48% of beta-carotene in orange juice. (2)

Animals fed irradiated food have shown lowered immune resistance, increased abnormal lymph cells, decreased fertility, damaged kidneys, depressed growth rates, and deficiency in vitamins A, B, C, E, and K. This may be linked to free radical overload in irradiated food.(3)

Internationally renowned pediatrician, Dr. Helen Caldicott, is a staunch opponent of food irradiation.

Non-nuclear irradiation technologies, such as electron beams or x-rays, have the same effects on food, and are therefore equally harmful.

An irradiation free diet will be better for you, containing more vitamins and nutrients than an irradiated diet. Going irradiation free ensures you avoid radiation related health problems and unknown potential side effects. Avoiding irradiated, chemically altered, or genetically modified foods will provide for a more natural and wholesome diet.

Irradiation can harm the environment

Food irradiation affects the environment in two major ways:

1) As a nuclear industry, irradiation is part of the global nuclear fuel cycle.

2) As a tool of agribusiness, irradiation is used to manipulate food technologically, at the expense of more natural and sustainable production practices.

Irradiation is used to extend shelf life, facilitating increased global trade and therefore longer storage times and "food miles" - the distance your meal travels.

Nuclear food cycle:
The global irradiation industry relies almost entirely on nuclear materials. The majority of irradiation facilities worldwide use Cobalt-60, a by-product of the nuclear industry. Caesium 137, a nuclear waste product, is also permitted in the US and other countries.

The nuclear cycle is neither clean nor sustainable. It produces waste that is radioactive for thousands of years and leaves a legacy of environmental destruction and human health impacts, such as cancer, leukemia and birth defects.

Uranium mines, nuclear reactors and irradiation facilities are often pushed on unwilling communities, violating democratic principles and indigenous land rights.

Avoiding irradiated products means supporting socially just and ecologically friendly food production practices.

Irradiation can harm Australian farmers

Irradiation can impact Australian farming in several ways:

- Irradiation compromises Australian food's clean green reputation.
- Irradiation can help cheaply produced products enter the Australian market.
- Irradiation supports large-scale centralised farming over family farms.

Last year (2005) some Queensland mangoes were irradiated and exported to New Zealand without the farmer's knowledge. When the irradiated mangoes broke out into blotches, the produce was traced back to its originating farm. The NZ Herald covered the story. The farmer, who assured the Herald that the fruit was in fine condition when it left her farm, stated that 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." Full story NZ Herald 8 January, 2005.

Australian food production has a reputation for being "clean and green" compared to farming elsewhere. International trends show that consumers in Australia and overseas prefer fresh, natural and non-adulterated food.

Irradiation is a clear step away from this trend, instead supporting a centralised food production system. This kind of system undermines true food security as small family farms are subsumed by large agribusiness. Irradiation is linked to increased global trade in food, forcing Australian producers to compete with foods produced more cheaply overseas.

Worldwide, farmers are being forced to leave the land. Australia is no exception. Between 1986 and 2001, 31,000 farmers left the land in Australia (www.abs.gov.au).

"Food irradiation is an industry/corporate solution to unhygienic farming practices and only benefits imports and large agri-corporations. Small farmers are more interested in providing safe, clean food with good environmental practices that benefit all. Keeping food production local drastically reduces 'food miles' which is especially important in light of the 'peak oil' issue." - Robert Pekin Farmer & Farm Advisor

Picture: Robert Pekin with the Food Connect Team. Food Connect works in collaboration with over 200 local farmers to provide fresh, nutritious food to families in the Brisbane region under the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. Robert has witnessed first hand the impact rural decline has had on communities all across Australia. (see: www.foodconnect.com.au)

Going irradiation free supports our farmers by helping maintain Aussie food's wholesome reputation and sustaining environmental and humane production practices.

Consumers don't want it

"Our recent national survey found Australian consumers are highly motivated by the health, naturalness, animal welfare and environmental attributes of food. They are also concerned about the long term risks associated with industrialised food production and processing techniques, including the use of agri-chemicals, genetic engineering and food irradiation.

The irradiation of food represents the antithesis to everyday Australians' visions for a safe, healthy and sustainable food system, and as such we can expect there to be little or no consumer acceptance of irradiated food." - ***Dr. Kristen Lyons***

Picture: Dr. Kristen Lyons is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Science at Griffith University, where she teaches social studies of science and technology. She is currently undertaking research on global organic food and agriculture movements.

People in Australia simply don't want to eat irradiated food.

Community opposition to food irradiation in the 1980s lead to a moratorium on food irradiation, which lasted for ten years. In 1999, the government changed the food standards to allow irradiation of some foods. Since that time, all rounds of public consultation in relation to food irradiation have proven that the community is still overwhelmingly opposed to this technology. For example, in the final round of consultation in 2002, the irradiation of tropical fruit was approved despite 675 submissions to FSANZ opposing irradiation and only 16 in favour.

The European Union (EU), on the other hand, has placed a ban on further irradiation approvals after new scientific research confirmed the potentially harmful effects. The EU report confirmed that irradiation produces "Unique Radiolytic Products" (URP's), chemicals which are only found in irradiated foods. Some of these, known as "cyclobutanones", can cause genetic damage.

Problems with labelling

Irradiated products and ingredients are difficult for consumers to identify due to inadequate labelling requirements.

Firstly, non-packaged items such as fruit are not required to be individually labelled, and need only a sign nearby or at the point of sale. Secondly, the language permitted as labelling can be deceptive. Finally, many irradiated products require no labelling at all.

Non-labelled products:

Therapeutic or medicinal herbs and health formations may be irradiated without being labelled, as they are not classified as "food".

Labelled and non-labelled irradiated products may be packaged almost identically. The consumer has no way of knowing that the non-labelled product has been irradiated.

Cereal grains fed to animals, bee hives, and pet food may also be irradiated without labelling as they are not classified as "food."

Permitted Labelling language:

- The words ***"radiation"*** and ***"irradiation"*** are NOT required.
- A positive statement about the process is permitted, *and* no warning of potential harmful impact is required.

STOP PRESS!
February 1st 2006
UK Food Standards Agency investigation reveals half the food supplements tested were either irradiated or had an irradiated ingredient. None were labelled.
www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2006/feb/irradexercise

This is an actual size reproduction of the Irradiation Statement on the bottom of a box of Hilde Hemmes' Superior Quality Fennel Tea.

This product has been treated with
ionising electrons to destroy harmful
micro-organisms.

The statement avoids using the general and familiar words for this "treatment": "ionising radiation" or "irradiation". Similar looking herbal products that are listed as "therapeutic goods", such as Hilde Hemmes' *Therapeutic Quality Teabags*, have no labelling regarding irradiation at all.

How to use this Guide

This Guide has been developed to help you shop irradiation free. In mid 2005, Food Irradiation Watch surveyed over one thousand food producers, growers, processors, and outlets.

Our rating system:

The ratings in this book correspond to the company's policy regarding irradiation, not simply their current practice. This is to ensure that companies we rate as Green are those committed to avoiding irradiation in their long term production practices. The ratings do not reflect compliance or non-compliance to national food regulations, they reflect the company's attitude and practice regarding irradiation.

We ensured that all our respondents were notified of the rating system to be published in this Guide. The Guide will be regularly updated in line with changing company policy at our online Irradiation Free Food Guide **www.foodirradiationinfo.org/iffg**

The ratings rely on information provided to us by companies. They do not guarantee irradiation-free status, except in the case of certified organic products. Australian organic guidelines do not permit irradiation. All certified organic products should be treated as Green (non-irradiated) regardless of the overall rating of their company/brand. The ratings are not an endorsement or comment on any individual company, beyond their irradiation policy. FI Watch has not conducted any independent testing of these products.

While the Guide does not cover all companies/brands, every effort was made to survey and include all major brands available in supermarkets and health food shops.

Food Irradiation campaigners have been reviewing companies' attitudes to irradiation for the last decade. Accordingly, we have also included information on respondents to our earlier 2003 survey.

Some industry bodies, such as The Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC), have policy which supports irradiation. While not all members of the AFGC may agree with that policy, we have identified companies who are members of the AFGC for your information. (as per www.afgc.org.au)

Nukes and our food?

Australia's irradiation industry

Australia's three operating nuclear irradiation facilities are located just outside our three largest cities: in Wetherill Park (Sydney), Dandenong (Melbourne) and Deception Bay/Narangba (Brisbane). They are all operated by Steritech Pty. Ltd. A fourth irradiation plant which would use X-ray beams has been proposed for the Cairns region in North Queensland.

RED

Companies with no policy or a policy in favour of irradiation. They may not be currently irradiating products, but have no policy or commitment to avoiding irradiation in their products.

Non-respondents: Companies who failed to respond to our survey are listed in the "Non-respondents" box.

NB: AFGC stands for Australian Food and Grocery Council.

ORANGE

Companies committed to removing or avoiding irradiation in their production chain.

Note:
For our first edition, we have been generous in listing as orange those companies who say they have policy on food irradiation or are formulating it although we have not at the time of printing received it.

GREEN

Companies with policy against irradiation.
Certified organic and biodynamic products.

All certified organic & biodynamic products are required to be irradiation free by Australian organic standards.

Sonia Fletcher,
Herbalist & certified organic processor.
Abundance Herbs: Inspired by nature, honouring divine wisdom.

"I highly recommend there be a ban on all products in the global food chain that are treated with irradiation or any other nuclear food processing, especially herbs. The current plethora of scientific and medical evidence that warns of the potential risks greatly outweighs any positive applications regarding food irradiation practices. One's commitment to invest in certified organic food products, with its highest possible level of standards, ethical, economic, and social welfare protocols, creates promotion of agricultural sustainability, environmental and wildlife biodiversity, and protection of mother earth.

We label our products as free from irradiation, pesticides, herbicides, GM (Genetically Modified) ingredients or artificial fertilizers because it is necessary for people to be aware of those potentially harmful processes and be assured that our products are pure and do not use them." **- Sonia Fletcher**
www.abundanceherbs.com

Baby Food

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC:
Golden Circle
Nestle Australia
Heinz-Wattie's Australasia

Abundant Earth
Hepworths Organic
Planet Organic

Food irradiation became a big issue in Japan in 1978 when it was discovered that a major babyfood manufacturer had been illegally irradiating baby food ingredients. The vegetables were labelled as "animal feedstuff, because there is no law regulating the irradiation of animal feedstuff. And these irradiated vegetables were then re-labelled and supplied to babyfood manufacturers such as Wakodo, Meiji, and Snow Brand. The subcontractor and irradiator, Radiye Kogyo, were found guilty in June 1984 and the presidents of these companies were sentenced to eight months imprisonment." (source: Food Irradiation Network Japan, Risks and Problems Regarding Food Irradiation, 1999)

Breakfast Foods

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC:
Goodman Fielder (Uncle Toby's), Kellogg's, Sanitarium, Specialty Cereals (brands include Vogel's and Cerevite)

Other non-respondents
Coles (Bi-Lo) , Franklins, Woolworths

Dick Smith Foods
Freedom Foods

Abundant Earth
Carman's
Planet Organic
Pureharvest

Bee Products

Non-respondents:
Capilano Honey
Spring Gully Pickles
(Leabrook Honey)

Tasmanian Honey Company
Wescobee

Pure Harvest

Dairy Products & Substitutes

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC: Bonland (Bega, Bodalla, Perfect Italiano, Mainland, Western Star), Bulla Dairy Foods, Cadbury Schweppes, Kraft, Nestle , Parmalat Aust (Pauls, Trim, Soy Life, Vaalia), Sanitarium (So Good), Unilever (Streets) ,Yakult
Other non-respondents:
Attiki, Coles (Bi-Lo), Dairy Farmers, Franklins, Go Natural, Jalna, National Foods (King Island Dairy, Pura, Yoplait, Vitasoy) Norco Co-operative, So Natural Foods (Australia's Own, Vitalife), Woolworths

Dick Smith Foods

B-D Farm Paris Creek Yoghurt & Quark
Blue Lotus Tofu & To-fetta
Deliciosa
Harvey Fresh Milk Products
Mungalli Creek Dairy
Murray Goulburn
(Devondale, Organic Valley Milk)
Organic Valley Milk
Pureharvest
Pureland
Soy Products

Drinks

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC:
Cadbury-Schweppes, Coca-cola Amatil (Crusta, Deep Spring, Mount Franklin, Fruitopia), Golden Circle (Original Juice Co) Parmalat, Sanitarium
Other non-respondents: Coles (Bi-Lo), Mildura Fruit Company, Franklins, National Foods (Daily Juice, Just Juice, Mr Juicy, Pura, Squeeze), Woolworths

Berri
Nippy's
Freedom Foods

Kalangdoo Organic
Nudie Fruit Juices
Pureharvest
Red Dragon Inn
Sunzest

Oils and Spreads

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC:
Bonland (Western Star), Goodman Fielder Ltd (Meadow Lea, Mrs. McGregor's), Sanitarium, Unilever (Flora)
Other non-respondents:
Coles (Bi-Lo), Green's, Franklins, Norganic, Woolworths
Note: Oils and fatty foods have been known to have a particularly bad reaction to irradiation.

Diana Olive Oil
Dick Smith Foods
Freedom Foods
Masterfoods (Promite)
South Australian Olive Oil Co.

Brookfarm Macadamia Oils
Olive Health Foods
Nuttelex
Pureharvest
Sawyers Brook Estate
Wodonga Park Avocado and Macadamia oils

Breads

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC:
Goodman Fielder
(brands including: Buttercup, Helgas, Molenberg, Wonder White)
Other non-respondents:
Bakers Delight, Franklins, Coles, Woolworths

George Weston Foods
(brands including: Bazaar, Burgen, Golden, Kitchen Collection , Noble Rise, Ryvita, Speedibake, Tip Top, Top Taste)
Gold Coast Bakery Bread
La Famiglia Fine Foods

Golden Hearth
Laucke Bread Pre-mixes
Pureharvest
Real Foods (all Corn Thins and Rice Thins)
Vogels

Fresh Fruit & Veg

Note:
Organisations that supported the application for approval to irradiate tropical fruit in Australia include business groups and the International Consultative Group on Food Irradiation, (ICGFI) an organisation formed by the World Health Organisation and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Drover's Rest Berries (WA)
Eco Farms (NSW)
Mango Hill Farm
United Organics (QLD)
Wodonga Park

This label appeared on irradiated mangoes exported from Australia to New Zealand in late 2005. Consumers are concerned that the words "irradiated fruit" are not visible enough.

Meat / Eggs

Non-respondents: Baiada Poultry, Bartter Steggles, Franklins, Hans Continental Smallgoods, Inghams, Pace Farm Eggs, Ridders

Austrimi Seafoods
George Weston (Chapman's, Don Smallgoods, Hutton's, Melosi, Watsonia)
Roma Food Products
Valcorp (Sirena)

Buronga Organics
Cleaver's Organic Meats
Clancy's Eggs
Lenard's

NB: Some eggs are irradiated in the US in an attempt to reduce salmonella bacteria common in egg farms. Irradiation reduces their nutritional value and eating quality. Where meat irradiation has been used consumers are concerned that hygiene standards may have been compromised.

Tea, Coffee & Herbal Teas or Infusions

Non-respondents who irradiate:
Hilde Hemmes' Herbals

Non-respondents who have supported irradiation of some products: Christie Tea, Tetley Australia, and Unilever Australasia (2001 Food Standards Public Consultation - A413) (4)

Other non-respondents:
Nerada Tea, AB Food and Beverages (Twinings)

Cerebos (Riva, Mocopan, Robert Harris)
Dilmah Teas
Koala Tea
Onno Behrends Tea

Abundance Herbs
Abundant Earth
Australerba
Byron Chai
Formosan Tea*
Happy High Herbs
Montville Coffee
Planet Organic
Red Seal

Therapeutic Goods & Body Care

Non-respondents who irradiate:
Hilde Hemmes' Herbals

Note: Some herbal teas or infusions are classified as "therapeutic goods" although in appearance and use there may be little difference between them and teas regulated as "food".
Therapeutic goods do not have to be labelled as irradiated. Tampons and feminine hygiene products may be irradiated. No labelling requirements exist for this.

Kardwi Pharmaceuticals

Melrose Health Supplies*
Roseneath Organics
Red Seal

* means information about these companies is derived from our 2003 survey

Dry Goods: flour, dried fruits, nuts, and grains

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC: Arnotts, SunRice, Nestle Australia, Sugar Australia

Other non-respondents:
Barilla, Bundaberg Sugar, Coles, Go Natural, Franklins, Green's, Meriram, Riviana Foods , Woolworths

Dick Smith Foods
Freedom Foods
NSM Falafel Mix
Solarfruits
Sunbeam Foods

Abundant Earth
Angas Park organic certified
Blue Lake Milling
Brookfarm Gourmet
Buronga Organics
Byron Organic Pasta
Laucke Flour
Orgran
Planet Organic
Pureharvest
San Remo
Wodonga Park

Frozen, Tinned or Preserved foods:

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC: Campbell - Arnotts, Coca-cola Amatil (SPC Ardmona, IXL), Golden Circle, Kraft, Nestle , Sara Lee, Simplot (Big Sister, Birdseye, Chiko, Edgell, Four n Twenty, Herbert Adams, Nana's, John West)

Other non-respondents:
Barilla Australia, Coles (Bi-Lo), Franklins, Heinz Wattie's, Norganic, McCain Foods, Riviana Foods (Always Fresh, Admiral, Sharwoods), Woolworths

Dick Smith Foods
Fowlers Vacola
George Weston
Masterfoods

Sawyers Brook Estate

Spices, Sauces, & Condiments

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC: Heinz. Goodman Fielder (ETA), Hoyt, Spicemasters
Other non-respondents:
Coles (Bi-Lo), Franklins, Jensen's, Massel, Queen Fine Foods, Spring Gully Pickles, Woolworths

A.Clouet (Ayam)
Freedom Foods
Cerebos (Fountain, Gravox, Saxa)
Kikkoman*
Lee Kum Kee
Masterfoods
McCormick*
Ward McKenzie*

Abundance Herbs
Abundant Earth
Happy Healthy Herbs
Old Cathay Soy Sauce
Planet Organic
San Remo
Pureharvest
Three Threes Condiments

*rating is based on response to our 2003 survey

Snack Foods & Biscuits

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC: Arnotts (Kettle Chips, Samboy Chips, Thins Chips), Goodman Fielder (Uncle Toby's), Nestle Australia, Berri Ltd, Kraft, Sanitarium
Other non-respondents:
Coles (Bi-Lo), Darrell Lea, Franklins, Go Natural, Musashi Snacks, Sakata Rice Snacks, Smiths (Burger Rings, Cheetos, Doritos, Twisties, Lays, Nobbys, Parkers, Burger Rings), Woolworths

George Weston Foods (Top Taste Cakes)
Humble Pie Co.
La Famiglia
Wrigley

Abundant Earth
Poseidon Tamara (Black Swan, Poseidon, Gourmet Fresh)
Carman's
Energy Products
Naturally Good Crispbread
Pureharvest
Real Foods (all Corn Thins & Rice Thins)

Prepared Meals & Desserts:

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC: Campbell - Arnotts, Sara Lee, Simplot (Big Sister, Birdseye, Chiko, Edgell, Four n Twenty, Herbert Adams, Nana's, John West)
Other non-respondents: Coles (Bi-Lo), Mrs Crocket's Kitchen, Franklins, Woolworths

Humble Pie Co.
New Zealand Natural Ice cream

Blue Lotus Foods
Delisoy Desserts
Gigi's Icecream
San Remo "La Pasta"
Pommes Plus Organic Farms

Pet Foods

Non-respondents:
Members of AFGC: Proctor and Gamble (Iams, Eukanuba)
Other non-respondents:
Bush's Pet Foods (Bush's, GoCat), Green's (Supercoat), Hill's Pet Nutrition (Science Diet), Safcol (Snappy Tom)

Master Foods (Chum, Kitekat, My Dog, Pedigree, Pal, Pedigree Meatybites, Trill, Whiskas)

Nature's Gift
Veganpet

Food Outlets & Retailers

Non-respondents:
Aldi Stores, Dominos Pizza, Donut King, Red Rooster, Starbucks, Yum! Restaurants (Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken)

Olive Health Foods

Pancake Parlour
Santos Trading bulk health foods

The Spin on Irradiation

The major supporters of the global food irradiation industry are the nuclear industry, large agribusiness, and multi-national food corporations.

While it is often touted that the World Health Organisation (WHO) endorses irradiation, it is important to note that WHO's position relies substantially on information provided by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose mission is to promote the nuclear industry.

Australia's irradiation applications have all been put forward by irradiation companies: nuclear irradiator - Steritech and proposed X-ray beam irradiator - Surebeam *(now Horticulture Access Solutions).*

This budding flower logo, known as the "Radura Mark", is actually the international symbol for "irradiated food." Proponents of food irradiation hope that this mark will be used instead of more accurate symbols or text. Its use is optional in Australia. It is very similar the the US Environmental Protection Agency logo, and is an attempt to make irradiation seem clean and green.

THEY SAY:
Companies producing irradiated food, herbal remedies and "therapies" claim that they must irradiate their ingredients to comply with standards.

IN FACT:
According to regulators - the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) - this is not the case.

The Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) states: "irradiation is only permissible in a very limited range of foods, and only for reasons of decontamination. Importers always have the option of other treatments, such as cold storage, heat treatments or fumigation." *(Personal communication with AQIS, November 2005)*

Both AQIS and the Therapeutic Goods Administration have acknowledged that while some Chinese medicines and medicinal herbs are irradiated, the use of irradiation for decontamination of medicinal herbs is the manufacturer's choice, and not, normally, a regulatory requirement. Alternatives to irradiation exist.

Some companies, such as **Happy High Herbs** simply refuse irradiated imports.

THEY SAY:
Some government food agencies promote food irradiation as safe because it can destroy bacteria or neutralise contaminants present in the food.

IN FACT:
Food produced with good production practices should not need to be decontaminated. Furthermore, there are many ways to remove or avoid contaminants other than using radiation.

The alternatives

Food irradiation is an unnecessary risk because numerous non-chemical alternatives exist.

While processes vary depending on product and region, and desired outcome, some of the technologies currently in use include:

For pests or contamination:
Washing, heat / steam vapour treatment, cold treatment, exclusion zones, modified atmospheres, vacuum packs, correct maturity bands and host testing to show non-host status.

For shelf life extension:
Early harvesting, cold storage and local production.

For meat and seafood:
Remove the source of infection. For example, farming free-range chickens, and paddock grazing other livestock reduces the chance of infection. Ensuring that animal feed is clean and locally produced would also assist.

Organic production:
The organic industry prohibits any food treated with ionising radiation being certified as organic.

Australian Success Story:
Australian rambutans can be sent to Japan after treatment with a process that requires no chemicals or irradiation. The method is simple: after being harvested, the fruit is washed. It is then coated with food-grade/edible oil that will kill remaining surface pests by blocking their breathing pores.

"We are very concerned that some governments including the Australian government are considering making irradiation the only permitted quarantine requirement for imports and exports of some types of food - notably tropical fruits. This would see the end of trade of certified organic products. The recent approval of irradiation for tropical fruits, may soon see irradiated genetically engineered papayas imported from Hawaii. Proponents of food irradiation state that the practice is safer than using preservatives or pesticides to kill pests and diseases in food. However, the "unique radiolytic compounds", benzenes, ketones and free radicals created by irradiation adversely affect significant areas of the human body. Organics offers a wholesome, sustainable, and economically viable alternative to genetic engineering and preservative, pesticide and irradiation - using food production." Andre Leu (pictured above) is a tropical fruit grower and chair of the Organic Federation of Australia.

You don't need to stomach irradiated food. Choose to be irradiation free!

References:
(1) (2) Public Citizen The Top Ten Problems with Irradiated Food and Questioning Food Irradiation. www.citizen.org/documents/Top10.pdf and www.citizen.org/documents/questioningirradiation.pdf (3) Julius, Heiman, Friends of the Earth - Fact Sheet "Is daily use of irradiated food safe?" 1999, see www.foodirradiationinfo.org
(4) see FSANZ - www.foodstandards.gov.au