



European civil society statement against food irradiation

We, organisations defending consumers' right and public health, struggling in favour of the environment and advocating for responsible and fair economic system, express our opposition to food irradiation* and ask for the EU institutions to prevent the spread of this harmful technology in Europe.

Food irradiation is often used as a substitute for good sanitary practices and misleads consumers, as it kills spoilage bacteria, which tells people when food is rotten through smell or sight. Moreover, food irradiation's ability to destroy foodborne illness is dubious, since irradiation only partially destroys toxins that develop in contaminated food. Irradiation can actually break down the cellular structure of fruits, vegetables and meats, altering their texture, color and smell and possibly increasing the risk of contamination.

Food irradiation is no solution against foodborne illnesses. On the contrary, several health problems are linked to food irradiation. Irradiation produces new compounds in food that present cytotoxic and genotoxic effects, which can promote cancer. It also destroys key nutrients, such as vitamins A and C.

Irradiation is also linked to several environmental problems. The spreading of this process leads to new irradiation plants, which increases the risk linked with the transport and the use of radioactive materials and produces more radioactive waste for which no sustainable solution has yet been found. Moreover, food irradiation, by increasing the shelf life of food, encourages wasteful and costly transportation of food and delocalisation of production.

Irradiated food is of no interest to consumers. It supports the globalization of food supply which threatens local economies -and more specifically small-scale family farming- and destroys the environment.

European institutions need to react!

Thus we require:

- The European Council to consider the list of foods that can be irradiated, which was voted by the European Parliament in December 2002, as closed (limited to spices and dried herbs). This harmonised list should apply in all member-states and current national exceptions should be abrogated;
- The European Commission to allocate more research funding on the toxicity and the carcinogenic effects linked to irradiated food. This research should be conducted by fully independent researchers and the results should be made public;
- The European Commission and member-state authorities to give no new approval for irradiation facilities;
- The European Commission and the member-state authorities to develop control programs to prevent fraudulent irradiated food to be sold and to guarantee that all irradiated food are labelled according to the EU directive; and,
- The World Health Organization (WHO) to withdraw its endorsement of food irradiation at any dose and to proceed with new research independent from the International Agency on Atomic Energy (IAAE).

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For more information, please look at our website: www.irradiation.info

* Irradiation exposes food to ionizing energy, either from gamma rays, accelerated electrons, or X-rays, in order to extend the food shelf life and to kill bacteria.