



Public Citizen and Food Irradiation

Founded by Ralph Nader in 1971, Public Citizen is a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization that works to protect citizens and the environment from dangers posed by nuclear technologies, and seeks policies that will lead to safe, affordable and environmentally sustainable practices.

We also advocate the creation of an agricultural and food distribution system that guarantees safe, wholesome food produced in a humane and sustainable manner, and work to protect the world's fragile water resources from privatization and mass diversion.

Public Citizen is engaged with a wide range of organizations throughout the world in an effort to ensure the safety and wholesomeness of our food supply; to maintain the integrity of regional and local economies; and to encourage environmentally, economically and socially sustainable agriculture.

These organizations include consumer, health, environmental, food sovereignty and social justice groups; government and quasi-governmental agencies; nutrition and health care practitioners; and individuals who share our concerns about the current state and the future of food production.

As part of our efforts to encourage sustainable food-production practices, Public Citizen fundamentally opposes irradiation as a food "treatment." Proponents proclaim that irradiation kills bacteria and extends shelf life. In truth, irradiation only masks filthy conditions in unregulated factory farms and large corporate slaughterhouses. And, by extending shelf life, irradiation allows multinational corporations to produce food in the Global South, then irradiate and ship it to consuming nations - thereby, gaining greater control over the global food supply.

Public Citizen opposes efforts to weaken international food safety standards being pursued by the World Trade Organization, the Codex Alimentarius Commission and other international and national governmental agencies. Instead, we support the advancement of small family farmers; and not the corporate takeover of global food supplies and food production.

Irradiation forms new chemicals in food that are known or suspected to cause cancer and birth defects; destroys vitamins and other essential nutrients; and corrupts the flavor, odor and texture of food. A wide range

of health problems have been observed in animals fed irradiated foods, including premature death, stillbirths, mutations, fatal internal bleeding, organ damage, immune system dysfunction, stunted growth and nutritional deficiencies.

The food irradiation industry, backed by the nuclear industry, is attempting to spread throughout the world. The industry is only interested in fast profits, regardless of the impacts on food security, the environment, health or cultures. Public Citizen campaigns to prevent this unnecessary technology, which jeopardizes self-sufficiency, agricultural diversity and the world's foundation of ecological sustainability.

The American irradiation company SureBeam is negotiating in at least three Southeast Asian countries to build facilities: Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Irradiation there would increase the monopolization of international trade, especially in exotic fruits and fish, which are highly valued in wealthy consuming countries.

Irradiation could also indirectly damage the environment as fish farms and other destructive forms of conventional agriculture, forcing indigenous peoples from their lands and creating a peonage system of labor.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture decided that irradiation could be used in place of chemical, heat or cold treatments to kill fruit flies and other invasive pests. For the first time in history, irradiated produce is now allowed and actually encouraged for exportation to the U.S. This decision will benefit large food producers, processors and exporters at the expense of small farmers.

Because farmers in Southeast Asia will not be able to compete with cheap exports, their land and labor will become susceptible to joint ventures that grow cash crops for consuming nations. Cash crops will be irradiated and then shipped at low cost to the industrialized world. As a result, a blind eye will be turned to agricultural diversity, and therefore ecological sustainability, along with the fate of small-scale family farmers.

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