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Food irradiation has lobbyists engaged in 'nuclear' struggle

By Kara Story
Of the Emerald

SALEM — This is a nuclear society. There are nuclear missiles and nuclear power plants — but nuclear food?

Food irradiation, a process of treating foods with a by-product of nuclear reactors, has been practiced in the United States since 1963.

Those in favor of irradiating foods say the process reduces the number of salmonella and other bacteriological illnesses caused by improper food preparation. As an added benefit, the shelf-life of foods such as poultry is extended, said Dr. Kendrick Holleman, an extension poultry specialist at Oregon State University.



Legislative issues

These products are currently sold in Oregon, but this is likely to change if a bill introduced to the House Consumer and Business Affairs Committee passes. The committee heard testimony on the issue Tuesday afternoon.

House Bill 3077, sponsored by the Oregon Coalition to Stop Food Irradiation, would ban all irradiation of food products. The group opposes the process for several reasons.

The effect of irradiated foods on the human body and the dangers of transporting nuclear waste to irradiating facilities are two of the biggest concerns raised by the group.

Transportation of the waste increases the potential for an accident because the radioactive materials could be scattered all across the country instead of remaining in a controlled environment, said Hale Weitzman, a coalition founder.

Weitzman's group lists loss of nutrients, unsafe worker conditions, increased production

cost, no verifiable increased shelf-life and unnecessary need when pesticides are used as further reason for halting food irradiation.

The reduced incidence of salmonellosis from irradiating all meats, not just poultry, has a \$1 billion to \$6 billion economic impact on the United States, according to irradiation supporter Sue Buhler, a senior in poultry science at OSU.

"The food doesn't become radioactive. The irradiation doesn't add to the product. It breaks down the bacteria at low levels which doesn't kill the present salmonella but prevents them from reproducing and becoming dangerous through large numbers," Holleman said.

"There's no danger for a nuclear accident because there's no potential for an explosion," Buhler said.

The controversy surrounding the issue stems from conflicting evidence. Both sides have case studies to prove their points.

Committee Chairwoman Peg Jolin, D-Cottage Grove, doesn't give too much credibility to reports claiming low levels of radiation have no ill effects on humans, even though Holleman said the United States has been testing the effects of food irradiation for 50 years.

Jolin calls herself a conservative on this issue. She cites the federal Food and Drug Administration reports on DDT (a pesticide) as an example of misinformation. "I believed them, everybody believed them — and they were wrong," she said.

She also gave evidence from her own investigation into the available research and urged committee members to consider the bill carefully for an expected vote on Thursday.

If the committee votes to pass the bill, it then will go before the House. Even if the bill is vetoed, OCSFI members plan to give voters a chance to exercise their opinions, Weitzman said. The group collected 985 signatures in five days and said they will have no difficulty collecting the required 80,000 signatures to get the issue on the ballot.

Budget proposals entail few reductions

By Janet Paulson
Of the Emerald

Eugene City Manager Mike Gleason presented the budget proposals for fiscal 1988 to the city's Budget Committee on Tuesday evening at City Hall.

The proposed budget makes no major reductions in community services although all city departments have made minor cuts in order to balance the budget.

Among the few additions proposed are four new positions for a crime prevention/community outreach program in the Police, Fire and Emergency Services Department. An increase in the library's book budget also is proposed.

The proposed general fund budget, which finances most city operations, is \$58.7 million. The approximate budget allocations are as follows:

- 39 percent for public safety (police, fire, municipal court and social services);
- 26 percent for library, Hult Center, and parks and

recreation;

- 17 percent for public works, planning and economic and community development;
- 18 percent for administrative support services such as data processing, finance, personnel and council support.

Budget subcommittees will meet during April to review proposals for each department. A public hearing on recommendations of the Budget Committee will be held May 12.

The Budget Committee then will decide whether further changes are needed in the proposal before making final recommendations to the City Council. Another public hearing will be scheduled before the City Council adopts the final budget on June 22.

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