



Healthwatch

by Steven Bailey N.D.

As more bacteria and parasitic organisms become resistant to our pesticides, the efforts by producers and shippers to utilize Gamma or Ionizing radiation to sterilize food is increasing. The proponents of irradiation, like those of the "peaceful atom" claim that no health dangers exist through irradiation. Proponents claim that irradiation: 1) kills microorganisms yet 2) pose "no" negative potential for the consumer. Opponents to irradiation (including myself) claim that many potential problems exist with this new process (claims of safety in countries such as Japan are exactly the type of testing abhorred by the F.D.A. when it comes to accepting new drugs, but appears to be the primary support for the claims of safety offered by the proponents). When dealing with the effects of radiation, history has shown that the general population doesn't manifest many of the clinical conditions (such as leukemia, birth defects and other cancers) for 10 to 30 years; certainly we would not expect significant ill-effects of the process this early in its use.

There are three major concerns that are shared by opponents of irradiation. They are 1) nutritional loss due to destruction of vitamins and trace elements, 2) the creation of "super bacteria" similar to what has transpired in the pesticide and anti-biotic practices, and 3) the creation of cancer causing substances by the conversion of molecular chemistries through irradiation.

Nutrition: We live in a society that is strongly attached to convenience. The refinement of flour, white sugar, etc., has led to substantially reduced levels of certain nutrients in the prepared foods that many Americans consume. Likewise it is doubtful to me that the food industry will show any reverence for replacement of nutrients that are destroyed by the irradiation process. I have not seen

any studies on the integrity of water-soluble vitamins exposed to these forms of irradiation yet it seems reasonable to believe that these foods that are so sensitive to heat and oxygen, would not be any more stable against the radiation than are the bacterium, etc., which show such a high resistance to other forms of sterilization.

Resistance: Our use of antibiotics in feed for cattle has recently been linked with the creation of bacteria that are resistant to the antibiotics used in the feed. This in turn has led to human deaths from these "super-bacteria." On a similar vein, the use of penicillin to treat gonorrhea has led to both penicillin destroying nisseria gonococcus (the bacteria that causes gonorrhea) and n. gonococcus that are completely resistant to penicillin. The potential of certain bacteria to develop resistance to irradiation is a very real possibility. The life span of bacterium is very short in comparison to human life, therefore allowing for hundreds of generations of a given bacterium within a short period of time. The ability of an organism to mutate into a resistant form is directly related to the number of generations of that particular organism that are exposed to the particular substance (irradiation, chemicals, etc.). Whether 5 - 20 years of irradiation will produce resistant forms of bacterium, similar to our experience with D.D.T., is an uncertainty, but certainly worth our concern at the present.

Cancer: The transformation of

non-toxic (non-carcinogenic) chemicals into cancer-causing agents (carcinogens) has been shown in a variety of instances through changes of acidity, heat and other physical occurrences. The dimerization of human cells from the excessive exposure to ultra-violet light (sun-light) has long been accepted as a cancer initiating occurrence. Similar changes within foods exposed to ionizing irradiation is not at all far-fetched or unrealistic of a fear. Should be really expose our children and ourselves to these risks, without further research into the potential of these carcinogenic changes?

While most foods are not currently irradiated in the United States, there is a growing effort to include this as a standard form of preparation prior to transport of food goods. Many groups favor this "new" form of sterilization, and in fact are presently opposing an Oregon House Bill (H.B. 2539) that simply requires a warning label on any foods that have been irradiated. This bill introduced by Rep. Dave McTeague would require the following label on all irradiated food: "WARNING: This product (food) has been radiated with radioactive isotopes for purposes of preservation; the health effects are unknown." While this seems to be a fair compromise to allow Oregonians the choice of whether they want to buy and consume irradiated foods, there is a strong industrial opposition to this bill. Opponents of this legislation include the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Association of Oregon Food Industries, and the

Oregon Retail Council. Jame Black of the Food and Dairy Division of the Agriculture Department testified at a recent House Committee hearing on this bill, that "We don't think this process has to result in labeling any more than the canning of food does," adding that "It (the warning) would only feed on public fears about radiation." This reminds me very much of the stance of Johns Mannville (asbestos) that infected individuals should not be informed of their condition or the dangers of exposure to asbestos as it is irreversible and it would only lead to unnecessary worry (see the *Politics of Cancer* for an in-depth report on industries and the American Cancer Society's lack of aggressiveness toward controlling known cancer causing work and life related exposures). I feel at this point that the entire American public is once again being ignored by industry's attempt to find a convenient and profitable new tool.

If you feel strongly about the future of food irradiation in Oregon, contact Rep. McTeague's office and/or your own representative to support H.B. 2539, introduced by Four Laws on Board. Toll-free number to the state offices is 1-800-892-1211. Two representatives that appear as swing votes to get this bill out of committee are Rep. Robin Lindquist and Rep. John Schoon. Additional information on food irradiation may be obtained by contacting Mr. Jeffrey H. Reinhardt of INFORMAX, 44 Montgomery St., 5th Floor, San Francisco, Calif. 94104.

How to get book contracts

Got a book idea you'd like to see published? Dazzling a publisher with a proposal is the key to receiving a contract, and at the June 4 meeting of Willamette Writers, Brian King will explain how to write one of those winning proposals in a show and tell presentation complete with hand-outs.

King is a writer-entrepreneur whose first proposal to a Portland publisher got him going as a "high-tech" writer. His second proposal netted him a contract for six books, and since then he's written a total of 15 books in the computer field.

After eight years as a police officer, King turned his talents to business and marketing, becoming a self-taught microcomputer expert. When he's not adding to his impressive stack of computer-oriented books, he'll be writing a murder mystery — King's proposal for a book in that genre dazzled the editors at Delacorte and Dell, and snagged him a contract.

The June 4 meeting of Willamette Writers will be held at 7:15 p.m. at the Imperial Hotel, 400 S.W. Broadway, and is open to the public. There is a \$2.50 fee for non-members. Dinner will be served preceding the meeting, beginning at 6:30. The cost is \$9.20 and this includes gratuity. Reservations are necessary and can be made by calling Lois Webb at 244-7664 or Tot Jones at 244-5872.

Black center anniversary

The Black Educational Center will celebrate 15 years of cultural and educational leadership in Portland at a banquet and awards ceremony on Saturday, June 15, 1985, from 7 - 10 p.m., at PSU Smith Center Ballroom, located at 1825 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$5 for children under 12 and are tax deductible.

The Black Educational Center, founded in May of 1970, is a non-profit organization whose primary operation is a full-time school for students in kindergarten through fourth grade. The school's curriculum includes reading, mathematics, science, music, art, and Spanish. The Center also operates the Talking Drum Bookstore, which specializes in Black literature.

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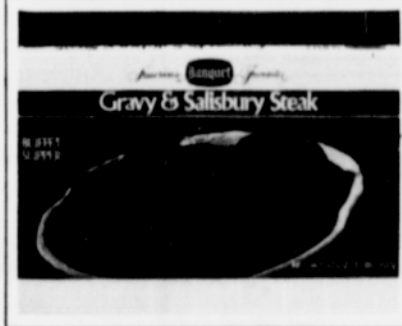
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