

Anti-nukes lie about food irradiation

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

"Do you want a kook telling you what to eat or do you want to listen to the scientific evidence about the benefits of food irradiation?" This is the question *21st Century Science & Technology* magazine posed to Florida consumers and producers in a Sept. 9 news release announcing its special report in the Fall 1991 issue on the benefits of food irradiation and the lies of the Food & Water, Inc. group, which opposes the nation's first food irradiation plant, scheduled to open this fall in Mulberry. Food & Water, a New Jersey-based group that has gained notoriety inventing scare stories about food irradiation, is carrying out a noisy campaign to bully Florida policymakers, supermarkets, and food producers. Their object is to keep business away from the Vindicator of Florida food irradiation plant, now that they have lost the battle to prevent the plant from opening. (This is, by the way, an important victory for science; the anti-nukes won similar battles in Alaska and Hawaii.)

Two decades ago, the antics of this anti-nuclear group would have been laughed out of town, pelted with rotten fruit along the way. But in today's climate of irrationality, even rational people are fearful of speaking out against the anti-scientific propaganda and lies that characterize Food & Water. Thus Florida Citrus Commission members and various elected officials who privately acknowledge that food irradiation is safe, are publicly silent in the face of Food & Water's fear campaign. And the big green foundations, including most recently Rockefeller, along with Hollywood activists like Barbara Streisand, are continuing to pump money into the Food & Water anti-food campaign.

Killer strawberries?

The Food & Water group is spending \$30,000 in Florida alone on radio ads, blaring that food irradiation "might kill you." Printed ads proclaim, "Stop the killer strawberries," one of the crops intended for processing at the Vindicator plant. A typical ad that appeared in the Tampa paper, *Creative Loafing*, has a big headline "Warning," with the text: "If you're looking to add radiation to your diet, you won't find it here! These stores care about your health. They have pledged they will not knowingly sell radiation-exposed food." At the bottom of a page full of health food store business cards is a "Mango Action Alert," urging people to

write the Florida Mango Forum to tell them they will not buy "radiation exposed mangos and you expect their organization to protect consumers by opposing the use of this process."

A similarly unscientific, "non-profit" organization, the American Natural Hygiene Society, Inc., based in Tampa, has recently joined Food & Water in making money by spreading hysteria. A Sept. 1 fundraising letter from executive director James Michael Lennon alerts members to the new plant and says, "We *desperately* need the help of every member! if you plan to help with *any* cause this year, *Please Make This The One!* This plant will use *deadly radiation* from nuclear waste to 'sterilize' the food we eat, putting our food into rooms filled with radioactive materials . . . rooms *So Lethal* the walls need to be *four feet thick!* . . . *Imagine What It Does To Our Food!*"

The scientific truth

None of these allegations—on the basis of which people are asked to sign a petition to Gov. Lawton Chiles and to send money—is true. Radiation per se is not deadly: The Sun's radiation is essential for life.

The radiation source in food irradiation is cobalt-60, not nuclear waste. Every nuclear facility by law must protect its workers from radiation. The food product moves on a conveyor belt past the radiation source, receiving a controlled, tiny dose of radiation that is tailored to the particular product. The radiation kills the microbes in the food—salmonella and campylobacter in chicken, or insect larvae in citrus fruit—not the food itself. After 40 years of research, food irradiation is perhaps the most thoroughly researched food preservation technology. The scientific and medical community support irradiated food as safe and wholesome, from the American Medical Association, to the Health Physics Association, to scores of scientific organizations. "Irradiation is the best method for destroying the things that cause food poisoning," Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan said Aug. 5 in a statement to *21st Century*. "It is a process that has been approved by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), and it is a process that is used in other countries." In a later statement, Madigan's office added, "The safety of irradiated foods has been evaluated by scientific and medical experts from many health-focused organizations, who have concluded that the irradiation processes for [preservation, disinfection, and reduction of microorganisms] is safe and efficacious."

A spokesman for the FDA, Chris Lecos, added: "It is very easy to promote public fear over the word radiation. It's disturbing that this would be done with such language as food irradiation 'may kill you,' as stated in the ad Food & Water has sponsored in Florida."

EIR readers who are looking forward to getting rid of the microbes in food are urged to write tell their elected officials—and their supermarkets—that they support food irradiation.