

Unlabelled Irradiated Foods on the Rise in the EU; EC Calls for Expanded Inspections

Sales of unlabelled irradiated foods at European Union stores nearly tripled from 2001 to 2004. Unregulated imports from Asia are fueling this increase in irradiated food products. In response, the European Commission is calling on Member States to step up inspections and enforcement actions.

The Commission has conducted annual surveys showing that the percentage of irradiated foods sold in the EU without required labels rose from 1.4 percent in 2001 to 3.9 percent in 2004. “In particular, products imported from Asia, especially Asian-type noodles and dried prepared noodles, appear to be illegally irradiated,” the Commission said in its September 2006 report, the most recent.

Other unlabelled irradiated products from Asia included:

- herbs from India and Singapore,
- powdered spinach from China,
- meat from Vietnam,
- fish from Thailand, and
- dehydrated meals from Taiwan and Vietnam.

Unlabelled irradiated products originating within the EU included Italian mushrooms, and German dehydrated meals and mushrooms.

Particularly high amounts of unlabelled irradiated food were detected in these countries:

- Finland – 28 percent of dried spices and herbs,
- Germany – 15 percent of dried prepared meals,
- The Netherlands – 19 percent of dietary supplements, and
- United Kingdom – 40 percent of noodles and dried seasonings, 32 percent of dried prepared meals, and 13 percent of food supplements.

France produced 1,800 tonnes of irradiated food in 2004, which ranked it third among EU countries surveyed, and which constituted 12 percent of the total reported within the EU. Yet only 60 samples of food, mostly spices, were analysed in France – less than 1 percent of the total samples analysed within the EU. As a result, French consumers have very little idea whether they are eating irradiated foods.

For the first time since it began conducting annual surveys in 2001, the Commission said in its latest report that the problem of consumer exposure to unlabelled irradiated foods requires a formal response: “The Commission expects that the numbers of checks on these products will be increased in all Member States and that Member States will take appropriate measures.”

This problem is worsening despite the EU’s reluctance to expose consumers to foods treated with radiation. In December 2002, the European Parliament voted by a wide margin against expanding the list of foods – herbs, spices and vegetable seasonings – that can be irradiated legally. The Parliament based its vote on lingering concerns about the safety and wholesomeness of irradiated foods, including the potential long-term health effects of consuming these products.

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Despite the Parliament's action and the persistent worldwide consumer rejection of irradiated foods, international food and nuclear technology companies continue to promote irradiation as a solution to food-borne illness.

We urge the Parliament to take all steps to protect consumers from exposure to unlabelled irradiated foods, and to ensure the strict enforcement of all relevant labelling and import regulations.

Thank you,

Action Consommation

Adequations

Agir pour l'Environnement

AIDAS

Animal Welfare Institute – Poland

Animal Welfare Institute – USA

ASECO – Alliance for Social and Ecological Consumer Organisations

ATTAC France

Biocoop

Collectifs BURE-STOP

Confédération paysanne

CPE – European Farmers Coordination

CRIIRAD

Ecoforum

Ekoland – Association of Ecological Food Producers – Poland

EKWO

Food & Water Watch – Europe

ICPPC – International Coalition to Protect the Polish Countryside

Les Amis de la Terre

MDRGF

Nature & Progrès

Nature et Progrès – Belgium

Polska Zielona Siec – Polish Green Network

RECit

Réseau Eco-consommation

Réseau Sortir du Nucléaire

Stowarzyszenie Zielona Przestrzen – Green Space Association – Poland

Swedish Consumer Coalition

Tudatos Vásárló – Association of Conscious Consumers – Hungary

Zöld Akció Egyesület – Green Action Association – Hungary

For more information, please contact:

Mark Worth

Food & Water Watch

Berlin

+49 (0)176 63094993

mworth@fwwatch.org

www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/foodirradiation

Véronique Gallais

Action Consommation

Paris

+33 (0)686897889

vgallais@actionconsommation.org

www.actionconsommation.org

(The Commission's latest annual survey is available at:

http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/c_230/c_23020060923en00280045.pdf)