

Anti-science mob a threat to your food

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

The first U.S. commercial food irradiation plant, ready to open for business in Mulberry, Florida, is a case study of how the anti-science mob tries to stop progress. The only thing holding up the opening of the Vindicator of Florida plant is the state license by the Office of Environmental Health in the Department of Health and Rehabilitation Services.

The scientific and technical evaluations of the plant are positive; the plant passed its safety inspection. Privately, many state officials have said that they think food irradiation is a beneficial and safe technology and that the lies of the eco-terrorist group Food & Water, Inc. are outrageous. Publicly, however, these same political figures are silent—in fearful deference to the same Food & Water group which they admit is crazy. And so the licensing process is going slowly.

As a result of the anti-nuclear noise, the state scheduled hearings on the plant's safety Nov. 4 in the Mulberry Civic Center. Of the 200 or so people there, there were only three Mulberry residents who spoke against the plant, according to Mulberry's mayor. The rest were imported Greens, brought in by Food & Water. Three groups, including *21st Century Science & Technology* magazine, turned out to support the plant, along with approximately two dozen or so local residents and many others from the area. But the nine radio stations, five television stations, and score of Florida reporters present neglected to note this fact in their coverage of the hearings.

The sensationalist press coverage for the most part has ignored the fact that the full weight of the scientific community supports the safety and benefits of food irradiation for disinfecting produce, prolonging the shelf-life of fruits and vegetables, and for getting rid of disease-causing microbes like salmonella. They would prefer to write about the people who attack the "unnaturalness" of radiation.

An 'ordinary citizen' testifies

For example, there was not a word reported about one Floridian who testified. He was an observer who came to the hearings to find out more about the plant and couldn't take it sitting down. "My ears were sore from sitting through five

hours of hearing the same stupid recording over and over," he said. "I stood up and protested and took over the rostrum. I identified myself as an ordinary citizen, an automobile repair mechanic who had traveled from Cocoa to Mulberry in search of the truth. I asked for a show of hands: How many present were also in search of the truth? Most raised their hands.

"Then I lit in! I denied that I had heard any truth today. I compared them with children around a Halloween campfire taking turns to see who could tell the scariest ghost story, that the real truth is that radiation is beneficial . . . that medical utilization of radiation was saving many lives every day through the use of diagnostic equipment like X-ray pictures. . . . I personally was there happy, productive, and cured of my own cancer because I had been 'nuked' five days per week for six weeks.

"I generalized that the previous doomsday speakers had raked up worst-case scenarios of pseudo-science and then recommended we err on the side of safety rather than chance putting our unborn grandchildren at any conceivable risk. Using such logic, not one attendee would have crossed the street to enter this auditorium rather than risk being run down by an automobile.

"I ran overtime, but no one dared call time on me. In closing I defined science as a systematic search for ways to discover the many benefits to mankind that are stored within nature; the same nature that God created and gave man the brains to invent ways to utilize those benefits. . . . Any person present who renounces science and yearns for 'the good old days' should move into a cave and eat berries."

'Food & Water': against both

Who is the opposition to food irradiation? The New Jersey-based group Food & Water has made a fortune telling lies about food irradiation, and it has used its foundation funding in Florida to scare the gullible and organize the fruit-and-nuts clientele of the health food stores to protest against the Vindicator plant. The group knowingly lies in its propaganda. When asked why they used such misinformation, Food & Water's executive director, Michael Colby, told one reporter this week that the Food & Water method of lies is "successful," and that they had "shut down four plants" this way, so they were sticking with it.

One of Food & Water's tactics has been to pressure local supermarkets by bombarding them with form letters telling them not to sell irradiated produce. This tactic works both ways: If you'd like your supermarket to sell delicious strawberries, picked ripe and irradiation processed to stay fresh, tell your supermarket management that you want irradiated produce. And if you live in Florida, write to Publix Supermarkets Inc., Mr. Mark Hollis, President, P.O. Box 407, Lakeland, FL 33802.

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