



Position Statement on Irradiation

5 December 2002

Background on Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition

The Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition was formed in December 2000 by associations representing all segments of the food chain from input suppliers through primary production, processing, manufacturing, transportation and distribution to final marketing at retail or in food service. Its membership is open to all national, provincial and local industry associations with an interest in food safety. There are currently 47 members.

Our vision is that *“Canada’s agriculture, fisheries and food industry will have a world-class reputation for producing and selling safe food.”* And, our mission is to *“facilitate, through dialogue within the food industry and with all levels of government, the development and implementation of a national, co-ordinated approach to food safety to ensure credibility in the domestic and international marketplaces.”*

Industry’s Food Safety Expectations

In the summer of 2001, the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition surveyed members and potential members to determine the nature and scope of industry’s food safety agenda. This work identified industry’s expectations of itself and of government, the impediments to their realization and a set of desired actions and time lines. Included amongst the expectations of governments - federal, provincial, territorial and municipal - were the following. Governments should:

- develop food safety policies through a transparent and collaborative process that involves industry, consumers and other stakeholders;
- develop and promote harmonized standards and programs using sound science; and,
- expedite regulatory approvals of new technologies once they have been assessed as safe.

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- The Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition applauds Health Canada for undertaking to amend the regulations respecting irradiation and irradiated products and for holding this series of information meetings across Canada. This approach is fully consistent with the food supply chain’s expectations of transparency and collaboration with all stakeholders.

- The proposed amendments are also consistent with industry's expectations. On 27 September 2002, the Coalition, after consulting with its members, wrote to the Minister of Health indicating its support for increased access in Canada to irradiation based technologies for food safety enhancement. The letter noted the initial approval of irradiation in Canada in 1960 and that internationally recognized and reputable organizations such as the World Health Organization and the Codex Alimentarius Commission as well as many national governments have endorsed the safety of irradiation. Accordingly, it appears that Health Canada has confidence in the science supporting the use of irradiation to enhance the safety of food.
- Our letter went on to note that the list of eligible products in Canada has lagged behind approvals in other countries and that applications for several products - poultry, mangoes and ground beef - had still not been granted, in some cases, after a decade of review.
- The Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition is, therefore, pleased that, following extensive study, Health Canada is proposing to enhance the availability of irradiated foods. We recognize the importance of offering Canadians an informed choice when they make their purchasing decisions. The existing labelling requirements and Health Canada's proposed information activities will provide consumers with the basis for making their choices.
- The Canadian food industry values its reputation and individual firms are committed to providing their customers with safe food. It is fully recognized that irradiation cannot and should not replace the good manufacturing practices which have contributed so significantly to the internationally recognized status of Canadian products as safe and wholesome. Nor, should it replace the safe storage and good handling practices that consumers use.
- Irradiation's ability to enhance food safety has been clearly demonstrated over the past 50 years. Consumer interest in purchasing irradiated products is growing due to the desire to reduce pesticide usage, the needs of an aging population more susceptible to foodborne illness, as well as the economic benefits of extended shelf life.
- The Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition is encouraged that the process is moving forward to ensure that the food supply chain is able to offer Canadians these advantages and it supports the proposals outlined by Health Canada with respect to the addition of new products to the list of approved products.

Thank you.

Note:

This position statement has been developed through a consultation process (August through December 2002) involving the members of the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition. Member organizations may have more detailed positions relative to the industries they represent.