

SANE Alaska questions irradiation safety

by Ed Davis and Christopher Toal
for the Tundra Times

Judging from his recent article in the *Tundra Times*, Sen. Fred Zharoff, D-Kodiak, feels that he alone is qualified to determine Alaska's food irradiation policy. The senator charged our organization with circulating "false statements, partial truths and threats."

OPINION

We believe the senator's charges are unfair and that the record should be set straight.

Zharoff singlehandedly killed a bill — House Bill 25 — to ban the sale of irradiated foods in Alaska. This legislation was supported by a majority of the legislators of both houses in both parties. HB 25 passed last year in the House by a vote of 31-4.

These legislators and the governor have not been "hoodwinked" as Zharoff suggested to a newspaper reporter. They have taken a careful look at the issue and decided that the Food and Drug Administration's approval of food irradiation was premature.

Contrary to Zharoff's assertions, food irradiation is here. Many of the spices being sold are already being irradiated without the public's knowledge or consent.

The irradiation industry, the U.S. Department of Energy and the International Atomic Energy Agency are conducting an aggressive, global campaign to develop, promote and sell food irradiation. Our grocery shelves will soon be filled with irradiated foods unless informed citizens speak out.

Zharoff, claiming that irradiated food is safe, noted the FDA has approved pork, wheat, spices and pro-

duce for irradiation.

Prior to its approval of food irradiation, the FDA reviewed about 400 studies involving decades of research. Out of these 400 studies, the FDA claimed that only five met its special criteria.

Dr. Donald Louria (Department of Public Health, New Jersey Medical School) has conducted a thorough analysis of the scientific "evidence" the FDA cites to justify its approval of food irradiation.

His investigation revealed there are serious deficiencies in each of the FDA's five cited studies. Either the indicated result claimed by the FDA was erroneous or the dosage of radiation was too low to apply the results to commercially irradiated food.

It's this kind of deceptive manipulation of the scientific record which has convinced legislators in three states to ban irradiated food, despite the FDA's approval. Apparently they don't share Zharoff's blind faith in Big Government.

Zharoff dismissed concerns that a seafood irradiator in Alaska would hurt the market for Alaskan seafood and distorted the Food Irradiation Network Japan's position on the issue. This coalition of Japanese consumer groups vowed to organize a boycott of all Alaskan seafood if a seafood irradiator were built in Alaska.

They are threatening a boycott on all Alaskan seafood because there is no known test to determine whether food has been irradiated. Zharoff tried to portray this as legislative "blackmail" by falsely claiming the boycott would be organized if HB 25 failed to pass.

It appears that Zharoff already has forgotten the successful tuna boycott (to save dolphins) and that the apple market recently was hit hard on the question of food safety. All it took with apples was for Meryl Streep and the Natural Resources Defense Coun-

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cil to publicize the effects of the pesticide Alar on humans.

If an irradiator were to be built in Alaska, the seafood industry would be vulnerable to this same type of market devastation.

Zharoff portrayed food irradiation as a food preservation process similar to freezing, drying and pasteurization. This is a totally inaccurate characterization because it ignores the new chemicals created in irradiated food. In fact, the irradiation process actually separates atoms from their molecules.

Dr. Richard Piccione, a published expert on food irradiation cites 12 credible studies which have identified some of these "radiolytic products" as carcinogens and mutagens. Is this the kind of image we want for our seafood?

The senator claimed in his articles that the American Medical Association has "endorsed" food irradiation. This also is untrue. The AMA's House of Delegates passed a resolution supporting the classification of food irradiation as a "process" rather than an "additive." This is hardly an "endorsement."

Zharoff stated in his article that the

"unanimous" recommendation of those involved in the seafood industry was to oppose a ban on food irradiation. Not true. The United Fishermen of Alaska and Copper River Fishermen's Cooperative are both on record as opposed to food irradiation, as are the hundreds of fishermen who have sent Zharoff cards and letters.

A ban or a moratorium on the sale of irradiated foods is needed to protect public health, as well as our seafood industry and to send a powerful message to Washington, D.C.

It's time to clean up our nation's food irradiation policies and follow the lead of Japan, West Germany, Australia, New Zealand, New York, New Jersey and Maine in prohibiting the sale of irradiated foods. Alaskans should not be used as guinea pigs for a dangerous and unproven technology.

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