

# Food For Thought

## New Food Safety Measures *Information From The USDA*

(NAPSA)—With more consumers enjoying the thrill of the grill, a growing number of companies are irradiating hamburgers, chicken and other food products before they are sold to the public. That's because for many people, irradiated equals safety.

Food irradiation exposes food products to radiant energy including gamma rays, electron beams, and x-rays in amounts approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It may not destroy all pathogens, but does reduce their numbers.

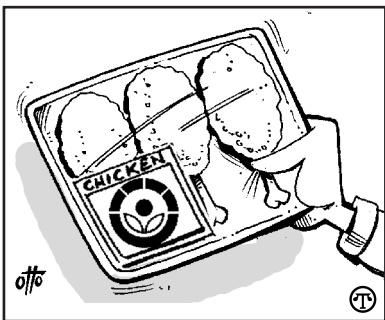
The amount of energy used in food irradiation is not strong enough to cause food to become radioactive. In fact, food passes on a conveyor system and never comes into direct contact with the energy source.

Only certain meat products may be irradiated—such as whole or cut-up birds, skinless poultry, pork chops, roasts, stew meat, liver, hamburgers, ground meat, and ground poultry.

To date, cooked meat and poultry products, such as luncheon meats and hot dogs, have not been approved for irradiation by the FDA.

U.S. food regulations also allow the irradiation of wheat and wheat powder, white potatoes, many spices, dry vegetable seasonings, fresh shell eggs, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

The international “radura” symbol must be on packages if the entire content was irradiated, as well as the phrase “treated by irradiation (or with radiation).” There are no labeling requirements for



**New food safety measures, such as irradiation, reduce the chances that bacteria will be present on meat and poultry.**

irradiated products served at restaurants; however, some restaurants voluntarily disclose irradiation information on menus.

It is important to remember that irradiation does not replace safe cooking or food handling practices by producers, retailers, or consumers.

Consumers should always follow the four safe food handling steps, even when preparing irradiated meat and poultry products.

- Clean—Wash hands and utensils often;
- Separate—Don't cross-contaminate;
- Cook—Cook food to a safe internal temperature. Check with a food thermometer; and
- Chill—Refrigerate or freeze within two hours.

For more information on food irradiation, contact USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), TTY for the hearing impaired: 1 (800) 256-7072, or visit the Web site at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov).