

wholesomeness: assembling the data

The widespread introduction of the use of ionizing radiation as a means of preserving or extending the storage life of certain foods hinges on the establishment of internationally acceptable tests to establish the wholesomeness of the treated product.

Research into food irradiation is now being carried out in more than 40 countries; and institutes in 20 countries are taking part in an international project concerned mainly with the testing of selected irradiated food products for wholesomeness.

The IAEA and the Food and Agriculture Organization — through the Joint Division of Atomic Energy in Food and Agriculture — have informed Member States that they are operating a central service at IAEA headquarters “to collect and disseminate information concerning national legislation on the licensing of irradiated food for human consumption and data concerning the wholesomeness of such food.”

Member States have already been keeping the Joint Division fully informed of relevant national legislation. The FAO and IAEA intend now to go beyond this, and to attempt to provide Member States, on request, with current data on wholesomeness studies — data which would be useful in giving the competent national authorities the information they require to secure the approval of irradiated foodstuffs. This approval is usually obtained by means of a “petition” based on data obtained through research carried out nationally; the new service should make it possible to submit results obtained in other countries, thus avoiding unnecessary duplication of research.

The FAO and IAEA are therefore seeking the collaboration of competent authorities in Member States. In particular, the authorities are being asked to provide relevant data on wholesomeness studies which have already been made or are in progress in national institutes. The information is to be supplied in a form suitable for computer processing, to be compiled into an index of world-wide activity.

Investigations of interest to the central service are both short and long-term animal feeding studies including effects, if any, of irradiated foods on the reproductive function of test animals. The information collected will be available, on request, to anyone having reasonable grounds to require it, and will be forwarded to such agencies through the requestors' governments.

The international project mentioned earlier, established formally on January 1 this year, is concerned in its first phase mainly with the wholesomeness testing of irradiated potatoes, wheat and wheat products with the aim of obtaining unconditional acceptance of them. Tests are being carried out under contract in specialized laboratories in member countries of the OECD, the IAEA and FAO, coordinated by a small central body and under the direction of a project leader at Karlsruhe, in the Federal Republic of Germany.