Food irradiation explained

Published by AGRINFO on 03 Nov 2023

Directive 1999/2/EC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States concerning foods and food ingredients treated with ionising radiation

What is changing and why?

Summary of the rules and practices of food irradiation in the EU

- Only dried aromatic herbs, spices, and vegetable seasonings are permitted to be irradiated and sold across the whole EU market.
- Only facilities approved by the EU may irradiate foods for the EU market.
- Ten non-EU countries have approved facilities: South Africa (3 facilities), India (3), Thailand (2), Switzerland (1), and Turkey (1).
- Any irradiated food ingredient, or food products containing an irradiated ingredient, must be labelled with the words “irradiated” or “treated with ionising radiation”.
- In 2021, irradiation of food products totalled around 5,000 tons, around half the amount that was irradiated in 2010.
- There is little consumer awareness of food irradiation in the EU. Only certain specific sectors, such as shrimp, frog legs, crayfish, and blood products, are seeking a change in the rules.

Timeline

There are currently no plans to increase the number of food categories in the EU that may be irradiated.

For more information see the full record on the AGRINFO website – where you can also view the latest AGRINFO Update newsletters and search the database.

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