

Irradiation Advances Food Safety

(NAPS)—With USDA approval, the National School Lunch Program now has irradiated beef on the menu. The U.S. military, hospitals, and NASA also serve irradiated foods to troops, patients and astronauts. Irradiation promises to improve food safety in the 21st century to the degree that pasteurization and canning relegated fears of typhoid fever and botulism to the 19th century.



Irradiation technologies have helped to preserve perishable food since the 1930s. The process has drawn increased attention with outbreaks of E. coli, salmonella, and listeria. Although it is not a substitute for good sanitation, irradiation aids food safety by destroying harmful microorganisms.

The term “irradiated” refers to processes that treat foods with radiation. Irradiation does not make the food radioactive; in fact, it changes the nutrient content no more than cooking or freezing.

Food-borne disease affects an estimated 76 million Americans every year and leads to nearly 325,000 hospitalizations. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate that irradiating even half of all meat could prevent 900,000 cases of food poisoning.

For more information about applications of nuclear science, visit the American Nuclear Society site at www.ans.org/pi/np/food.