

Irradiation Facts

Organic regulations preclude use of radiation on any products, so organic greens won't be irradiated.

Irradiation does change the nutritional content of foods. Scientists don't fully understand why, but there's extensive documentation that degradation occurs.

Irradiation also changes the flavor, odor, texture, and appearance of foods. It can mask the signs of age of leafy greens, making consumers more dependent on retailers and suppliers to provide only properly-handled products.

The cause of contamination is often before the irradiation, but can also occur afterwards, in shipping or handling. Longer shelf life of irradiated products means they're exposed to more chances for contamination (although they might or might not resist them better).

These regulations don't address causes of contamination, which are often (but not always) a result of large-scale industrial agricultural practices.

This technology will not control all hazards: in addition to bacterial contamination, noroviruses are common and will not be killed.

This technology will be of greater benefit to large farms and marketing organizations, and will be expensive for small-scale producers.

A leading food safety expert said irradiation indeed can kill certain bacteria safely - but it doesn't kill viruses that also increasingly contaminate produce, and it isn't as effective as tightening steps to prevent contamination starting at the farm.

"It won't control all hazards on these products," cautioned Caroline Smith DeWaal of the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

E. coli actually is fairly sensitive to radiation, while salmonella and listeria require more energy. While irradiation doesn't sterilize, the FDA ruled that food companies could use a dose proven to dramatically reduce levels of those germs, a dose somewhat lower than meat requires.

But consumers shouldn't consider irradiation a panacea, either. While *E. coli* and salmonella tend to affect more people and make bigger headlines, consumer advocate DeWaal has found that norovirus contamination is a leading cause of produce outbreaks.

(FDA: Irradiating spinach, lettuce OK to kill germs By LAURAN NEERGAARD, AP Medical Writer)

courtesy of Davis Food Co-op Davis, CA