



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

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Irradiated Commodity Ground Beef Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Q. Are any school districts currently receiving irradiated USDA commodity foods?

A. No. USDA is not purchasing any irradiated foods for the commodity program at this time.

2. Q. When will school districts start receiving irradiated commodity ground beef?

A. The Food and Nutrition Service announced in July 2003 that States would be able to offer school districts irradiated commodity ground beef beginning January 2004. Using established procedures and timelines, States will notify the Food Distribution Division of the amount of product school districts have requested. USDA will start the procurement procedure for the requested product to be delivered around March 2004. No school district will receive irradiated product unless it is specifically requested.


3. Q. What if the request from school districts in the State is less than a truckload quantity?

A. If States have less than truckloads of requested product, USDA would like to accommodate those requests to the extent possibly. States will be requested to notify the Food Distribution Division of any orders for irradiated product, regardless of the quantity. FNS and AMS will try to accommodate less than full truckloads as best as they can.

4. Q. How will irradiation affect the cost of ground beef?

A. Generally, the price of irradiated product ranges from \$.13 to \$.20 more than the equivalent non-irradiated product. There are several factors that affect the cost, one being the volume purchased. At this point in time, we do not know what the demand for irradiated product will be and, therefore, it is hard to predict its effect on the cost.

5. Q. How will schools know if the product has been irradiated?

A. The irradiated product will have its own separate product code. Procurement specifications require that the case have FSIS required markings for irradiated product. The case will include the international Radura symbol.  Also, the case will have the word “irradiated” in the product name.

6. Q. How will the product come packed?

A. The bulk fine grind will come vacuum packaged in a thermo formed and tamper proof plastic rectangular shaped container. A case will contain two 10- pound packages. A case will be no more than 4 in. deep, 14 in. wide and 20 in. long.

The patties will come as either one 20-pound or two 10-pound packages in a case that will be the same size as the bulk pack.

7. Q. Is it possible that a further processor could send to a school district product made with substituted irradiated ground beef without the school district or vendor's knowledge?

A. USDA will purchase only two forms of irradiated ground beef - bulk fine grind and patties. Neither of these is diverted by USDA to further processors. The coarse grind that USDA purchases to divert to further processors for cooked product is not irradiated.

8. Q. Where can I get extra copies of the packet announcing the roll out of irradiated commodity ground beef that was sent nationally to all school superintendents and food service directors?

A. The packet may be found at <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/Safety/FNSFoodSafety.htm>. A link to this address is also on the Food Distribution Division web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd>. The packet that was sent to all school superintendents and food service directors in July 2003 contained a letter from FNCS Under Secretary Bost announcing when irradiated beef would be offered to schools and highlighting the importance of preparing the school community for making the decision whether to include it as part of the school food safety plan. The packet also included resource material and references to use as part of an irradiation educational campaign.

9. Q. When and where will the Minnesota Irradiation Educational Campaign materials referred to in the Under Secretary Bost letter be available?

A. The materials are scheduled to be web based available on or about September 30, 2003. A link to the materials will be provided on the Food Distribution Division web site at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd>. The materials will include irradiation consumer fact sheets, a public relations tool kit, and a state/local partnership-building guide. It is strongly suggested that school communities conduct an educational campaign to assist in the decision to use irradiated product or not.

10. Q. Will the irradiated beef taste differently than the non-irradiated product?

A. Studies recently completed by USDA's Agricultural Research Service suggested that irradiation at doses specified for the commodity ground beef patties did not affect palatability. Ratings for overall liking, aroma, taste, texture and aftertaste in the irradiated patties were not significantly different from the non-irradiated patties.