

IAHS Position Paper and Action Plan on Irradiated Supplements

FSAI Survey on Irradiated Herbal Products

In the light of two recent surveys carried out by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) it has been revealed that a significant proportion (up to 50%) of herbal supplements or their ingredients have been irradiated.

Purpose of Irradiation

Apparently the purpose of irradiation is to kill microbial and insect infestation and to prolong the shelf life of the product or ingredient. According to EU law, only certain types of foodstuffs can be irradiated. In the case of herbs or herbal ingredients which are intended for use in supplements, is not illegal provided the irradiation is carried out at an approved facility and the consumer is informed of the process by appropriate labelling.

Concerns about Irradiation

Although the FSAI contend that irradiation is not a safety issue, there is little or no consumer confidence in the process, in our experience. Questions still remain about the long-term safety of irradiation. There is some evidence to suggest that irradiation may adversely affect micronutrients and the active principles of plants. There is also the concern that irradiation extends the life of a food product beyond its normal best before date, so that consumers are actually consuming old product where it appears fresh, whilst allowing essential nutrient and enzyme constituents to degrade.

The IAHS shares these concerns and so does not recommend herbal supplements, or indeed any other foodstuffs, which have been irradiated either in whole or in part. IAHS code of Ethics states: “The main ethos of an I.A.H.S. health food store should be the promotion of natural foodstuffs, organically grown where possible, as part of a healthy and balanced diet and lifestyle”.

Irradiated products are no longer Natural Products

Health stores stock a wide variety of herbal supplements and remedies which have been prepared according to the ancient traditions of herbal medicine. The modern practice of irradiation has no place in these ancient traditions, and therefore herbal products which have been irradiated can no longer be considered as *bone fide* natural health products.

Quality Assurance

IAHS stores have always prided themselves as stocking only the best quality products which are, as far as possible, free from artificial additives and unnecessary processing.

Quality control is especially important in food supplements and herbal remedies where it is IAHS policy that any such products stocked by member stores should be made to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP). Unfortunately, as is seen in the FSAI report, even the highest level of quality control may not be sufficient to screen against irradiated ingredients.

Plan of Action

Two years ago the IAHS wrote to each and every one of the supplement manufacturers seeking evidence that their products were manufactured to GMP. The response was very good, so that we can now say that the overwhelming majority of food supplements and herbal remedies on our shelves are made to the highest possible quality standards.

The IAHS is now embarking on a similar quest to eliminate irradiated supplements, so that the consumer can be assured that their IAHS Health Store is the place to go when they want to be assured that their supplements are irradiation free. We are also investigating the situation regarding culinary herbs and spices, with a view to substituting any currently irradiated products, with non-irradiated alternatives. Accordingly, the IAHS is putting the following Action Plan into immediate effect:-

- 1. Immediately remove from sale all batches of products listed as irradiated (in whole or part) in the FSAI report.**
- 2. Write to the manufacturers of the products implicated in the report seeking categorical and validated assurance that all their products are free from irradiation, before they are re-stocked.**
- 3. Write to all other supplement and food manufacturers seeking similar assurances.**
- 4. Gradually eliminate all products from non-compliant manufacturers and replace with similar non-irradiated products.**

Other Irradiated Products

The IAHS welcome the FSAI surveys which have identified a problem which we were not aware of. We are now acting on this problem. We also welcome the FSAI assurance that they will now extend this survey to other foodstuffs, sold in multiples, where **no labelling of any kind is to be seen.**

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