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Press Release

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US Government and industry to investigate irradiation and food safety

USDA researchers and IBA join forces to examine irradiation and food safety

Louvain-La-Neuve, October 10, 2000 (released simultaneously in Memphis, Tennessee, USA) - Scientists at the research arm of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced a partnership with one of the food industry's top irradiation experts, Ion Beam Applications (IBA), to further study irradiation and food safety in order to help guarantee the quality of America's food supply.

The five-year agreement between the USDA-Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Food Safety Research Unit in Wyndmoor, Pa. and IBA's Food Safety Division, based in Memphis, Tennessee, follows escalating public concern over food-borne illness as well as the recent approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the use of irradiation to control harmful microorganisms in beef and other meat. The partnership brings leading researchers at ARS, whose work helped lead to the FDA's evaluation and approval of irradiation, together with technology specialists at IBA.

Under the agreement, ARS will use IBA's commercial sterilization and ionization facilities to compare the effectiveness of gamma, electron beam and X-ray sources in controlling food-borne pathogens. The program will also examine how these treatments affect the properties of food such as taste and texture, and how to optimize the benefits of the process.

"Every year 76 Million people are affected by food-borne illness and as many as 5,000 Americans die, says Dr. Donald Thayer of the USDA-ARS Food Safety Research Unit. New technologies like irradiation - and pasteurization before it - can really help. Irradiation is the most tested technology in the history of the food industry, and this new research will help ensure that consumers can make informed choices about the food they eat."*

"As an unbiased governmental research unit, ARS is able to provide the food industry and consumers with an unparalleled source of factual data concerning irradiated foods," says Pat Adams, President of IBA's Food Safety Division. "Providing ARS access to IBA's x-ray, e-beam and gamma facilities will help food processors make the best decisions concerning the use of irradiation to significantly increase the safety of our foods. Furthermore, the ARS-IBA agreement will allow us to confirm that food irradiation is safe and that it can help prevent illness caused by food-borne pathogens."

ARS is the United States Department of Agriculture's chief research agency. Following the acquisition of SteriGenics International, Griffith Micro Science, RDI and Scanditronix, IBA is the largest ionization and sterilization company in the world with irradiation service plants on three continents and 18 facilities in North America, including Mexico.

About IBA

IBA is also world leader in the production of high-precision cancer treatment systems using proton beams, the manufacture of radioisotope-producing cyclotrons and the development of centers for the distribution of FDG, a radiopharmaceutical used in cancer diagnosis. IBA has been producing irradiation systems for over 40 years and in particular, treating foods, including poultry, seafood, cheese and spices for over 15 years. The Food Safety Division is headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee, and the IBA corporate offices are in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

IBA has formed a strategic alliance with Ecolab Inc., world leader in critical environment sanitation systems and services, to provide food processors with one comprehensive resource for integrated, multiple intervention food safety programs. Ecolab offerings include the latest in advanced detergents and sanitizers, automated systems to improve operational efficiencies, employee hygiene programs, and patented food surface treatment products. Combined with IBA's leading-edge food irradiation technology and support services, these represent the most comprehensive food safety program available today.

*source: Center for Disease Control

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