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Concern about Food Safety

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We all must learn about safe food handling. While many people assume that food-borne illness is contracted primarily in restaurants, it is revealing to discover that each of us is his or her own worst enemy. Food properly handled in home kitchens would reduce the incidence of disease dramatically. This always includes conformance with rules governing bacterial growth, time, and temperature. A case in point is a very common bacterium, salmonella, which is found on 25 percent or more of raw poultry and may be in raw eggs as well. Frequently, and especially when preparing the Thanksgiving or Christmas turkey, the public is warned about how to avoid serving up salmonella for dinner. Food-borne organisms are discussed in the first unit articles. New methods for detecting these pathogens on animal carcasses and poultry are under consideration, and new means of eliminating bacteria, such as the use of chlorine rinses, are in use. However, eliminating all contamination is not realistic. Labels and leaflets with safe food handling instructions can be found on or near fresh meat and poultry and are part of the effort to empower the consumer to handle these products safely.

Food irradiation as discussed by Alan Morton in "After the Glow," is partially a food safety issue and certainly a political issue. Some activist groups, such as Food and Water, Inc., have used very aggressive scare tactics to persuade the public to boycott irradiated products. While this process does not produce radioactive food, it does prolong shelf life and destroy bacteria which cause food-borne diseases. Although considerably delayed, commercial food irradiation is now under-way in the United States, and market demand is growing. Of the three states with early bans on the sale of irradiated foods, one has let the ban run out and another is reconsidering its decision.

Concern about pesticide usage on crops and residues in food is periodically nudged back into focus by consumer groups and is the topic of Dennis Avery's article, "How Pesticides Help Prevent Cancer." In this article, the reader will discover that arguments for the use of pesticides can be very persuasive. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS), in response to public concern over a possible connection between pesticides and cancer, points out that the incidence of lung cancer alone is really rising. A major report on pesticides in the diets of infants and children finds no current cause for concern and certainly no reason to reduce the consumption of fresh produce. Nevertheless, various government agencies are working together to decrease the use of pesticides by the end of the century. Genetic engineering may also contribute to less pesticide use by making plants disease resistant.

References

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