USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

3101 Park Center Drive

Alexandria, VA 22302-1500

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SUBJECT: Irradiation Requirements in "*The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004*"

TO: State Distributing Agencies
Child Nutrition Directors

Ensuring the nutritional quality and safety of the foods served to children participating in the National School Lunch Program continues to be a top priority within the Department of Agriculture (USDA). As you know, irradiation has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration as one of several tools that can be used to help protect consumers from foodborne illness. "*The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004*" contains several requirements regarding irradiated USDA commodity product that we want to bring to your attention.

USDA must ensure that:

- Irradiated commodities are made available only at the request of States and school food authorities.
- Reimbursements to schools for such product are equal to reimbursements for non-irradiated products. (In other words, both the non-commodity reimbursement rate as well as the commodity entitlement rate will remain the same. Ordering irradiated beef will have no effect on your reimbursement or entitlement. However, this does not mean that prices for irradiated product will be the same as for non-irradiated product. Prices are dictated by competitive bidding among vendors.)
- States and school food authorities receive factual information on the science and evidence of irradiation technology including a notice that irradiation is not a substitute for safe food handling techniques.
- States and school food authorities are given model procedures on how to provide irradiation information to school food authorities, parents, and students. (This information can be found on the FNS web site at http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foodsafety/irrad-edmaterials.htm.)

USDA, States, and schools must ensure that:

- Irradiated commodities are clearly labeled with the radura symbol or another prominently displayed printed notice of irradiation.
- Irradiated food products are not commingled in containers with non-irradiated foods.

The contents of this guidance document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

In addition, the *Act* encourages schools to offer non-irradiated alternatives when irradiated commodities are offered.

We highly recommend that schools which choose to serve irradiated USDA commodity product inform parents, students, and others in the school community of that fact, and make it clear that they have a choice on whether or not to consume it. States and schools receiving irradiated product are encouraged to conduct informational and educational activities that provide science-based information about irradiation so that informed decisions can be made about its consumption.

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