January 22, 2003

Ann Veneman
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 200-A, Whitten Building
12th and Jefferson Dr. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

I strongly oppose the use of irradiation on meat and other foods served to children in the National School Lunch Program. When meat is subjected to the equivalent of more than 100 million chest x-rays, new chemicals are formed that have never been tested. In addition, irradiation damages vitamins and creates free radicals that can damage the body's cells over time. No long-term studies show the safety of irradiated food.

Worse yet, current plans to include irradiated foods in school lunch programs do not seem to provide for any kind of labeling or mechanisms for parental advisories. Consumers aren't attracted to buying it; many parents don't want it. So it shouldn't be hidden behind terms like "pasteurized." Parents have a right to know if irradiated food is being served to their children-and the right to refuse it.

Sincerely,

LAURA BARGER
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