

ANTHRAX ATTACKS HAVE BOLSTERED CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF FOOD IRRADIATION

American consumers may be warming up to the idea of irradiation, according to a news survey by Porter Novelli. Apparently, news coverage of bioterrorist activity in the United States, combined with the well-publicized news about the use of irradiation technology to eradicate anthrax spores in potentially contaminated U.S. mail, has brought the benefits of this technology to the forefront in consumers' minds.

Consumers are making the connection between the ability of irradiation to eliminate anthrax and other harmful bacteria to its potential use in processing the food supply, and increasingly view it as an acceptable precautionary measure, according to Porter Novelli.

Conducted among 1,008 U.S. adults from Nov. 2 through 6, the survey found that consumers have moved from trepidation to a strong level of support for the technology—with more than half (52 percent) saying that the government should require irradiation to help ensure a safe food supply. In another PN survey conducted last year, only 11 percent of consumers said they would buy irradiated foods if they were available.

“In the past, consumers expressed concern for irradiation--specifically for food use,” said Bill Layden, senior vice president of Porter Novelli Washington's Food, Beverage and Nutrition Practice. “Consumers are beginning to understand that irradiation is similar to pasteurization...that it is the next generation in technology with proven benefits that could protect the food supply *now*.”

About two-thirds (64 percent) of the consumers surveyed this year said they are concerned about contamination of the U.S. food supply with anthrax or other biological agents. Fifty-one percent agreed that irradiation could be used to kill anthrax and other biological agents.

Porter Novelli is a subsidiary of Omnicom and calls itself one of the world's largest public relations firms. – *report by Bryan Salvage on 9 November 2001 for www.meatingplace.com*