

Media release:

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Research shows most New Zealanders want irradiated produce to be clearly labelled

Most New Zealanders want irradiated produce sold in shops and food outlets to be clearly labelled, a major consumer survey has found.

The study of 1000 people, commissioned by Tomatoes New Zealand, found that 85% of participants want irradiated fruit and vegetables, as well as food made with irradiated produce, to be clearly identified.

Tomatoes NZ chair Alasdair MacLeod, said: “With seasonal stocks of irradiated tomatoes soon arriving in New Zealand, it’s timely to remind retailers, restaurants and catering operations that by law consumers must be made aware of irradiated produce so that they can make an informed choice about whether to purchase it.”

Some foods, including all imported Australian tomatoes, are irradiated to preserve the food and kill bacteria and pests. This involves exposing it to ionising radiation and x-rays or gamma rays which pass through it like microwaves in a microwave oven.

Mr MacLeod said: “The Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) requires anyone selling irradiated produce to provide clear labelling for customers at point of sale. This research shows there is overwhelming support for this from New Zealand consumers.

“New Zealand tomatoes are never irradiated, but Tomatoes NZ supports measures taken to protect New Zealand’s vulnerable horticulture industry from pests like the Queensland fruit fly.

“Each piece of irradiated produce is not individually labelled but retailers must provide signage at point of sale. Consumers can look out for signage and, if in doubt, ask the retailer.”

The survey carried out by Curia Market Research, found that 85% of respondents want stores to label irradiated fruit and vegetables and 78% want to know if food they order at a restaurant, café or takeaway includes irradiated produce.

Slightly more woman than men wanted to see irradiation labelling in stores and food outlets but there was no major differences across different age groups or locations.

A thousand respondents participated in the poll, taken from a random selection of 15,000 nationwide phone numbers. The results were weighted to reflect the overall adult population in terms of gender, age

and area. Based on this sample of 1,000 respondents, the maximum sampling error (for a result of 50 per cent) is +/- 3.2 per cent, at the 95 per cent confidence level.

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