

Supervisor resumes crusade to label irradiated foods

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SANTA CRUZ — County supervisors Chairman Gary Patton will resume his crusade for local labeling of irradiated food products when the Board of Supervisors meets Tuesday morning.

Thwarted in November in an attempt to pass a measure requiring warning labels on locally sold food products treated with gamma, ionizing or radionuclide radiation, Patton has returned to the board with an expanded ordinance which would both require warning labels on irradiated food and warning signs in stores which sell irradiated food items.

Both the labels and the signs would carry the ominous yellow and black international radiation symbol and warnings that the labeled or adjacent food products had "been treated or processed with radiation."

Patton wants the signs posted next to the irradiated food items.

Patton was unable to muster three votes for his initial labeling plan on his first attempt to pass the measure Nov. 19. Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, who supports Patton on most issues, sided with the board chairman, but Supervisor Robley Levy did not. Levy joined with Supervisor Dan Forbus in voting against the proposed ordinance. The two said it would be inappropriate for the county to impose food labeling requirements, which,

they said, should be handled at the state or federal levels. Pleading ignorance, Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. said he could not cast an informed vote either way on the issue.

Supervisors did agree to direct Patton to write a letter to Rep. Leon Panetta, D-Monterey, to express the board's concern over the food irradiation issue, and agreed to further consider the matter this week.

In a letter to board members last week, Patton said a local labeling requirement was needed now more than ever, in the wake of a new federal Food and Drug Administration rule, which, he said, had expanded the approved uses of radiation in food.

Patton said label language proposed by the FDA under its new rule was "intended to hide, rather than reveal, that a radiation process has been used."

According to an FDA press release, all irradiated food is to carry a warning that it has been "picowaved." Labels may also indicate that the food has been "picowaved to control spoilage," or "picowaved to extend shelf life."

Wrote Patton: "This language means nothing to the average consumer, and does not disclose that the food or food product has been treated with radiation.

"I believe that the (local) ordinance originally proposed is still needed, and in fact is more necessary than ever, in view of the latest FDA regulation," the supervisors chairman said.