

CONTRIBUTIONS PLEDGED TO SUPPORT WORK ON FOOD IRRADIATION

Contributions in cash and in kind totalling about US \$250 000 were pledged to support the work of the International Consultative Group on Food Irradiation, when representatives of 20 Member States of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, the World Health Organization and the IAEA which are currently participating in the Group met for the first time during December 1984 at Vienna.

The purpose of the Group is to serve as a focal point for advice on food irradiation processing as a technique to reduce post-harvest food losses and improve the keeping qualities of foodstuffs, recognizing that international co-operations is required if the technique is to be fully explored.

The Group aims to improve awareness of the benefits of food irradiation on the part of public health authorities, the food industry and consumers, to expand training in the use of the technique, to assess its

technological and economic feasibility, and to create task forces for the harmonization of legislation in various countries, thus facilitating international trade in irradiated foods.

Opening the meeting, the Director General of the IAEA, Dr Hans Blix, noted that disharmony between countries in their acceptance of irradiated foodstuffs for human consumption is a major barrier to the widespread introduction of food irradiation processing. An important task for the group is therefore to give factual information which will promote governmental acceptance and the widespread implementation of the Codex General Standard for irradiated Foods, adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission in 1983. (IAEA, PR 84/24, International Atomic Energy Agency, Wagramerstrasse 5, P.B. No. 100, A-1400, Vienna, Austria.)

THE FIRST ELECTROMETALLURGICAL WORKS

The Oskol electrometallurgical plant in Central Russia turned out its first commercial steel. The new steel smelting plant, built in the vicinity of the Europe's biggest iron ore deposit, will be the world's biggest producer of steel by the technology of direct metal reduction from ore.

This method has been known since time immemorial when ancient smiths pumped air into furnaces charged with a mixture of ore and charcoal to produce the refined iron of which ploughshares and swords were forged.

This technology, which has survived through centuries, ensures high ecological safety standards at the plant and saves production area. The latter is of primary importance as rich arable lands are all around the project. The Oskol plant has no blast furnaces, coking batteries and complementing bulky and complicated equipment.

A many kilometre-long pipeline delivers a water-ore mixture to the pelletising shop, the products of which contain up to 70 per cent of iron. Heating increases the iron content in pellets to 90–95 per cent. Thus, enriched they are fed into electrical furnaces. The locally produced four million tons of steel a year will be converted into rolled stock, steel sheets and pipes.

Steel production which uses no blast furnaces and coke can be easily automated. Absence of dust and noise attests to high technological standards.

Plans for the future development provide for the construction of another works here, which will produce slabs. Ecologically safe iron works in Central Russia will not only save millions of tons of coal hitherto converted into coke, but will also cut down the amount of transportation, for all principal consumers are situated in the European USSR.

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USSR: Biggest Manufacturer of Metal-Working Equipment

The Soviet Union is the world's biggest manufacturer of metal-working equipment. Every year it produces about 200,000 machine-tools, some 60,000 press-and-forging machines and 4,000 casting machines of a wide variety of models. There are currently in batch production, for instance, more than 1,500 models of machine-tools, including those designed to machine parts weighing several hundred tons. (*Soviet Features*, Vol. XXIII, No. 185, p. 5, December 7, 1984.)
