JOSEPHSON, Prof. Edward

Ex-Prof. Edward Josephson; pioneer in food irradiation

WARWICK — Edward S. Josephson, 86, of Chatham Circle, a retired professor at the University of Rhode Island and a pioneer in food irradiation, died Tuesday at Philip Hulitar Hospice Center, Providence.

He was the husband of Blanche (Andelman) Josephson. Born in Boston, a son of the late Adolph and Anna (Marcovitz) Josephson, he had lived in Warwick for 15 years, previously living in Newton, Mass.

He retired as an adjunct professor in food science at URI, and had been a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Mr. Josephson worked for many years for the U.S. government at both the National Institutes for Health and the Natick Laboratories. He was a pioneer in the process of food irradiation, the technology now being used to protect the mail in the wake of the anthrax attacks.

In March 1989, Mr. Josephson and a fellow URI food researcher gave a media demonstration at the university, where they unveiled fish, strawberries, bananas and potatoes "that looked as though they had just been caught, picked or dug up," a Providence Journal reporter observed.

In fact, the foods should have been too old to be edible, but had been kept fresh through irradiation.

Mr. Josephson had worked with other food scientists for years to refine the process, which uses radiation to slow the ripening process and kill the bacteria that cause spoilage and food poisoning.

The demonstration marked the occasion of the government's approval of irradiation for wheat, pork, potatoes, spices and various fruits and vegetables.

To the naysayers who raised safety concerns, Mr. Josephson editorialized in 1990 that irradiation could help prevent "the estimated annual 9,000 deaths and 6.5 million to 33 million cases of food-borne illness."

He was a member of the American Chemical Society as well as other professional organizations, and was honored throughout the world for his many achievements in his field.

He was a graduate of Harvard University, Class of 1936. He received his doctorate in biochemistry from MIT. He was a student at Boston Latin and other schools in Boston.

Besides his wife, he leaves two daughters, Nancy Wall and Betty King; a son, William Josephson; a brother, Dr. Eliot Josephson; and four grandchildren.

A graveside service will be held Sunday at 10:45 a.m. in Sharon (Mass.) Memorial Park Cemetery.