



Boost for consumer confidence

Risk analysis has three main components: risk assessment (scientific advice and information analysis), risk management (regulation and control), and risk communication. For consumers to have confidence in the food they buy and eat, they need access to all the important information and must put trust in risk analysis as a viable procedure ensuring that the food is safe and that the consumer can make her/his informed choice. Risk analysis can help to solve the problem of a lack of consumer confidence in the safety of food, and restore trust. Consumer trust in the food chain has declined as the result of a number of highly publicised scares like BSE, but is now improving in some European countries thanks to the hard work of all parties involved in risk analyses.

If risk analysis could be applied to new processes in food production, such as changes in breeding programmes, potential dangers could be spotted before they become serious. It is vital not only to carry out such checks, but to take public opinion into account when accepting their conclusions, to avoid food scares in the future.

A new Integrated Project within the Sixth Framework Programme, SAFE FOODS (Promoting Food Safety Through a New Integrated Risk Analysis Approach) seeks to refine risk analysis practice for food safety. Lasting four years, it combines the skills of natural and social scientists, stockbreeders, food producers, and regulatory bodies, coming from 33 institutions, not only in Europe but from other continents, too.

Coherent research

The tenor of the research is to design new and effective procedures for analysing risks for foods produced by different production practices (high- or low-input systems) and with different breeding technologies (traditional, molecular, and genetic modification). New systems will be compared with traditional methods to see if they introduce greater risks; for example, high-input, intensive animal

rearing will be contrasted with low-input traditional methods. Projects will seek ways to detect emerging risks associated with food and feed production, and to make quantitative assessments of the risk of human exposure to food contaminants.

The potential role of regulatory organisations in managing risks in the food chain will be explored and, ultimately, a new integrated risk analysis approach for foods will be designed. A wide range of concerned organisations – food producers, plant and animal breeders, and national and international organisations associated with risk analysis – will all test this new framework.

More confidence in food chain

The project acknowledges the importance of consumer confidence for the societal acceptability of effective risk analysis practices in foods. In fact, an entire work package is dedicated to consumer confidence in risk analysis practices regarding novel and conventional foods. The public debate on GM foods has shown that there is a good deal of public information and education needed. Consumer organisations will be asked to trial the risk analysis approach developed in the research, and due publicity will be given to the results.

This Integrated Project will put assessing risks associated with food production on a firm basis with transparent, effective and balanced procedures. These will form the foundation for further development of this novel approach to food safety. A clear demonstration of the safety of European food, breeding and rearing practices will make them more competitive in world markets. The inclusion in the project of researchers from South Africa and China will give it an international direction so that the risk analysis strategies developed could be applied globally. The net result will be to restore consumer confidence in the safety of European food, both within our borders and on a global scale.

Full title: Promoting food safety through a new integrated risk analysis approach for foods

Acronym: SAFE FOODS

Contract n°: CT-2004-506446

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EU contribution: €11.4M

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