Risk Communications: the role and experience of the European Food Safety Authority

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Agenda

- Risk Communications: EFSA role, objectives and overall approach
- Risk Communications – a practical example: BSE in goats
- Future perspectives
Communications:

A key part of EFSA’s mission to contribute to improved food safety in Europe and build public confidence in the risk assessment process.
Purpose:
Provide appropriate, consistent, accurate and timely communications on food safety issues, to all interested parties, stakeholders and the public at large, based on the Authority’s risk assessments and scientific expertise.
Effective Risk Communication

To be effective the communication must
(i) explain and contextualise the risk
(ii) address key concerns of target audiences
(iii) advise the recipient whether he/she needs to take action
(iv) set out clearly steps for any necessary government/industry action
(v) Cover (i) to (iv) above in a way which is culturally sensitive

⇒ Collaboration between risk assessors and risk managers is key!
EFSA’s role in Risk Communication

- Independent of political process
- Open and transparent
- Co-ordination with national authorities
- Co-ordination with Commission and Member States over food ‘scares’/emergencies
Who does EFSA communicate to?

- Risk Managers (EC, EP, MS)
- Stakeholders (Environment, Consumer, Health NGOs, Industry)
- Media (Food, Health, EU Affairs)
- Concerned Individuals
- Policy Makers (EU & Beyond)
- Stakeholders (Scientists/Academics)
- Risk Assessors (e.g. AF)
EFSA Risk Communication -
What are we trying to achieve?

1. Europe-wide reference service largely via website (www.efsa.eu.int)
2. Timely and accurate public announcements on risk assessments and key EU-wide issues
3. Accessible and relevant messages on food safety issues
4. Close coordination of communications with Member States to achieve more consistent and culturally sensitive output (eg Advisory Forum Working Group on Communication)
AF Communications Working Group

- Chair: Director of Communications, EFSA
- Members: Heads of Communication from National Food Safety Authorities in Member States
- 4 meetings/year
- Sharing of information regarding key issues in countries
- Pro-active co-ordination of communications
- Evaluation of communications initiatives (eg SEM)
- Crisis Communications requirements
- Communications links (eg extranet, videoconferencing)
- Risk Communications training
AF Communications WG - A possible model for collaboration

EFSA COMMUNICATIONS
- Core messages on European food safety issues/risk assessments
- Releases / PR materials on risk assessments
- Europe-wide reference (website, …)
- Support to Commission in crisis communications
- Early warning on emerging issues

NATIONAL ACTIVITIES
- Input to EFSA on risk communications
- Early warning on key issues
- Country specific issues, strategies & programmes
- Local relevance/ context
- Underline common messages
- Tap Working Group resources

EUROPE - WIDE ACTIVITIES
- Issues preparedness/ management
- European events/ conferences
- Consumer perception surveys
- European media relations
- Consumer Information

BEST PRACTICE
- Ideas sharing
- Networking
- Case studies/ Lessons learned
- Training
- IT capability & links
- Measurement
Defining a Communications Strategy: key considerations

- Scientific significance of the risk assessment findings
- Nature of the risk (emerging, possible, identified and confirmed)
- Potential public health impact, taking into account exposure of vulnerable groups
- Public perception and anticipated reactions
- Legislative and market contexts, as appropriate
Tailor Communications approach to information needs

- All opinions published on the EFSA website
- Press releases for “sensitive” opinions, eg:
  - New scientific evidence
  - Possible likely/risk management implications…
- Press briefings for “highly sensitive” opinions, eg:
  - Need to fully brief media to ensure common understanding and consistency of messages
  - Immediate risk management implications; consumer advice
  - Close co-ordination with risk managers required
  - High level of stakeholder and public interest
EFSA Public Announcements: Process

- Communications developed in close collaboration with Scientific Co-ordinators and Scientific Panel Chairs.
- Address uncertainties and potential areas of concern/implications of scientific advice.
- Pre-notification of press releases to Advisory Forum and key stakeholders.
- Involvement of stakeholders in assessing public perception and in message development.
EFSA Public Announcements: Highlights

- Semicarbazide & baby food
- GMOs (NK 603, MON 863, ARMGs, guidance for RA...)
- Methylmercury in fish; safety of wild and farmed fish
- Labelling of allergenic foods, derivatives
- Trans fatty acids
- Animal health and welfare (transport, stunning...)
- BSE (BSE risk in UK, 7 GBR reports, SRM, BSE in goats...)
- Additives: safety of parabens usage in food
- Pesticides: peer review evaluation of active substances
- Infant formula: microbiological risks
- Avian influenza...
Distribution of articles per category - 2004

Distribution of Articles per Category

- EFSA: 54%
- GMO: 13%
- BSE: 11%
- NDA: 11%
- AFC: 4%
- BIOHAZ: 2%
- AHAW: 2%
- HYPO: 2%
- PPR: 2%
- CONTAM: 1%
- NDA: 11%
EFSA Communications & Outreach: Key initiatives

- 82 Press Releases/statements since EFSA’s establishment
- Relaunch and continuous update of EFSA website
- Publications: Annual Report, “EFSA News”…
- Public meetings, Consultations and Colloquia:
  - Stakeholder consultations (eg GMO guidance doc – May 04)
  - Invitation to Management Board and Scientific panel meetings
  - Scientific Colloquia (June & December 2004, April 2005)
  - Scientific Conferences (eg Lille, October 2004)
  - Advisory Forum Event (Berlin, November 2004)
Risk Communications: a practical example

BSE risk in goats
BSE risk in goats

- French authorities (Ministry of Agriculture, Afssa) and European Commission inform public of a high suspicion of BSE in a goat

26 November 2004:
- COM: More data required for final decision by Community Reference Laboratory (CRL) re suspected case of BSE
- EFSA issues preliminary advice on health risks of goat milk and derived products
- Press release & statement of BSE/TSE Working Group of BIOHAZ Panel

“...goat milk and goat milk products sourced from healthy animals, and irrespective of their geographical origin, are unlikely to present any risk of TSE contamination..”

More data required to assess possible risks associated with goat meat
BSE risk in goats

28 January 2005:

- COM: Case of BSE in a goat confirmed. Commission extends testing programme (200,000 tests of healthy goats in the EU) and introduces discriminatory testing to differentiate between BSE & other TSEs in sheep and goats
- EFSA provides update on plans to assess the safety of goat meat goat meat products with respect to BSE/TSE
- Press release and statement BIOHAZ Panel
  - Important information gaps need to be filled to deliver QRA (results of monitoring, experimental and epidemiological data)
UPDATE 2-Mad cow disease found in French goat, EU says.

Goat had 'Mad Cow Disease'

January 2005: BSE in goat confirmed

MUCCA PAZZA: EFSA, SU CAPRA ENTRO LUGLIO NUOVI AGGIORNAMENTI

Confirmán primer contagio de mal de "vacas locas" a una cabra
BSE risk in goats

28 June 2005:

- EFSA provides further assessment on health risks of goat meat and goat meat products with regard to BSE
- Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards of EFSA
  - Qualitative RA (insufficient data for QRA)
  - “…the likely prevalence of BSE in the wider EU goat population is very low…”
  - “…the current risk in terms of BSE, related to the consumption of goat meat and goat meat products, is considered at this time to be small for goats born in 2001 after the feed ban and later.”
- EFSA press release and briefing
June / July 2005: safety of goat meat

AESA ve poco riesgo EEB
en consumo carne cabra de menos de 4 años.

De Standaard Online
Risico op gekke geiten miniem

Les experts européens rassurants sur les risques de "chèvre folle"

EU/Lebensmittel/Rinderwahnsinn/ EU-Lebensmittelbehörde
sieht keine Gefahr durch BSE bei Ziegen
BSE risk in goats

Geographical distribution of articles

Country: France, Italy, USA, Germany, UK, Portugal, Spain, Pan-EU, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium, Netherlands, Ireland, Qatar, Angola, Morocco, China, India

N° of articles: 73 articles – Jan-July 2005
Balanced and factual coverage – information provided while avoiding a food scare.

Risk of escalation was reduced by:

- Keeping public informed at each stage
- Outlining areas of uncertainty, knowledge gaps and how to progress with risk assessment
- Outcome: ability to characterise risk as « small » based on current evidence
- Measures in place and strengthened to help manage risk (increased surveillance), hence “under control.”

Co-ordinated action/communications: risk assessment & risk management
BSE in goats: A watching brief!
EFSA Risk Communications: Looking Ahead

- Transparency: more accessible scientific summaries for EFSA opinions
- EFSA Risk Communications Advisory Group
- Consumer risk perception research (with DG SANCO)
- Information seminars for media
- Pan-European media monitoring and evaluation of communications initiatives
- Continue to improve website: web survey to be launched
- Strengthen corporate presence in Parma/Italy and manage EU/international communications from Parma…