

The involvement of stakeholders in risk assessment



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The Hungarian Food Safety Office is one of the newest organisations established in 2003. as national contact point to EFSA and to DG SANCO.

Main stakeholders are the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development and the Ministry of Public Health, Family and Social Affairs.

The Hungarian Government decided to call a Steering Committee from high ranked officers of the two ministries among them state secretaries and the chief medical doctor and the chief veterinary doctor of the country to have regular control of activities over the new institution.

The Office started its work on September 2003 with few senior staff members and until the end of the year 20 positions were filled with young and ambitious scientists.

Their expertise was generated from different kind of practice from plant and animal breeding, veterinary medicine, food and chemical engineering, pharmaceutical and medical science representing the food chain from farm to fork.

This complex approach enables a wide view and perspective for team work in the field of risk assessment and traceability in feed and food production, processing, trade and consumption.

Among newly associated countries to the EU only Hungary was able to establish and run an independent institution dedicated to food safety.

At the date of accession to the European Union the Office was operational and was playing the role of a model to other new member states in this region of Central and Eastern Europe.

This was very much supported by the EU by providing a PHARE project to facilitate activities in creating legal background for the establishment of the institution by reaching agreement between several members of the Hungarian Government.

The Hungarian official feed and food control is very fragmented between several ministries and authorities.

Plant health and protection services, animal health and welfare protection in a state owned veterinary system are under the umbrella of the agrarian regime.

Their view on risk assessment is not only scientific-based, but they take account to socio-cultural aspects, too.

Integrity and independence of science in this field could be maintained in a difficult way because of lack in competence of safety versus productivity.

In a crisis situation old reflexes are playing greater role in decision making, therefore quantity and quality of feed and food is more important than safety aspects.

Food and feed security is better managed than safety by companies and they consider safety only in case of high risk in health of consumer. Imported oilseeds, nuts and spices are taken as good examples involved in the communication of emerging risks.

Public media is less informed in the world of new challenges and together with low level of consumer's knowledge they are able to increase lack of confidence among consumer and panic in the population.

Who is responsible in providing the necessary information to the public when risk assessment is not in harmony with risk management. Where is the link between science-based assessment and decision-oriented authority management at national level?

EFSA can function most effectively
by issuing scientific advice, raising
communications and
provide transparency in informing
contact points of national authorities.

In the year of 2004 new member states of the EU were connected to the rapid alert system for food and feed (RASFF), which was given guidance for official food control institutions and for private companies to evaluate and upgrade their food safety systems. This lesson could be learned both for private and public institutions and change their attitude to consumer.

Thank you

for your attention!