

Risk Communications at EFSA

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Agenda

- Why do we need Risk Communications?
- Risk Communications: EFSA Role, objectives and overall approach
- Understanding public perception: highlights from the Eurobarometer on risk issues
- EFSA Communications channels and tools
- ITX: a practical example of EFSA advice concerning a food controls risk issue

Why do we need Risk Communications?



As European veterinary experts met yesterday to discuss easing the ban on British beef, the Consumers' Association issued a report claiming the Government had failed to put consumers first in the BSE crisis. Have people been misled? Today, CHRIS ELLIOTT reports on how a Mid-Anglian scientist is attempting to put the crisis in perspective — by launching a crusade to banish misinformation about it.

**Public just
want truth
about BSE
says expert**

Hamburger tasting in front of cameras



John Gummer, UK Minister of Agriculture,
demonstrating the alleged safety of British beef
(6 May 1990)

Decline in public trust due to:

- Hiding the truth
- Lack of transparency
- Public concerns were not taken seriously
- Conflicting advice re food safety

Mission

- **Provision of scientific advice** and scientific and technical support for the Community's legislation and policies in all fields which have a direct or indirect impact on food and feed safety.
- **Provision of independent information** on all matters within these fields.
- **Risk communication**

Regulation EC 178/2002 – 28 January 2002

Effective Risk Communication

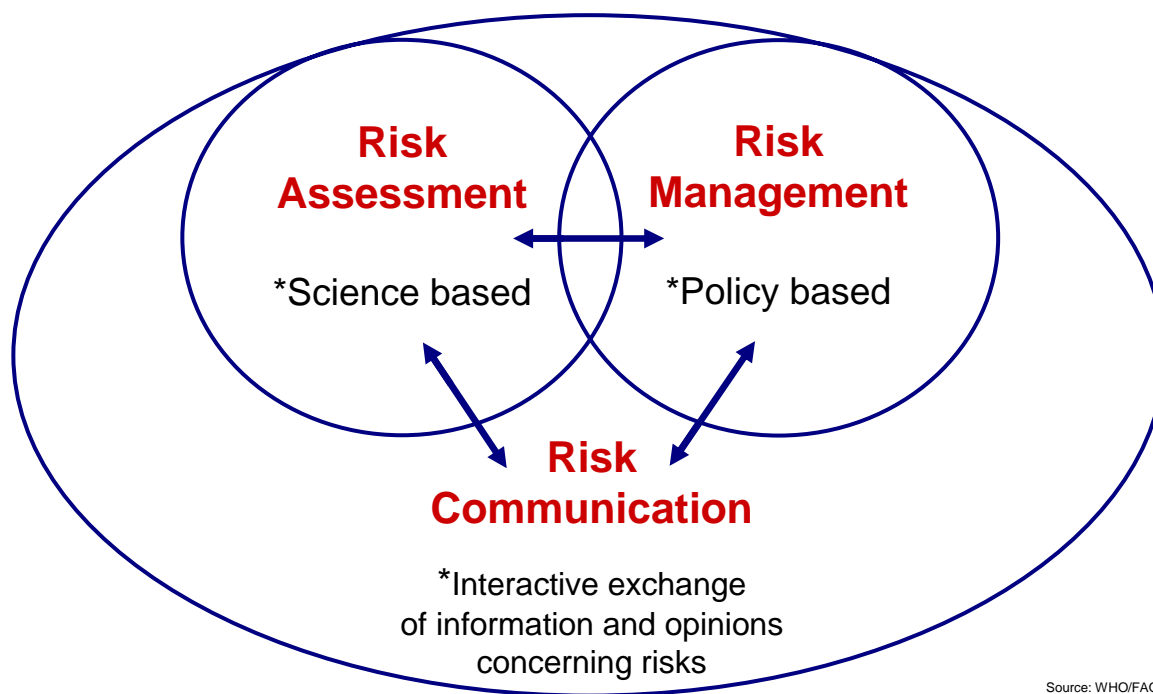
To be effective the communication of Risk Assessors and Risk Managers together must:

- (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!

Risk Communication: a continuum

Risk Analysis Framework



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

Risk Communications

Purpose:

Provide appropriate, consistent, accurate and timely communications on food safety issues, to all stakeholders and the public at large, based on the Authority's risk assessments and scientific expertise.

Objectives

- Establish EFSA as an expert and trusted source of information on food and feed safety issues (within Risk Assessment mandate).
- Promote EFSA's key values: scientific excellence, independence, openness and transparency.
- Ensure that messages are relevant, understandable and address food safety concerns.
- Enhance the coherence of information on food safety matters across the Community.

Overall Strategic Approach

- Understand consumer and public perception of food and food safety risks.
- Bridge the gap between science and the consumer.
- Harness support of key actors to reach consumers with pertinent and effective messages.
- Promote coherent risk communications across the Risk Assessment/Risk Management interface.

Risk perception and food safety: where do European consumers stand today?

Eurobarometer on Risk Issues

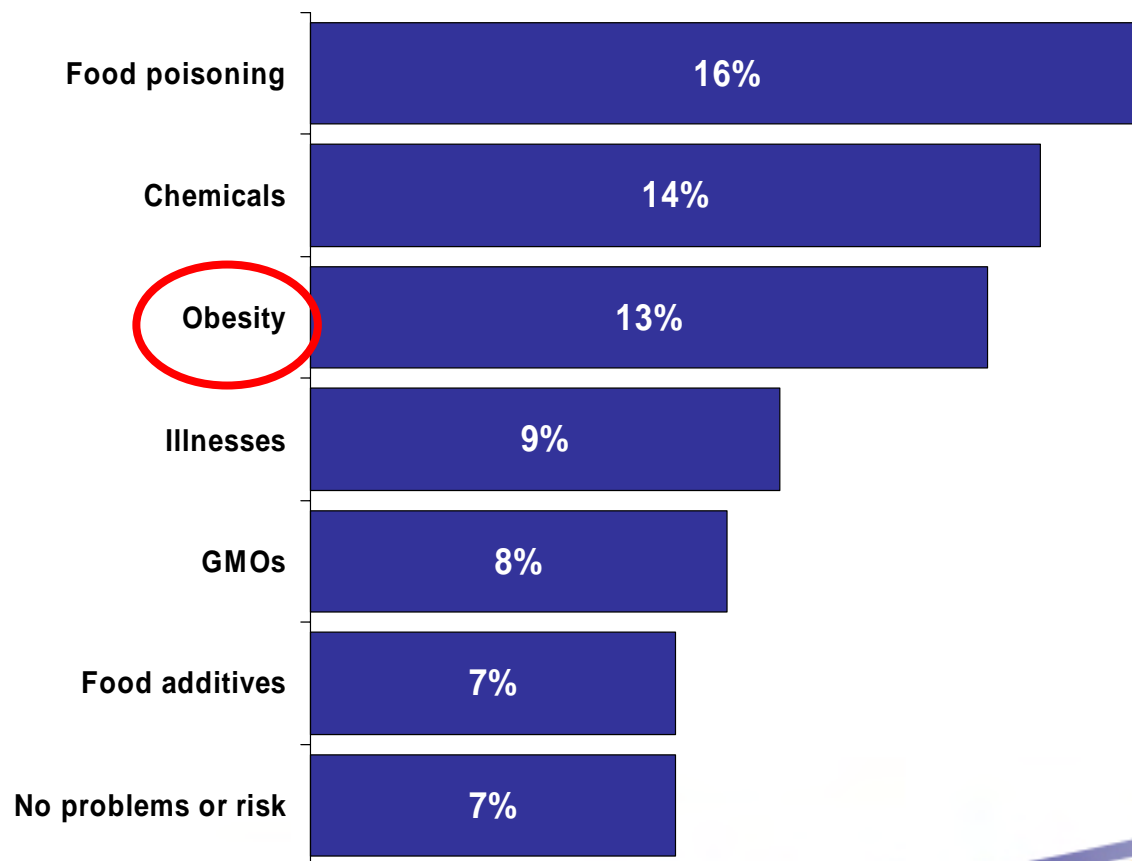
Main findings: Food Safety

- Consumer perception of food is positive; food safety not top-of-mind
- Major food crises of past (eg BSE, dioxins) not cited by consumers as being top concerns today
- High level of awareness re EU food safety regulations (> 60%)
- Opinions divided re progress made in food safety (country differences)
- Overall, public authorities' actions judged appropriate, in particular:
 - Decisions re food risks are science-based (nearly 6 out of 10)
 - Information re food risks (1 out of 2)
- Need for impactful risk communications:
 - Over 40% who hear of food risks in media either ignore story or worry and do nothing

Risk perceptions

Food-related risks - spontaneous

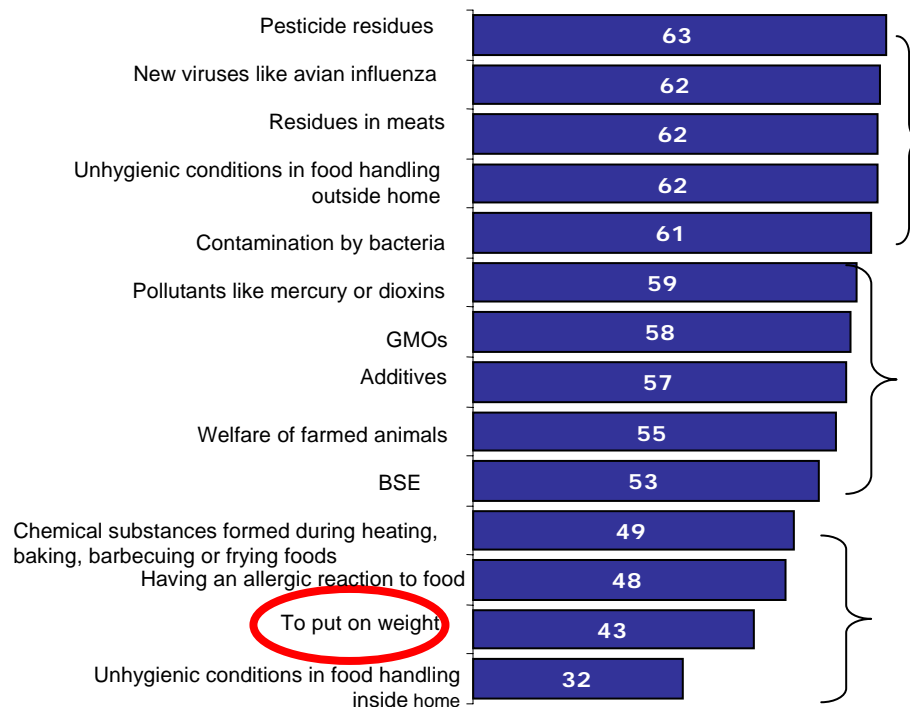
Question: What are all the things that come to mind when thinking about possible problems or risks associated with food?



Risk perceptions

Food-related risks - prompted

Question: For each of the following issues, please tell me if you are very worried, fairly worried, not very worried or not at all worried by it? AVERAGE WORRY "INDEX"



+ 100=very worried, +67=fairly worried, +33=not very worried, 0=not at all worried (DK responses omitted)

Risk perceptions: Top Concerns

Question: For each of the following issues, please tell me if you are very worried, fairly worried, not very worried or not at all worried by it?

Answers: *WORRIED*

PESTICIDES: Greece, Italy, Hungary, France, Portugal, Slovenia, Germany, Spain, Finland

NEW VIRUSES LIKE AVIAN INFLUENZA: Malta, Latvia, The Netherlands

RESIDUES IN MEAT: Cyprus, Greece, Belgium

FOOD HYGIENE OUTSIDE HOME: Poland, United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, Spain

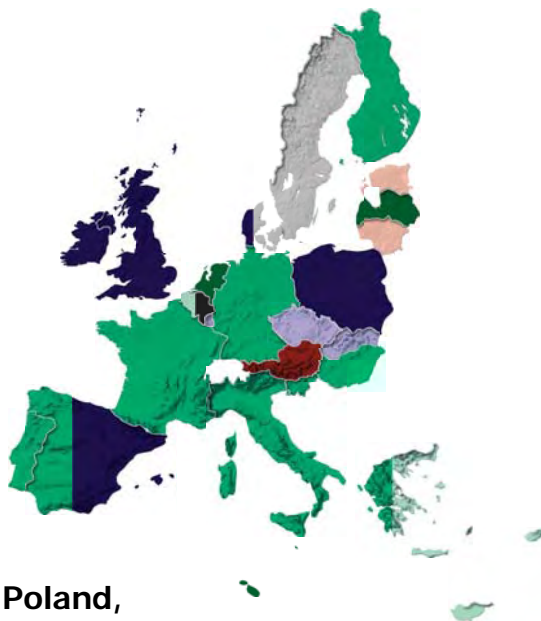
CONTAMINATION BY BACTERIA: Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Slovakia

POLLUTANTS LIKE MERCURY OR DIOXINS: Belgium

GMOs: Austria

ADDITIVES: Lithuania, Estonia

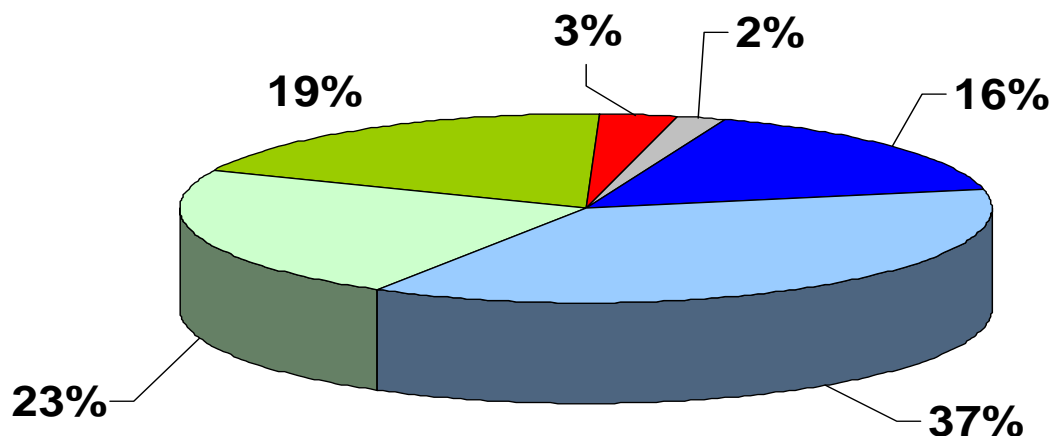
WELFARE OF FARMED ANIMALS: Denmark, Sweden



Sources of Information

Reaction to story

Question: Please tell me how you reacted to the last story you heard about a type of food being unsafe or bad for your health.

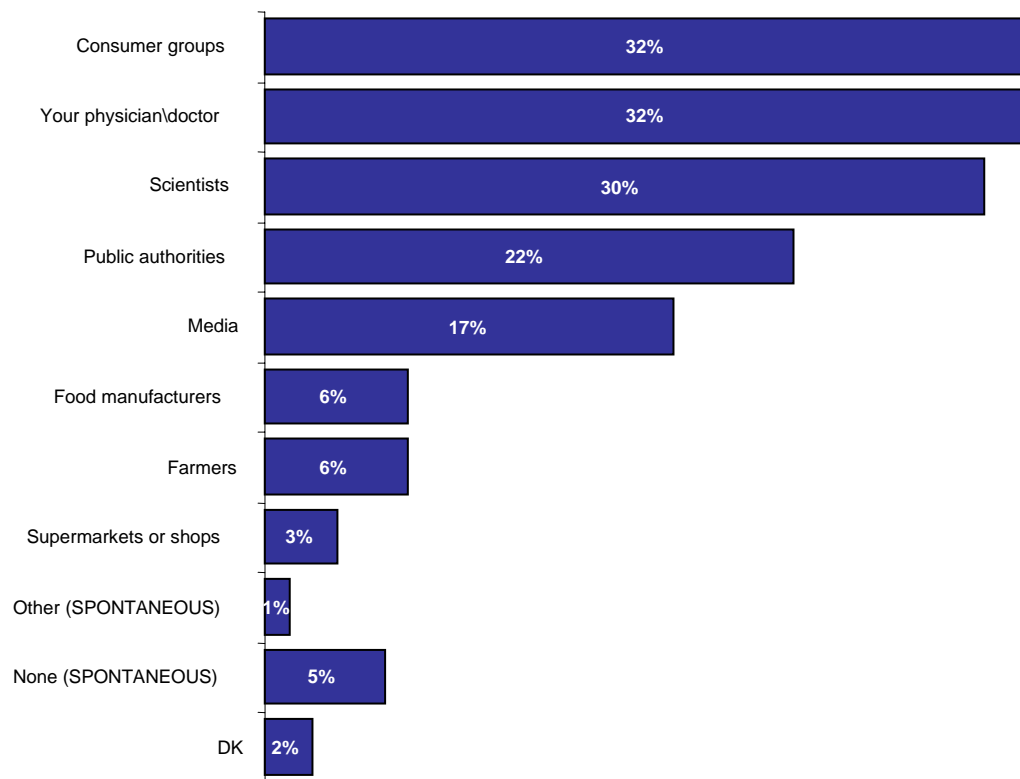


- You have permanently changed your eating habits
- You avoided the food mentioned in the story only for a while
- You got worried about the problem but finally you did nothing about it
- You have ignored the story
- Other
- DK

Sources of Information

Preferred sources

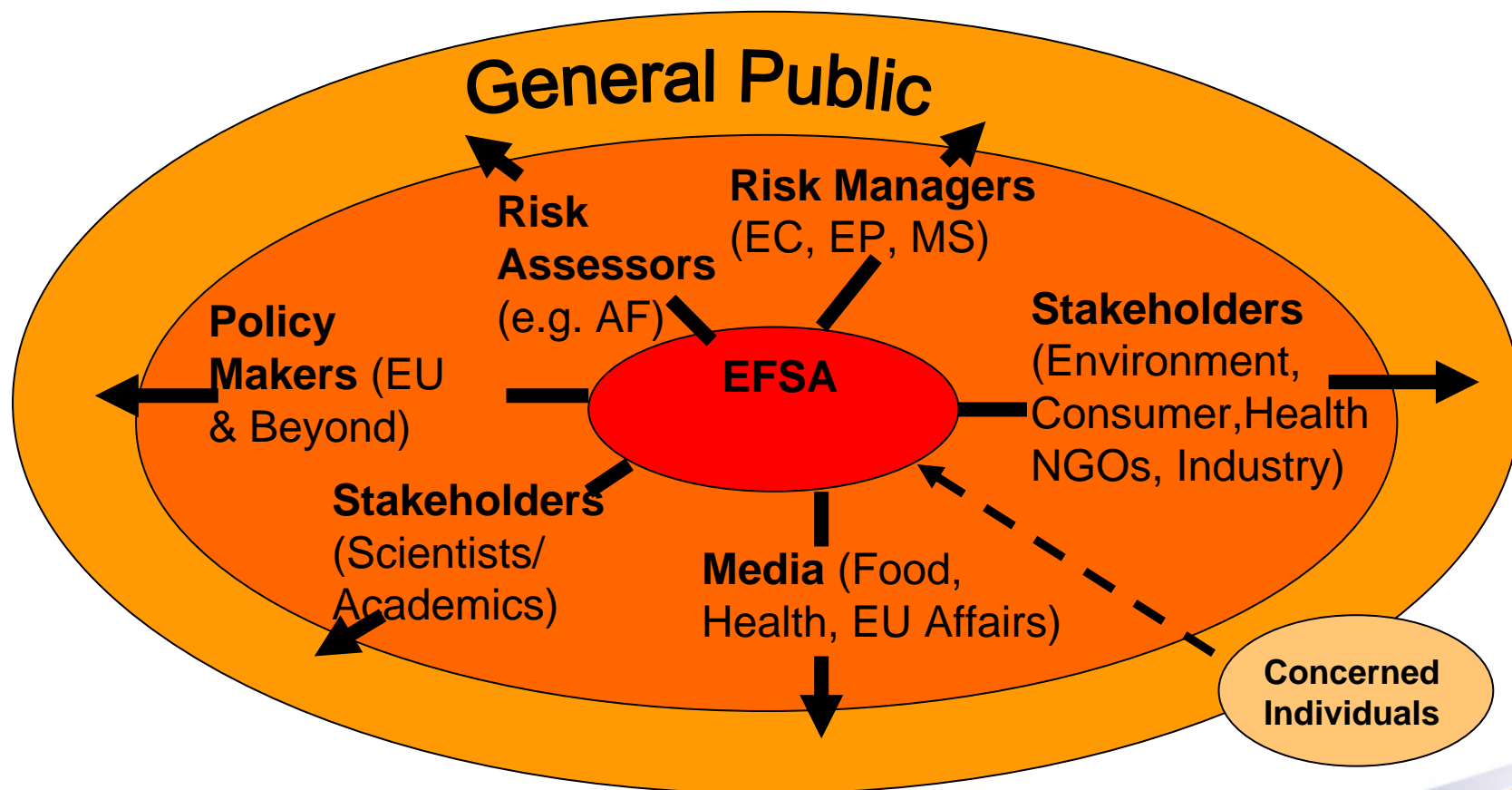
Question: Suppose a serious food risk were found in fish or chicken. Who would you trust the most to inform you about this risk?



Conclusion

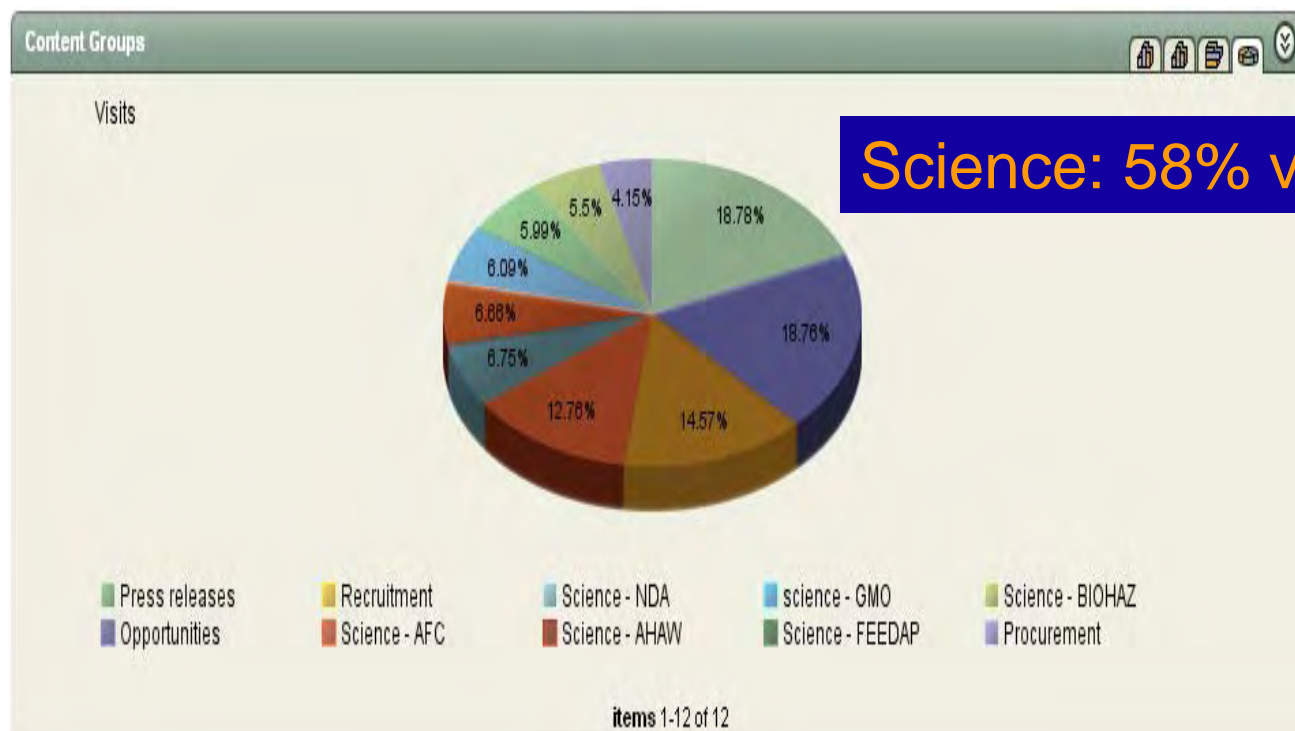
- **Europeans are worried about health-related risks**
- **Food has positive connotations of taste and pleasure and concerns regarding health and food safety are not top-of-mind**
- **Consumers identify a wide range of concerns and tend to worry most about factors which are beyond their control**
- **Clearly identifiable groups are more liable to worry about risks**
- **In order to be effective, communication on risks may need to be tailored to meet specific needs of target audiences**
- **Public authorities should seek to engage and involve consumers' most trusted information sources**

Who does EFSA communicate to?



Communications Channels and Tools: «Influencing the influencers»

1. **Website** - Europe-wide reference service on food and feed safety
- 120.000 visits per month/ 10.000 subscribers to *EFSA Highlights*



Science: 58% visits in April

Communications Channels and Tools: «Influencing the influencers»

2. Press and Media – key intermediary with consumers on food safety issues:

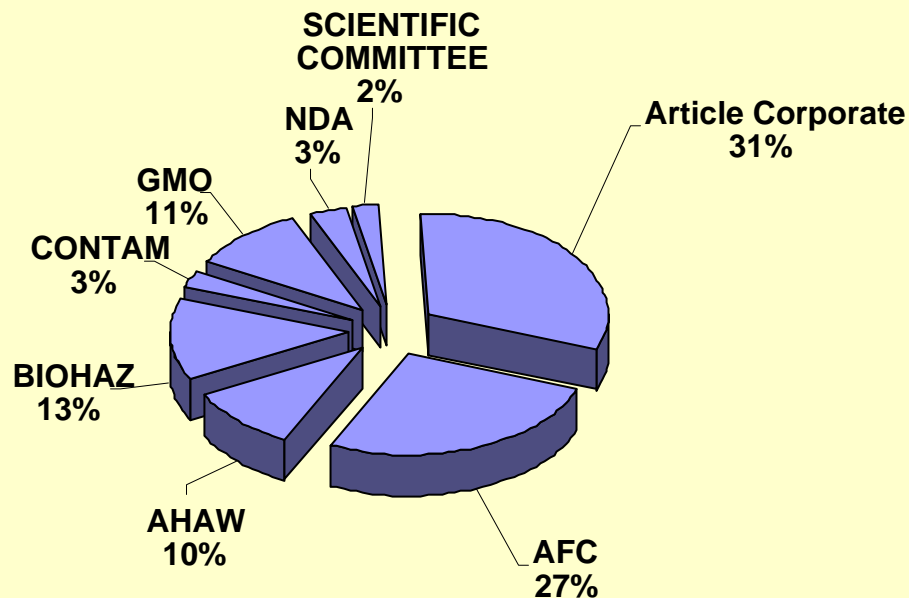
-46 press releases in 2005 (+ 37% vs 2004)

- 4-fold increase in publicity (>1300 articles)

-over 70 media enquiries on one press issue alone

- comprehensive database of food and consumer safety journalists

Distribution of articles per Category



2005 Headlines

Irish Examiner.com

Goat had 'Mad Cow Disease'

The Food & Drink Innovation Network



EFSA sets guidelines to minimise risk of bird flu in poultry

Keine rohen Eier mehr essen!

Vorsorge der EU-Lebensmittelsicherheit wegen der Vogelgrippe

Europe calls for new risk assessment method

TETRA PAK L'Agenzia europea per la sicurezza alimentare ha espresso un parere autorevole ma che non elimina le perplessità

«Quelle quantità di Itx non sono pericolose per la salute»

La multinazionale: «Per stampare i contenitori in Italia useremo un sistema differente»



TetraPak di latte per neonati

«Il parere espresso dall'Efsa (European Food Safety Agency) sulla questione degli inchiostri contenenti Itx giunge alla conclusione che la sostanza "non costituisce causa di preoccupazione per la salute ai livelli riscontrati". Questa tranquillizzante valutazione, diffusa il 9 dicembre, è da ritenersi finale ed anticipa il parere prima previsto per marzo 2006. Tranquillizzante almeno secondo la Tetra Pak Italia, che ieri ha diffuso una nota in cui si afferma ritiene come «questo parere dell'Efsa e la posizione assunta dal-

la Commissione Europea il 30 novembre siano un'importante conferma alle valutazioni da noi svolte ed ai conseguenti comportamenti adottati, nel rispetto delle richieste e delle sensibilità espresse dalle Autorità italiane ed europee».

«Siamo rassicurati da questo pronunciamento e dalle posizioni analoghe assunte dalle altre autorità che hanno verificato gli effetti dell'Itx», prosegue il comunicato di Tetra Pak, che conferma comunque la propria decisione «di non utilizzare più, per i clienti italiani, il sistema di

stampa offset UV con Itx, che rappresentava in ogni caso - precisa - una irrisoria percentuale dei propri prodotti».

«Sappiamo che le Autorità europee hanno compiuto un grande sforzo, nell'interesse dei consumatori, per dare una risposta a questo problema in via prioritaria, e di questo siamo grati», ha dichiarato Paolo Nigro, presidente di Tetra Pak Italia.

Come dire: «Fate pure bere il latte all'Itx ai vostri bebè perché non fa male». Le madri e i padri italiani daranno retta al consiglio della multinazionale?

L'INFORMAZIONE
DI PARMA

CAMPAGNA AMICA

E la mucca pazza inglese salvò quella italiana

Communications Channels and Tools: «Influencing the influencers»

3. Member State and Stakeholder networks

- (i) Advisory Forum (representatives of 25 MS)
- (ii) Advisory Forum Working Group Communications
(Heads of Communications – MS)
- (iii) Pre-notification under embargo of draft press
releases to Commission, MS authorities and stakeholders
- (iv) Stakeholder Relations/Stakeholder Consultative
Platform

EFSA Risk Communications: Looking Ahead

- New communications tools for non-technical audiences, eg: “Focus on the issues”, explanatory notes...
- Annual Review on Risk Communication (AGRC)
- Information seminars for media
- Website redesign
- New scientific communications tools, eg EFSA Journal/scientific publishing house
- Joint communications with Member States
- Pan-European media monitoring and evaluation of communications initiatives

A practical example of EFSA advice concerning food controls risk issue: **ITX**

ITX

Chronology

September 2005

- Problem first identified in ready-to-feed infant formula in Tetra Pak cartons
- Italian Authorities sent rapid alert to European Commission → EU Member States
- Manufacturer of infant formula undertook own analysis: no health risk

ITX Chronology

- **3 November 2005**

EFSA accepts request from the Commission to carry out a risk assessment → deadline 30 April 2006

- **Week of 21 November 2005**

Major manufacturer recalls millions of tonnes of baby milk in 5 countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, France and Portugal)

ITX

Chronology

▪ 24 November 2005

EFSA publishes press statement:

- Based on very limited data, ITX "not likely to present an immediate health risk at the levels reported"
- EFSA commits to provide preliminary advice beginning of December

▪ End of November 2005

Letters from EFSA were sent to CEOs of 2 major food/packaging companies re misinterpretation of EFSA advice (ie not a RA)

▪ 1 December 2005

EFSA publishes press statement to reaffirm its position

ITX

Chronology

- 6 December 2005: EFSA announces future update
- 7 December 2005: Final ITX Opinion adopted
- 9 December 2005:
Final ITX Opinion and press release published
 - **Panel concludes: No indication of a genotoxic potential for ITX**
 - **EFSA advises: ITX considered of low concern at the levels reported**

EFSA provides advice on the safety of ITX

December 2005

Le Monde

Les experts de l'Autorité européenne de sécurité alimentaire ont entrepris une étude sur la toxicité de l'ITX

la Repubblica.it

Frankfurter Allgemeine
FAZ.NET

Ink chemical does not pose a health risk, food regulator says

TETRA PAK L'Agenzia europea per la sicurezza alimentare ha espresso un parere autorevole ma che non elimina le perplessità

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ITX: Key Learnings

- Highlights challenges of communications across the Risk Assessment/Risk Management interface, including relations with stakeholders!
- EFSA can assist Risk Managers by provision of scientific advice re control issues
- Opportunity to clarify EFSA's own role as risk assessor, eg not responsible for:
 - **Control issues: recall, levels found in food...**
 - **Consumer advice in Member States**
- Importance of strong voice at national level to inform consumers on food safety risks

GRAZIE
PER LA VOSTRA ATTENZIONE!