

TRADITIONAL FOODS FROM THIRD COUNTRIES IN A NEW CONTEXT – THE CHALLENGES FOR RISK ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional foods from third countries are subject to the EU's novel food regulation and equivalent law in the UK when consumed in these territories. By definition, these foods have been consumed in third countries for a long time. However, assessing the risks of introducing them to a new country's consumers and identifying the balance of evidence needed to support the evaluation has been challenging. While regulators are keen to learn from the experiences of third countries, understanding how information on the traditional experience can support the assessment and address data gaps has proved problematic. Since the regime moved into UK law, there has been a need for further exploration of this topic in order to support safe food whilst giving consumers choice and diversity.

METHODOLOGY

Following the change in responsibilities for the UK government in relation to the novel foods regulation after the UK's departure from the EU, we have been reviewing the process of assessing traditional foods for safety. Case studies of the experience of the UK Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) in assessing foods such as Baobab fruit and Chia seeds through the full novel food process have been explored, as well as collating information on all the traditional foods considered by the UK. This data is being used to identify challenges in the assessment. Using this information, recommendations are being identified to support the effective implementation of the process in the UK.

RESULTS

A core set of challenges have been identified. These include identifying further opportunities to learn from the traditional experience, core data that could inform the assessment and where the balance should lie on the amount of data required to support the assessment. We are developing a set of materials for both risk assessors and applicants to better understand the core data needs and how the available data can be used to meet the needs of traditional food assessment.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this project is to provide a basis for a consistent and proportionate assessment of traditional foods from third countries in the UK. Information and materials for risk assessors will help establish a level playing field for these assessments and make best use of the available information on these foods to ensure safe food choices for consumers.