Communication of risk (and benefit) in the area of food safety

Barbara Gallani
Head of Communication, Engagement and Cooperation
Hazard vs. Risk

Hazard
A hazard is something that has the potential to harm you.

Risk
Risk is the likelihood of a hazard causing harm.

Shark
- A shark in the sea is a hazard.
- Swimming with a shark is a risk.

Lightning
- Lightning is a hazard.
- Standing under a tree during a thunderstorm is a risk.
### Risk Assessment vs. Risk Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Assessment</th>
<th>Risk Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EFSA carries out risk assessment on safety of certain <strong>neonicotinoids</strong> for bees</td>
<td>Risk managers suspend use of certain <strong>neonicotinoids</strong> in EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFSA evaluates safety of every GMO on a case-by-case basis</td>
<td>Risk managers decide whether or not to authorise each GMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFSA collects and analyses data from Member States on prevalence of <strong>Salmonella</strong> in poultry holdings and assesses risk for human health</td>
<td>Risk managers set reduction targets for <strong>Salmonella</strong> in laying hens in the EU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Risk assessment is**
- Providing scientific advice on food-related risks to support decision-making

**Risk assessment is NOT about**
- Policy making on food safety
- Setting or enforcing legislation
- Product approvals and authorisations, recalls and withdrawals
- Food labelling
- Food quality
- Trade issues, import/export controls, traceability
- Investigation of food fraud
GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

ADOPTED: 21 November 2018
do: 10.2903/j.efsa.2019.5520

Guidance on Communication of Uncertainty in Scientific Assessments

European Food Safety Authority,
Andrew Hart, Laura Maxim, Michael Siegrist, Natalie Von Goetz, Cristina da Cruz,
Caroline Merten, Olaf Mosbach-Schulz, Majlinda Lahaniatis, Anthony Smith and Anthony Hardy

Abstract
This document provides guidance for communicators on how to communicate the various expressions of uncertainty described in EFSA’s document: ‘Guidance on uncertainty analysis in scientific assessments’. It also contains specific guidance for assessors on how best to report the various expressions of uncertainty. The document provides a template for identifying expressions of uncertainty in scientific assessments and locating the specific guidance for each expression. The guidance is structured according to EFSA’s three broadly defined categories of target audience: ‘entry’, ‘informed’ and ‘technical’ levels. Communicators should use the guidance for entry and informed audiences, while assessors should use the guidance for the technical level. The guidance was formulated using evidence from the scientific literature, grey literature and two EFSA research studies, or based on judgement and reasoning where evidence was incomplete or missing. The limitations of the evidence sources inform the recommendations for further research on uncertainty communication.

© 2019 European Food Safety Authority. EFSA Journal published by John Wiley and Sons Ltd on behalf of European Food Safety Authority.

Keywords: uncertainty communication, risk communication, transparency, probability, likelihood
EFSA addressed the benefits of fish/seafood consumption – using polyunsaturated fatty acids as an example of a beneficial substance – compared to the risks of methylmercury in fish/seafood.

Some population groups reached TWI for methylmercury before intake levels that brought nutritional benefits.

Benefits of fish should be met by consuming certain species low in mercury.

Difficulties in generalising across all EU.
CAFFEINE
TV remains the main channel
Social media more popular among young crowd, even if less than TV

QDST Which of the following are your main sources of information about food risks? Firstly? And then? TOTAL (MAX. 4 ANSWERS)
(%) - THE MOST MENTIONED ANSWER BY COUNTRY

Sources of information
Scientists are the most trusted on information on food risks

QD7: Please tell me to what extent you trust the following sources or not for information on food risks.
(\% - EU)

- Scientists: 28% totally trust, 54% tend to trust, 11% do not trust, 4% do not trust at all, 3% don't know
- Consumer Organisations: 21% totally trust, 58% tend to trust, 13% do not trust, 4% do not trust at all, 4% don't know
- Farmers: 16% totally trust, 53% tend to trust, 21% do not trust, 6% do not trust at all, 4% don't know
- National Authorities: 11% totally trust, 49% tend to trust, 26% do not trust, 10% do not trust at all, 4% don't know
- EU Institutions: 10% totally trust, 48% tend to trust, 25% do not trust, 10% do not trust at all, 7% don't know
- NGOs: 10% totally trust, 46% tend to trust, 24% do not trust, 9% do not trust at all, 11% don't know
- Journalists: 6% totally trust, 44% tend to trust, 33% do not trust, 13% do not trust at all, 4% don't know
- Supermarkets and Restaurants: 5% totally trust, 38% tend to trust, 39% do not trust, 15% do not trust at all, 3% don't know
- Food Industries: 6% totally trust, 30% tend to trust, 39% do not trust, 22% do not trust at all, 3% don't know
- Celebrities, Bloggers and Influencers: 3% totally trust, 16% tend to trust, 35% do not trust, 38% do not trust at all, 8% don't know
1. Hazard v Risk

2. Risk Assessment v Risk Management

3. Communicating Uncertainties

4. Food is Emotional

5. The science of food is complex

6. Acknowledging Perceptions and Values
Fundamental principles of risk communications apply

- Openness and transparency
- Timeliness
- Clarity in language
- Acknowledging and communicating uncertainty
- Responding to audience needs – social science & risk perception
Stay connected

Subscribe to

Engage with careers

Follow us on Twitter
@efsa_eu
@plants_efsa
@methods_efsa