

4. Consumer confidence in risk analysis practices regarding novel and conventional foods

Objectives:

- To identify important determinants of public and stakeholder perceptions and attitudes towards food risk analysis for the three food chains under consideration.
- To understand differences and similarities in the social representations of different affected groups regarding the implementation of current risk management practices.
- To assess cultural and individual differences in attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs regarding optimal risk management practices.
- To develop best practice in communication about food risk uncertainty .
- Testing the effectiveness of the new integrated risk analysis framework, informed by qualitative and quantitative research.
- To actively make use of completed and currently on-going research based on these specified in the earlier sections of this technical annex.
- To identify information relevant to nutrition and labelling derived from possibly WP1-3, and include this in the research activities.
- To develop a gender policy

Co-ordinator

Partner 21, WU

Partners

21 WU (Wageningen Univ.; NL)

22 IFR (Inst. Food Res.; UK)

23 KVL (Agric. Univ. Copenhagen; DK)

24 DIA (D)

25 AU (Athens Univ.; GR)

27 UM (Univ. Maastricht; NL)

Contribution

organisation of national focus group and surveys on perception, backtranslation of cross-cultural survey national focus groups and surveys on perception, backtranslation of cross-cultural survey

idem

idem

idem

gender specialist

Deliverables:

- Report with conclusions and implications of 4.1 (perceptions of risk management) and 4.2 (perceptions of risk analysis) regarding the final design of 4.3 (cross-cultural survey)
- Report detailing the implications of the consumer research for the new integrated risk analysis approach in Workpackage 6.
- Report detailing recommendations for best practice in communicating risk uncertainty.
- Different reports will focus on implications of the research for the food industry (including SMEs, and the policy community).
- The final report with detailed similarities and differences in values and perceptions across the European population regarding preferences for risk analysis strategies in the area of food safety. Where relevant issues on nutrition and labelling will be taken into account.
- Policy recommendations regarding how value- and perception- differences should be accommodated within the new integrated risk analysis framework. Where relevant issues on nutrition and labelling will be taken into account.
- Report on gender status of the project and proposed gender policy by also nominating a representative to participate in the gender network to be established under TP5 (i.e. by months 1) and generating a detailed action plan during the first 12 months of this IP. This will also take into account different activities in the different countries.
- Gender plan.

Workplan

4.1 Perceptions of the effectiveness of current food risk management practices

Focus groups will be run in each of five participating countries in order to understand factors underlying the effectiveness of current food risk practices. These will be selected using Hofstede values. This will facilitate the identification of countries that are culturally differentiated in terms of uncertainty avoidance and risk taking aversion. Countries will include Denmark, The United Kingdom, Greece, Slovenia and Germany. Key items regarding consumer and stakeholder preferences for risk management and communication strategies across the different food chains under consideration will be identified through analysis of the focus group transcripts. These will be incorporated into the design of a larger questionnaire (see below, assessment of differences in attitudes, perceptions and beliefs regarding risk management practices). Information about current risk assessment and risk management practices will be provided by Research Tasks 2 and 3. The results will also inform the social representation study to be conducted under the topic described below on understanding differences in perceptions of food risk analysis. Due account will be taken of individual and cultural differences in relevant perceptions and attitudes. The determinants of consumer trust in institutions with responsibility for consumer protection and food safety will be assessed, as well as with consumer willingness to be involved in risk decision-making. Different preferences for increased consumer involvement will also be analysed. The results will be used to generate experimental hypotheses to be tested in sub task assessment of differences in attitudes

4.2 Understanding differences in perceptions of food risk analysis by consumers, experts, and decision-makers

In order to develop an understanding of the representations of scientific experts regarding risk management, it is essential to gain understanding of how expert communities represent salient issues. Empirical analysis will be applied to enable identification of the key arguments advanced by natural scientists involved in risk assessment, stakeholders involved in the food chain, and policy makers and decision-makers regarding the process of risk analysis applied to food. Differences and similarities in perceptions regarding optimal implementation of risk analysis (risk management, risk communication and risk assessment) between different food chains will be an explicit part of the analysis. Comparison with the results of the sub-task on perceptions of the effectiveness of current food risk management practices, will permit identification of differences in values, attitudes and perceptions between the different groups relevant to the development of the integrated risk analysis approach. This information can then be used to develop an understanding of potential barriers to institutional change salient to the practice of risk management to be examined in Research task 5. Focus groups will be conducted to explore how members of different communities with an interest in food risk analysis represent key issues of relevance to the process. These will be run in each of the countries being used in the cross-cultural comparison. The structure of the 4 different focus groups (at least N=8-10 in each group) will be as follows: 1. natural scientists, 2. consumers, 3. other stakeholders (drawing on representatives of each of the food chains under consideration) 4. decision-makers (amendments to this composition may be made in close agreement with the Commission). The transcripts of the focus groups will be analysed using qualitative methodologies, and key similarities and differences identified in perceptions and attitudes between the different groups. All members of the focus groups will receive information about the way that their own group members, and members of the other groups, represent the key issues. Follow up interviews of all focus group members will be used to discuss whether the arguments advanced by both groups are understandable and/or acceptable as the basis for developing effective food safety risk management. Implications for the development of the risk analysis framework will be identified. For both focus groups and follow-up interviews, recordings will be used for transcription purposes. Analysis of transcripts will provide information relating to how the different groups represent and understand the views of each other.

4.3 Assessment of differences in attitudes, perceptions and beliefs regarding risk management practices

The information gathered from the qualitative phases of the research program will be combined with other items derived from the risk perception and related literature and used to develop a survey instrument. This will be used to construct a larger survey that will be distributed to a quota sampled strata of the population of each of the countries being evaluated according to the Hofstede criteria applied in 4.1. Back-translation will be applied to check cross-cultural validity of survey instruments. Generic issues (principles of communicating uncertainty, preferences for citizen involvement in the three phases of risk analysis) will be tested against specific food products in each food chain under consideration. Multivariate analysis and structural equation modelling will be applied to develop a model of how public attitudes relate to technology acceptance, and whether individual differences exist between different subgroups within the population.

4.4. Identification of strategies to communicate uncertainty

Stakeholder analysis will be applied to the development of alternative communication strategies and operations to optimally communicate food safety from a new perspective (including communication about probabilistic risk assessment and other forms of uncertainty, and variability). We will develop hypotheses from regarding the potential effectiveness of different communication strategies in risk uncertainty information. Hypotheses will also be developed and tested regarding potential cross-cultural and individual differences in communication effectiveness.

4.5 Proof of principals of new proposed risk analysis framework

Before implementation of the new risk analysis framework (see Workpackage 6), it is important to test the acceptability of the new proposed framework to consumers, stakeholders and users. At this stage, it is not possible to envisage precisely how this research activity will be taken forward, as it is dependent on the outcomes of preceding activities. The appropriateness of the integrated model will be assessed through:

Case studies and qualitative interviews with expert representatives of policy communities and other relevant stakeholders in the different food chains and cultures

Confirmation through qualitative and quantitative analysis with consumers and relevant stakeholders; citizenship

Small scale empirical studies to determine the effectiveness of different strategies to communicate uncertainty and variability in different cultures and contexts, and to groups of the public with different perceived (and actual) vulnerability.

Gender Policy

The consortium recognises the importance of equal opportunities between women and men and wishes to initiate activities to promote gender equality in the research area under investigation in this IPI. Consequently, a representative to participate in the gender network to be established under TP5 (i.e. by months 1) will be nominated and a detailed action plan during the first 12 months of this IP will be delivered. This deliverable will also take into account different activities in the different countries.

To ensure proper execution of the plans the consortium assigns the overall management coordinator with this responsibility.

To promote the participation of women in our project the following activities will be initiated:

- To stimulate occupation of leading position in project by women. This policy has resulted in the occupation of 30% of the positions in the Project Management Team (PMT) by women.

The Safe Foods Project

- To develop an inquiry to determine the degree of women's' participation in the whole project, to determine needs for improvement and to develop plans to increase their participation (Gender Audit)
- To develop plans to determine which aspects of the project are relevant for gender stimulation. A gender expert will be hired to this end.
- To assess the implementation and effectiveness of gender stimulation activities midterm (month 18) and retrospectively (toward the end of the project, month 46). A final report will be delivered making recommendations for implementation of a successful gender policy in future EU research and dissemination activities.