

Food-borne risks perceived by Hungarian consumers

Abstract

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For consumers safety is the most important ingredient of their food. Recent crises have undermined public confidence and pointed out the importance of consumer perception of different risk factors to be taken into account.

All kind of developments in this food chain should be determined by the consumers whose opinions and expectations should be considered and their confidence regained.

The objective of current socio-economic research is to provide well-founded information on the requirements, expectations and behaviour of Hungarian consumers concerning food quality and safety. The new orientation is given by the food chain approach (primary production – food processing – storage and distribution – trade – households) to ensure the health, safety and satisfaction of the consumers concerning food products. For this reason the consumer expectations, requirements and behaviour have to be analysed and evaluated from the special point of view of food safety. Besides food chain approach we will focus on specific consumer groups as well. An important concern will be the different evaluation of food safety risk factors by consumers and professionals.

Food safety is a top priority for Hungarians so most of the respondents of our surveys evaluated the issue as an important or very important one. Potential risk factors had to be evaluated on a 1-5 step-scale. Integrated program packages were used to determine significant differences between various groups, then statements were refined through

factor analysis. Combining factor and cluster analysis, five main consumer types could be separated from each other concerning evaluation of various risk factors threatening food safety. Respondents considered microbiological factors as the most important ones influencing food safety, which is a remarkable difference from that of the previous studies indicating the underestimation of this field. Consumers demand rigorous food control and labelling of GM foods. On the basis of various attitudes, by combination of factor and cluster analysis a grouping of Hungarian consumers can be carried out. The various consumer groups differ from each other not only by their attitudes to food safety but also by various socio-economic factors. This gives a good possibility for differentiated marketing communication strategy.

All aspects of food safety throughout the whole food chain should be drawn together and studied in respect of their importance for consumers and professionals whereas consumer concerns supposed to be taken into account when considering risk management options and especially building up risk communication strategies.