

WORKING PRINCIPLES FOR RISK ANALYSIS FOR FOOD SAFETY FOR APPLICATION BY GOVERNMENTS

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SCOPE

1. The Working Principles for Risk Analysis for Food Safety for Application by Governments are intended to provide guidance to national governments for risk assessment, risk management and risk communication with regard to food related risks to human health.

GENERAL ASPECTS

2. The overall objective of risk analysis applied to food safety is to ensure human health protection.
3. These principles apply equally to issues of national food control and food trade situations and should be applied consistently and in a non discriminatory manner.
4. To the extent possible, the application of risk analysis should be established as an integral part of a national food safety system.¹
5. Implementation of risk management decisions at the national level should be supported by an adequately functioning food control system/program.
6. Risk analysis should be:
 - applied consistently;
 - open, transparent and documented; and
 - evaluated and reviewed as appropriate in the light of newly generated scientific data.
7. The risk analysis should follow a structured approach comprising the three distinct but closely linked components of risk analysis (risk assessment, risk management and risk communication) as defined by the Codex Alimentarius Commission², each component being integral to the overall risk analysis.
8. The three components of risk analysis should be documented fully and systematically in a transparent manner. While respecting legitimate concerns to preserve confidentiality, documentation should be accessible to all interested parties³.
9. Effective communication and consultation with all interested parties should be ensured throughout the risk analysis.
10. The three components of risk analysis should be applied within an overarching framework for management of food related risks to human health.
11. There should be a functional separation of risk assessment and risk management to the degree practicable, in order to ensure the scientific integrity of the risk assessment, to avoid confusion over the functions to be performed by risk assessors and risk managers and to reduce any conflict of interest.

¹ It is recognized that national governments will use different approaches and time frames in the application of these principles taking into account national capacities and resources.

² See *Definitions of Risk Analysis Terms Related to Food Safety*, Procedural Manual.

³ For the purpose of the present document, the term “interested parties” refers to “risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, industry, the academic community and, as appropriate, other relevant parties and their representative organizations” (see definition of “Risk Communication”).

However, it is recognized that risk analysis is an iterative process, and interaction between risk managers and risk assessors is essential for practical application.

12. Precaution is an inherent element of risk analysis. Many sources of uncertainty exist in the process of risk assessment and risk management of food related hazards to human health. The degree of uncertainty and variability in the available scientific information should be explicitly considered in the risk analysis. The assumptions used for the risk assessment and the risk management options selected should reflect the degree of uncertainty and the characteristics of the hazard.

13. National governments should take into account relevant guidance and information obtained from risk analysis activities pertaining to human health protection conducted by Codex, FAO, WHO and other relevant international intergovernmental organizations, including OIE and IPPC.

14. With the support of international organizations where appropriate, national governments should design and/or apply appropriate training, information and capacity building programs that are aimed to achieve the effective application of risk analysis principles and techniques in their food control systems.

15. National governments should share information and experiences on risk analysis with relevant international organisations, other national governments (e.g. at the regional level through FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committees) to promote and facilitate a broader and, where appropriate, more consistent, application of risk analysis.

RISK ASSESSMENT POLICY

16. Determination of risk assessment policy should be included as a specific component of risk management.

17. Risk assessment policy should be established by risk managers in advance of risk assessment, in consultation with risk assessors and all other interested parties. This procedure aims at ensuring that the risk assessment is systematic, complete, unbiased and transparent.

18. The mandate given by risk managers to risk assessors should be as clear as possible.

19. Where necessary, risk managers should ask risk assessors to evaluate the potential changes in risk resulting from different risk management options.

RISK ASSESSMENT

20. Each risk assessment should be fit for its intended purpose.

21. The scope and purpose of the risk assessment being carried out should be clearly stated and in accordance with risk assessment policy. The output form and possible alternative outputs of the risk assessment should be defined.

22. Experts involved in risk assessment including government officials and experts from outside government should be objective in their scientific work and not be subject to any conflict of interest that may compromise the integrity of the assessment. Information on the identities of these experts, their individual expertise and their professional experience should be publicly available, subject to national considerations. These experts should be selected in a transparent manner on the basis of their expertise and their independence with regard to the interests involved, including disclosure of conflicts of interest in connection with risk assessment.

23. Risk assessment should incorporate the four steps of risk assessment, i.e. hazard identification, hazard characterization, exposure assessment and risk characterization.

24. Risk assessment should be based on scientific data most relevant to the national context. It should use available quantitative information to the greatest extent possible. Risk assessment may also take into account qualitative information.

25. Risk assessment should take into account relevant production, storage and handling practices used throughout the food chain including traditional practices, methods of analysis, sampling and inspection and the prevalence of specific adverse health effects.

26. Constraints, uncertainties and assumptions having an impact on the risk assessment should be explicitly considered at each step in the risk assessment and documented in a transparent manner. Expression of uncertainty or variability in risk estimates may be qualitative or quantitative, but should be quantified to the extent that is scientifically achievable.
27. Risk assessments should be based on realistic exposure scenarios, with consideration of different situations being defined by risk assessment policy. They should include consideration of susceptible and high-risk population groups. Acute, chronic (including long-term), cumulative and/or combined adverse health effects should be taken into account in carrying out risk assessment, where relevant.
28. The report of the risk assessment should indicate any constraints, uncertainties, assumptions and their impact on the risk assessment. Minority opinions should also be recorded. The responsibility for resolving the impact of uncertainty on the risk management decision lies with the risk manager, not the risk assessors.
29. The conclusion of the risk assessment including a risk estimate, if available, should be presented in a readily understandable and useful form to risk managers and made available to other risk assessors and interested parties so that they can review the assessment.

RISK MANAGEMENT

30. National government decisions on risk management, including sanitary measures taken, should have as their primary objective the protection of the health of consumers. Unjustified differences in the measures selected to address similar risks in different situations should be avoided.
31. Risk management should follow a structured approach including preliminary risk management activities⁴, evaluation of risk management options, implementation, monitoring and review of the decision taken.
32. The decisions should be based on risk assessment, and should be proportionate to the assessed risk, taking into account, where appropriate, other legitimate factors relevant for the health protection of consumers and for the promotion of fair practices in food trade, in accordance with the Criteria for the Consideration of the Other Factors Referred to in the Second Statement of Principles⁵ as they relate to decisions at the national level. National Governments should base their sanitary measures on Codex standards and related texts, where available.
33. In achieving agreed outcomes, risk management should take into account relevant production, storage and handling practices used throughout the food chain including traditional practices, methods of analysis, sampling and inspection, feasibility of enforcement and compliance, and the prevalence of specific adverse health effects.
34. Risk management should take into account the economic consequences and the feasibility of risk management options.
35. The risk management process should be transparent, consistent and fully documented. Decisions on risk management should be documented so as to facilitate a wider understanding of the risk management process by all interested parties.
36. The outcome of the preliminary risk management activities and the risk assessment should be combined with the evaluation of available risk management options in order to reach a decision on management of the risk.

⁴ For the purpose of these Principles, preliminary risk management activities are taken to include: identification of a food safety problem; establishment of a risk profile; ranking of the hazard for risk assessment and risk management priority; establishment of risk assessment policy for the conduct of the risk assessment; commissioning of the risk assessment; and consideration of the result of the risk assessment.

⁵ See *Statements of Principle Concerning the Role of Science in the Codex Decision Making Process and the Extent to which other Factors are Taken in to Account*, Procedural Manual.

37. Risk management options should be assessed in terms of the scope and purpose of risk analysis and the level of consumer health protection they achieve. The option of not taking any action should also be considered.

38. Risk management should ensure transparency and consistency in the decision-making process in all cases. Examination of the full range of risk management options should, as far as possible, take into account an assessment of their potential advantages and disadvantages. When making a choice among different risk management options, which are equally effective in protecting the health of the consumer, national governments should seek and take into consideration the potential impact of such measures on trade and select measures that are no more trade-restrictive than necessary.

39. Risk management should be a continuing process that takes into account all newly generated data in the evaluation and review of risk management decisions. The relevance, effectiveness, and impacts of risk management decisions and their implementation should be regularly monitored and the decisions and/or their implementation reviewed as necessary.

RISK COMMUNICATION

40. Risk communication should:

- i) promote awareness and understanding of the specific issues under consideration during the risk analysis;
- ii) promote consistency and transparency in formulating risk management options/recommendations;
- iii) provide a sound basis for understanding the risk management decisions proposed;
- iv) improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the risk analysis ;
- v) strengthen the working relationships among participants;
- vi) foster public understanding of the process, so as to enhance trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply;
- vii) promote the appropriate involvement of all interested parties;
- viii) exchange information in relation to the concerns of interested parties about the risks associated with food; and
- ix) respect the legitimate concern to preserve confidentiality where applicable.

41. Risk analysis should include clear, interactive and documented communication, amongst risk assessors and risk managers and reciprocal communication with all interested parties in all aspects of the process.

42. Risk communication should be more than the dissemination of information. Its major function should be to ensure that all information and opinion required for effective risk management is incorporated into the decision making process.

43. Risk communication involving interested parties should include a transparent explanation of the risk assessment policy and of the assessment of risk, including the uncertainty. The decisions taken and the procedures followed to reach them, including how the uncertainty was dealt with, should also be clearly explained. It should indicate any constraints, uncertainties, assumptions and their impact on the risk analysis, and minority opinions that had been expressed in the course of the risk assessment (see para. 28).