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| Project: | Managing food chain risks |
| Project Investigator: | Richard Shepherd |
| Duration: | 2005-08 |
| Impact Summary: | The research found that the benefits of stakeholder participation in the risk analysis process are most evident at the problem-definition and evaluation phases. Researchers developed an innovative 'fuzzy felt' visual modelling tool to facilitate participation in food chain risk identification and assessment |

Research Aims

- To investigate the extent to which stakeholder participation can improve the management and communication of risks associated with the food chain
- To design and evaluate decision support tools and processes for participatory risk management and communication which ensure that the views and values of all stakeholders are fully integrated into the management process, particularly those in the rural community

Contribution to knowledge & understanding

- Using three case studies (pesticide residues on apples & pears, campylobacter in chickens and a crisis scenario based on contaminated chicken feed), the research found that the balance of pros and cons of stakeholder participation differ according to the phase of the risk analysis process; the benefits of widespread stakeholder engagement tend to be most evident at the problem-definition and evaluation phases and the disadvantages loom much larger at the assessment phase (except in situations when stakeholders are also acting as experts)

Implications for policy & practice (e.g. recommendations)

- The findings highlight the importance of stakeholder participation in decision making around food chain risk. But also shows that communication must be done at the right time and on the basis of the right information. In order to maximise trust and credibility, the whole risk management process must be transparent, documented and open to independent review.

Applications of research for public policy/services and business performance

- Researchers developed an innovatory visual methodology to facilitate participation: the 'Fuzzy felt'. Key elements of the food chain are mapped by stakeholders using visual modelling techniques and risks identified. A web-based version allows individuals to construct and submit a model electronically

Stakeholder engagement and contribution

- Through a series of workshops the project engaged with over 150 stakeholders including members of the public, representatives from the Food Standards Agency, National Farmers Union, Pesticides Safety Directorate, Health Protection Agency, Crop Protection Association, Pesticides Residue Committee, Assured Food Standards, consultants, farmers and academics. These were involved in determining issues that were important, test different participatory processes and determine the effectiveness of different modelling techniques
- Close working with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in one case study, with FSA staff helping to facilitate a workshop
- Four presentations to stakeholders including one to FSA consumer exposure team

Stakeholder comments

"The Food Standards Agency has taken a keen interest in the RELU project (Managing Food Chain Risks). The Agency regularly reviews its incident procedures and is interested in evaluating the impact of stakeholder participation in its incident management process...The Agency was heavily involved in the preparation for the one-day incident exercise in June 2007 and provided a number of players on the day. With our extensive experience of incident related work, this helped to ensure that the exercise was as realistic as possible" (John Caseley, Incidents Branch FSA)

Soft networks (e.g. work shadowing, visiting fellowships)

- Health Protection Agency was host for work shadowing in 2006; researcher familiarised themselves with the National Surveillance Database for General Outbreaks

Securing future impact (post-project/follow-on work)

- The research led to two further projects being funded:
 - The first project is funded by NERC and investigates the methods developed in this project as part of a case study on pasteurised milk as part of the Environment and Human Health Research Programme
 - The second project is for the UK Pesticides Safety Directorate with funding from Defra to extend the modelling work developed in this project to multiple food types
- There will be further development and application of the Fuzzy Felt model as part of project researcher (Cassidy's) Relu Interdisciplinary Fellowship award: 'Investigating the badger-bTb controversy'
- 1 post-doc has continued in a research post as a Research Fellow, 1 has joined Defra's climate policy unit and 2 researchers have moved into industry