

Stakeholder Engagement in Ireland on Radioactive Contamination of Food



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Contents

- Introduction
- EURANOS Food Handbook
 - Customisation for Ireland
- PREPARE Project
 - Identifying participants
 - Meeting structure
 - Issues discussed
- Future Work

Ireland

- No nuclear facilities or research reactors
- Following a nuclear accident abroad the most significant route of potential exposure would be the consumption of contaminated food
- Most of the ingestion dose could be averted through the introduction of protective actions
- Importance of agriculture and food to Ireland's economy
 - 15% of the world's infant formula is made in Ireland
 - Ireland is the 5th largest exporter of beef in the world

Protective Actions

- We can use protective actions to
 - Reduce external dose
 - Reduce the transfer of radioactivity into food
- Or we can destroy or limit the sale of contaminated food

BUT

- What are the socio-economic implications?
- Will the protective actions be accepted by farmers, producers, retailers and consumers?
- How can we reassure the markets/public?

EURANOS Food Handbook

- In 2009, a multi-disciplinary group was set up to customise the EURANOS food handbook for Irish conditions – the IRISH Food Handbook
- This group currently comprised agricultural, sea fishery protection, veterinary, food safety, environmental protection and radiation protection experts.

PREPARE Project

- WP3 – development of strategies, guidance and tools for the management of contaminated goods taking into the account the views of producers, processing and retail industries and consumers
- Each country involved in WP3 setting up a panel
- Irish panel objective – “To investigate the issues involved in placing Irish produced foodstuffs (meat, dairy and crops) in the marketplace (at home and abroad) following contamination from a nuclear accident abroad”

Starting Stakeholder Engagement

- Use EURANOS customisation group as a starting point
- Identify organisations – quite easy, identify representatives – much harder
- How to get potential panel members interested?

Setting up a Panel

- Identify stakeholders
- Obtain contacts
- Issue invitations to participate in the panel
- Organise first meeting – date, venue etc.
- Organise a facilitator to chair the meeting
- Decide on issues to be discussed
- Develop agenda for the meeting
- Issue invitations and provide background material

Panel Members

- Majority of participants had no background in radiation or radioactive contamination – made clear that this was not a pre-requisite
- All participants are either involved in emergency preparedness and response or are involved in the food industry in Ireland and have insight into food contamination issues e.g. Dioxins in pork and BSE

Organisations

Government Departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM)• Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government (DECLG)
State Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RPII/ now EPA Office of Radiological Protection• Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)
Dairy Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irish Dairy Industries Association (IDIA)• Irish Dairy Board (IDB)
Farming Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irish Farmers Association (IFA)
Meat Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meat Industry Ireland (MII)
Crops Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teagasc• Irish Grain and Feed Association (IGFA)
Seafood Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sea Fisheries Protection Agency (SFPA)
Retail Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tesco• Musgrave Group
Consumer Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consumer Association of Ireland

Material Circulated Prior to Meetings

- Briefing notes circulated prior to meetings
 - the potential impact of a nuclear accident abroad on Ireland,
 - the National Emergency Plan for Nuclear Accidents,
 - EU maximum permitted levels of radioactive contamination in foodstuffs following a nuclear accident
 - case study on the Irish experience of dealing with a food dioxin contamination crisis
 - outcomes from the other PREPARE panels in Europe
 - examples of protective actions that could be introduced in Ireland to reduce the activity concentrations in meat, milk and crops intended for sale.

Location for Meetings

- National Emergency Co-ordination Centre
 - Strategic response centre where all relevant Government Departments and Agencies convene if a major emergency occurs
 - Central location so easily accessible
 - Interesting venue
 - Appropriate size for panel



Meeting duration and structure

- Duration – 3 hours (10 am to 1 pm followed by lunch)
- Structure
 - Short presentations e.g. the impact of the Chernobyl and Fukushima accidents, an overview of a risk assessment on the potential radiological implications for Ireland of the proposed nuclear power plants in the UK
 - Panel discussions on two or three topics

Facilitator

- Market research company facilitated meetings
 - No background in the topic
 - Understood objectives
 - Skilled in stakeholder engagement
 - Made best use of the time - kept discussions on track
 - Ensured everyone had the opportunity to contribute
 - Viewed as neutral
 - Took notes and prepared summary reports of the meetings

Meetings

- Two to date (May and October 2014)
- Approximately 20 participants at each meeting
- Invited speaker at 2nd meeting - food management options in the UK using the Windscale fire in 1957 as a case study
- First meeting – discussions on issues surrounding the contamination of food, protective actions that could be implemented to reduce radioactivity in food and the impact on trade if food was contaminated following a nuclear accident
- Second meeting - feasibility of various protective actions

Outcomes – Shared Purpose

- Even an accident at the nearest nuclear power plant in the UK will not cause significant radiation exposure to people in Ireland or result in immediate health effects
- Since agriculture and food exports are very important to the Irish economy, these must both be protected following a nuclear accident abroad
- Although the panel of experts brought together to discuss this issue were representing their own sector's interests they had a common objective of protecting the food industry in Ireland and ensuring food products were fit for consumption

Key Issues - Communications

- Communication paths must be clear to avoid confusion and ensure the public/industry are not receiving mixed messages
- Key stakeholders in the food industry must be notified directly quickly - not receiving information from the media
- Development of pre-prepared key messages
- Who should deliver the communication?
- The language used should be non-technical and the risks explained by comparison with everyday examples and familiar concepts

Key Issues – Protective Actions

- Feasibility of the action e.g. use of AFCF – availability, how much and how often and to which animals.
- Time of year in which contamination occurs
- Availability of clean feed
- Implications for trade (Ireland and abroad – 90% of milk and beef is exported)
- Communications with farmers and consumers
- Associated costs and effect on farmers' incomes
- Labelling of food

Future Work

- Important to keep panel going now that the hard work has been done in setting it up
- Frequency of meetings – one per year (sufficient to maintain contact without becoming a burden to members)
- Ireland's National Emergency Plan for Nuclear Accidents (NEPNA) is currently undergoing a review and the outcomes from this stakeholder engagement process will feed into the review