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Risk-based meat inspection and
integrated meat safety assurance

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Views from stakeholders and national contact points (NCP)

From your perspective, which are the main knowledge gaps in the context of meat safety assurance system that the scientific research should address to support the implementation of a modern meat control system in Europe?

Data on the basic microbiology of meat (carcasses, primals and retail cuts) including the fate of pathogenic bacteria along the meat chain is limited, as becomes clear when trying to undertake a modelling approach to assess the potential impact of, for example, alternative carcass chilling regimes or specific interventions on pathogen reduction and the overall risk to the consumer. Moreover, NGS technologies offer us a great opportunity to better understand how other bacteria in the microbiota affect pathogen survival and perhaps how some of these, especially lactic acid bacteria, could be harnessed to improve food safety (Declan Bolton, Teagasc Food Research Centre, University College Dublin).



How can motivation and financial incentives be used to achieve Risk Based Meat inspection and Integrated Meat Safety Assurance in Europe?

Every food processor is legally and morally obliged to produce safe food, which should be sufficient to ensure meat processors and regulators implement the most effective meat safety assurance systems. Risk based meat inspection, where standards and inspection activities are based on a scientific knowledge of the risks, are more effective than traditional approaches that focused on identifying and removing abnormalities or carcass/organ condemnation during post-mortem examination. The financial incentive is profit that accrues when retailers and their customers have confidence in the quality and safety of meat, knowing these have been assured using risk-based meat inspection. (Declan Bolton, Teagasc Food Research Centre, University College Dublin)

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What results would you wish from RIBMINS?

It would be useful, if the RIBMINS project could outline cost-effective checks and audits veterinarians and food business operators could apply in practice. They will need to be adaptable and ideally, lead to suggestions on how to solve problems. FVE believes that effective meat safety controls should advance relying on the enhanced use of the food chain information and an improved collection & communication of inspection results ([FCI/CCIR](#) – FVE guidance). In such a framework, risk-based meat safety controls can contribute to an improved health, welfare and profitability on farms through reduced costs of treating diseases and production losses. Additionally, they can enhance consumers trust in safe food.

(Thierry Chambon, Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE))



Considering the EU meat safety assurance system, which are the initiatives that from your perspective should be promoted or developed to establish a valuable relationship between science, competent authorities and industry?

European countries share the same legislation; however, practices and systems vary considerably. To foster valuable relationship between science, competent authorities and industry, FVE believes in the need to work in partnership. This partnership should include all food-chain partners, including farmers. Besides, pilot projects could be considered to enhance corporation and to raise awareness of scientifically evaluated good practices. FVE strongly believes in the need for data and transparency towards society. The RIBMINS project can help to translate the complex science around meat safety assurance systems into understandable messages for consumers. FVE thanks RIBMINS for the great work done and suggests a wide dissemination of the project outcomes. (Thierry Chambon, Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE))

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From your perspective, which are the main knowledge gaps in the context of meat safety assurance system that the scientific research should address to support the implementation of a modern meat control system in Europe?

There are two important issues to be addressed. First, foodborne bacteria. The evaluation of feasible harmonised epidemiological indicators that should be used by FBO to mitigate risk to consumers, as well as definition of feasible and cost-effective procedures that may be used to reduce contamination at animal and carcass level. Second, the risk-based meat inspection. The implementation of harmonised additional procedures based on risk analysis, at the national level, to detect and control some important diseases (E.g. Tuberculosis, Fasciolosis, Cysticercosis) during meat inspection, taking into account the national reality of these diseases.

(Susana Santos, General Directorate for Food and Veterinary (National contact point in Portugal of RIBMINS); Madalena Vieira-Pinto, University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (National contact point in Portugal of RIBMINS)



***(Top: Madalena Vieira-Pinto;
Down: Susana Santos)***

How can motivation and financial incentives be used to achieve Risk Based Meat inspection and Integrated Meat Safety Assurance in Europe?

Regarding motivation, it is necessary to have scientific-based information that must be cost-effective for FBO and OV. The incentive for improvement should be phased in, prioritising the most important hazards so that operators can gradually adapt. The dissemination of good results obtained by FBOs that have implemented good practices can also motivate other FBOs to implement these good practices, especially if these good results have led to trade advantages (e.g. exports to third countries). Regarding financial incentives, they must be very clear and objective, and should be based on prioritizing the most important hazards so that operators can gradually adapt.

(Susana Santos, General Directorate for Food and Veterinary (National contact point in Portugal of RIBMINS); Madalena Vieira-Pinto, University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (National contact point in Portugal of RIBMINS)

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Considering the EU meat safety assurance system, which are the initiatives that from your perspective should be promoted or developed to establish a valuable relationship between science, competent authorities and industry?

It is important that meat safety systems are tailored to the individual production, since meat production is highly diverse depending on the animal species, the type of products produced, the country disease profile etc. A relationship between science, competent authorities and industry that builds on clear division of roles, mutual understanding of the working scope, good cooperation and trust is essential to support further development of a balanced meat industry that is able to handle present and future challenges. We just could repeat what RIBMINS-website highlights as Research coordination objectives and the Capacity objectives which is so to speak very well known "among us involved" - what could certainly be an additional task would be an accompanying professional communication both for "newcomers" to make them aware as well as for other interested parties - this was thankfully started with this newsletter and has our full support.



(Karsten Maier, European Livestock and Meat Trades Union)

Which are the main challenges that the meat safety control system and meat industry are facing during the current COVID-19 pandemic in Europe?

In general the sector was like all in the food-sector specifically hidden by extremely market challenges due to the closure of the HoReCa – including changes of consumption habits - and still is due to closure of events being important for meat consumption as well. But for this article we will focus on the specific issues of the slaughterhouses.

One first challenge seen during the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe was keeping the slaughterhouses functioning, when cases occurred, and workers had to be quarantined. Further we simply had to put in place protocols so that social distancing was respected, and we had to tackle the supply chain for masks, sanitizer etc as core of our hygiene rules. In the beginning it was an issue for the transport of workers as often sites are not deserved by public transport but rather by a system put in place by companies or by car-sharing, or, as an other example, companies had to multiply busses.

This issue was similar for the pauses and catering which was forbidden and had to be newly organized. In some companies, they foresaw different times for lunch.

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Workers had to be systematically tested so capacities were built up but sometimes in the beginning authorities were against. Factories had to quarantine in case of positive but also in case of contact with positive cases at work or in the family until the result of the test was available.

Clusters were in plants where the air is chilled, like in cutting plants. After organizing scientific research, a system of more powerful filters has been explored and we managed to communicate even on European level via being able to join a EU-meeting usually foreseen only for representatives of EU- Member States.

Second, challenges linked to safety of meat had been tackled for example to make clear and communicate what EFSA, UN or national institutes made clear luckily professionally from the very beginning: that there is no contamination of meat or packaging even esp. China asked for specific confirmations.

Third topic was the handling of reduced physical availability of Official Controllers and to make sure nevertheless no lowering of controls.

(Karsten Maier, European Livestock and Meat Trades Union)