



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Risk communication for food safety poses unique challenges

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Risk communication

- Informs about the existence, nature, severity or acceptability of risks
- Dialogue, two-way communication vs dissemination?
- Food is the third most urgent basic human need (after air and water)
- Food safety risks exist along every step of the supply chain
→ Food Safety is everyone's business
- Includes all people: consumers, media, risk managers, assessors, producers, etc.
→ every single person is recipient and communicator

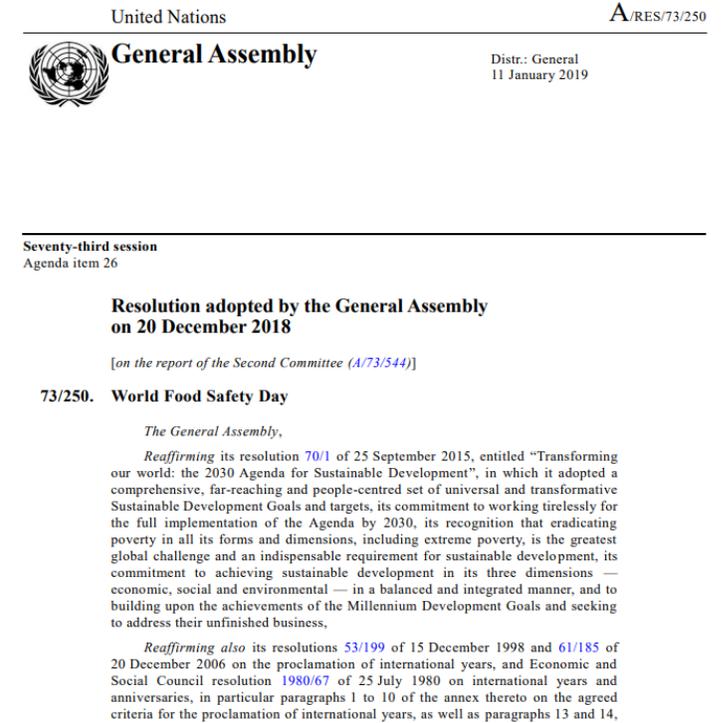


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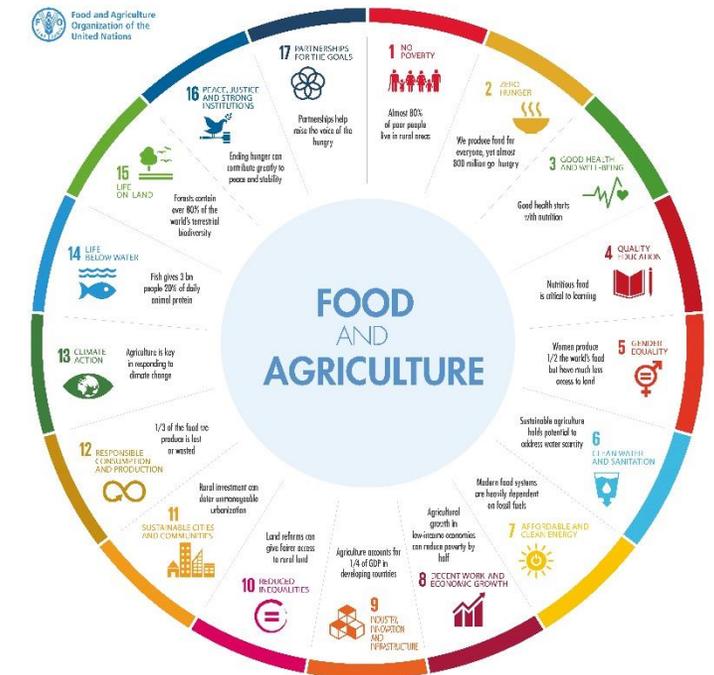
So, food safety is everyone's business....why?

- Aptly put by UNGA when it proclaimed World Food Safety Day to occur every year on 7 June (UN resolution 73/250), in particular to help raise awareness (risk communication) noting that
 - “there is no food security without food safety, and that in a world where the food supply chain has become more complex, any adverse food safety incident may have global negative effects on public health, trade and the economy”
 - “improving food safety contributes positively to trade, employment and poverty alleviation”.
 - “the global burden of foodborne diseases is considerable and affects individuals of all ages, in particular children under 5 years of age, and persons living in low-income regions of the world”



Food is life (Sustainable Development Goals)

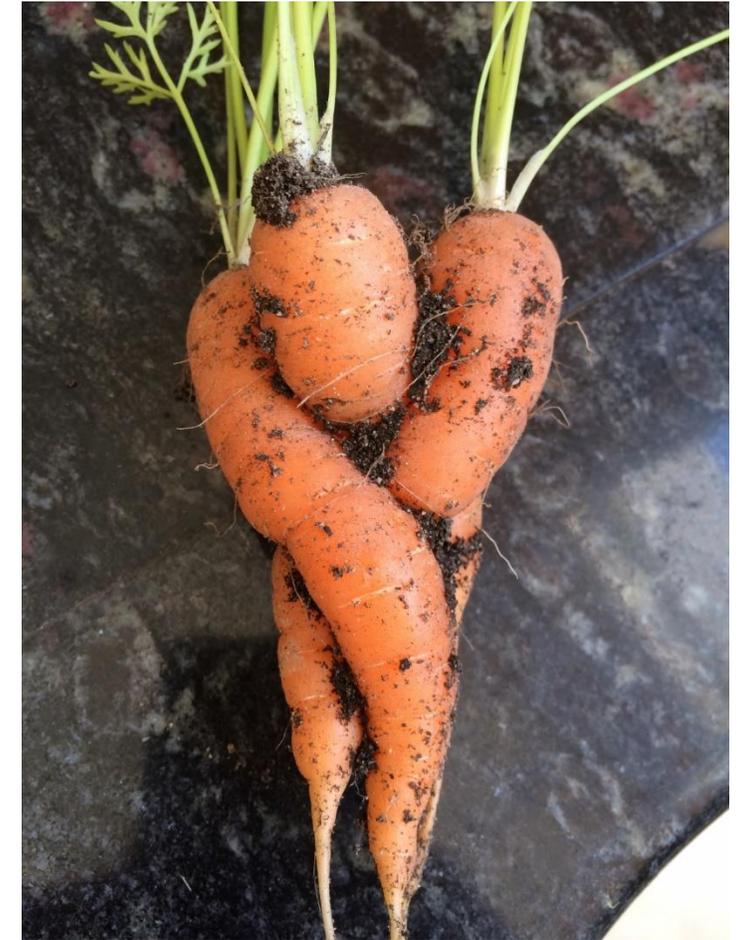
- Alleviate poverty (SDG 1); as a nation develops, food is often among the first products to be traded internationally; only safe food allows access to trade and helps alleviate poverty;
- Zero Hunger (SDG 2): There is no food security without food safety.
- Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3): Food safety has a direct impact on people's health and nutritional intake.
- Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12): Strengthening regulatory, scientific and technological capacities to ensure that food is safe and of the expected quality, will lead to increase sustainability of food production and consumption.
- Partnerships to achieve the Goals (SDG 17): A globalized world with annual food exports currently in excess of USD 1.6 trillion and complex food systems demands international cooperation across sectors to ensure food is safe. Food safety is a shared responsibility among governments, food industries, producers and consumers.





Food is love

- Food is intimate; it becomes part of us.
- Food is passion; we have strong likes and dislikes.
- Food is a way to communicate.
 - Many hours filled with passionate and engaged discussions, and almost every language has a saying for food being the means to gain the affection of another person.
 - Most of us express ourselves through food choices we make. We choose the food to celebrate a special occasion very carefully.
 - We take extra care and pride in providing our children with good, healthy and, above all, safe food.
 - And many find great satisfaction in seeing others enjoy the food they prepared.
- Food is intimately woven in the fabric of our lives, food is unique, no other consumer product compares to it.



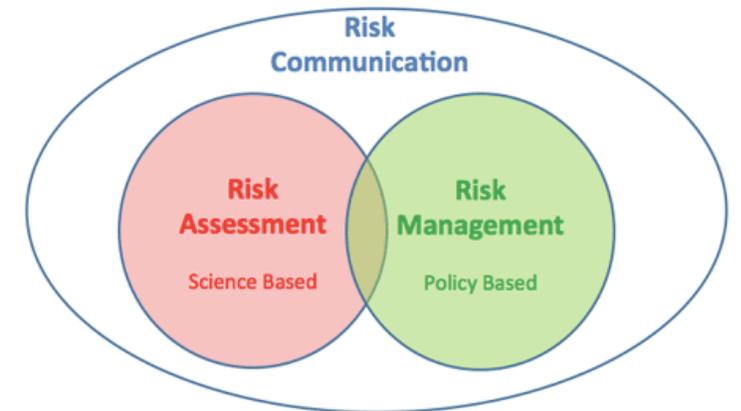
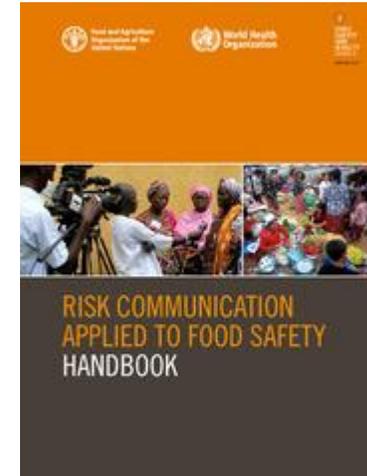
Food is safe?

- The word food implies food safety
 - If it is not safe, it is not food.
 - There is no food security without food safety
 - Unsafe food becomes waste
- Yet, we have no choice, we all have to eat every day.
- Normalization of Deviance (Diane Vaughan): “Social normalization of deviance means that people ... become so much accustomed to a deviation that they don’t consider it as deviant, despite the fact that they far exceed their own rules for the elementary safety.”
- Learned helplessness: behavior exhibited by a subject after enduring repeated aversive stimuli beyond their control.



Risk communication for food safety

- Food is unlike any other consumer product, it is not optional for any single person
- Food is psychologically deeply interwoven into the fabric of humans
- Food safety failures quickly triggers feeling of betrayal and similar strong emotional reaction, which makes it an easy target for click bait
- Food safety is extremely complex: chemical, microbiological, physical, radiological hazards are manifold
- Food safety and food authenticity is based on trust, and when trust erodes through mislabeling or food fraud (incl consumer expectation), all trust in all supply chain actors erodes





The way forward

- I wish the path was clearer
- We cannot deviate from science as the foundation of risk communication (truthfulness of information)
- Risk communication cannot rest only on the notion that scientific facts will convince (they simply don't by themselves); scientific truthfulness is an absolute requirement, but it is never sufficient
- Science is not enough; science does not speak to emotions (food is emotional)
- We all have to play our part, we all have to participate in risk communication regarding food and food safety
- We need to reshape our approaches in communicating with regard to food safety and we ideas and input from everyone



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Thank you