

PERCEPTION OF FOOD SAFETY – ITS DEPENDENCE ON INTERESTS, VALUES AND CONTEXTS

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PARADOX OF FOOD SAFETY

- People are in general concerned about their own health
- To get meat and food products which are free of pathogens is an important measure to protect one's own health
- However, in everyday life people don't seem to be much concerned about the safety of the food they buy

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AIM OF THIS TALK

Will in the paradox try to answer the following two questions:

1. Why are people not much concerned about the safety of the food they buy?
2. What incentives are needed to increase food safety?

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WHY ARE PEOPLE NOT MUCH CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAFETY OF THE FOOD THEY BUY?



IS IT RIGHT THAT PEOPLE ARE NOT CONCERNED?

- Of course, it depends on how you ask
- However, there are good reasons to believe that consumers are not motivated much by concerns for food safety when they go shopping



I must admit I do not think about the country of origin[as a cue for safety]. I just put my trust in it being okay. . . otherwise I have to treat the meat properly myself; that way I have nothing to worry about.

(Korzen et al. in press)



IS IT RIGHT THAT PEOPLE ARE NOT CONCERNED?

- Of course, it depends on how you ask
- However, there are good reasons to believe that consumers are not motivated much by concerns for food safety when they go shopping
- Well they may be concerned – but not in the way experts expect them to be



WHY?

- Consumer versus citizen perspective
- Differences in risk perception
- Differences in risk strategies



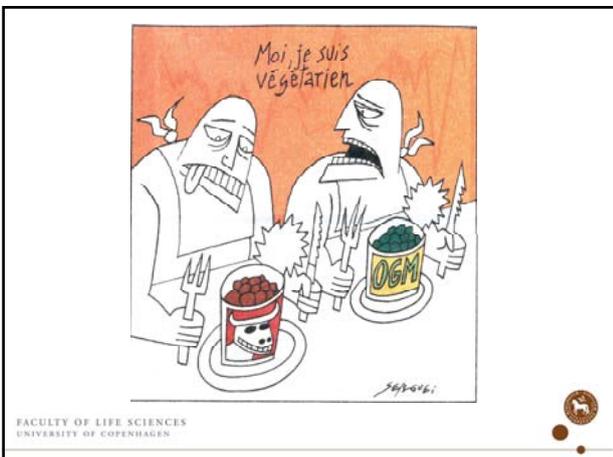




TWO DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF RISKS

- Experts in food safety will typically view food-borne risks as a one-dimensional affair:
 - Risk = effect x probability
- For lay persons risks have several dimensions:
 - uncertainty
 - dread
 - catastrophic potential
 - controllability
 - fairness
 - ...





INTERVIEWS WITH LAY PERSONS AND ZONOSIS EXPERTS

- **Lay person:** Person who is not an expert and is not employed in the food sector
- **Population:** 11 persons from Viborg, Kbh./Frb. & NV Fyn.
- **Expert:** Person who on a daily basis deals professionally with zoonotic risks
- **Population:** 13 persons from industry, public authorities, research & NGOs



PRIORITIES OF EXPERTS

- **Generally focus on preventing diseases in the most efficient way ...**
- **But little awareness of own value judgements**
- **Awareness of the "political reality":**
 - Preventing people from dying is very important (BSE)
 - Fight zoonoses in the primary production (use of radiation ... is not acceptable)
 - Customers are always right



LAY VIEW ON ZONOSSES RISKS

- **Limited knowledge**
- **Greater diversity of views than among experts**
- **Main focus on seriousness of consequences**
- **Frequencies and probabilities only mentioned by a few**
- **Personal experience and media reports play a role (the chocolate cake)**
- **Assessment based on several parameters**



"BSE/vCJD IS THE WORST"

Anne: "One can also die from Salmonella, Tuberculosis and Botulism ... but Creutzfeldt-Jakob [...] seems to be a disease one can build up over long time and then suddenly it shows up with lethal effect ... without particular warning, while the other three after all show some symptoms in the beginning, right? ... which makes it possible to get treatment in time; and there is apparently no real treatment for Creutzfeldt-Jakob, so ... that must make it the most dangerous ..."



"SALMONELLA I CAN AVOID"

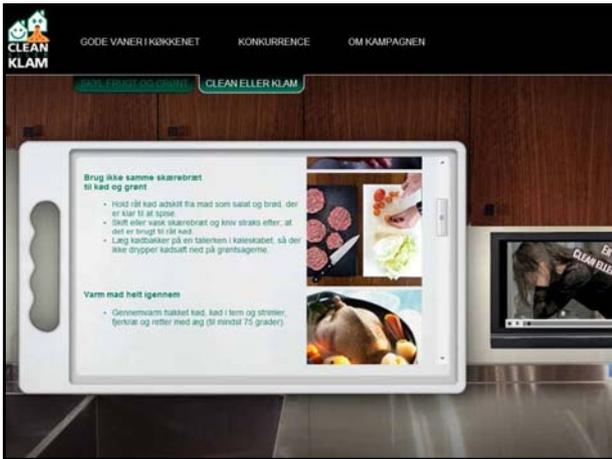
Susanne: "So that one [i.e. BSE/vCJD] is probably the worst one, because it is something in the meat you can't avoid. Salmonella I can avoid by cooking the meat properly and sterilise the things when I have been working with the meat, and the eggs ... I can also ... abstain from eating soft-boiled eggs [...]"



PARAMETERS FROM THE LAY PERSPECTIVE

- For lay persons the following things matter when assessing a zoonotic risk:
 - Is it lethal?
 - Is there a chance of cure and/or recovery?
 - Is the zoonosis "natural" or is it caused by intensive agriculture?
 - Is there anyone to blame?
 - Is there anything you can do yourself?





RISK STRATEGIES

- Kitchen hygiene
- Buy from your local butcher
- Buy organic
- ...

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WHAT INCENTIVES ARE NEEDED TO INCREASE FOOD SAFETY?

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HOW TO INCREASE FOOD SAFETY?

- Through labelling + consumer demand for the labelled products
- Through voluntary initiatives taken by food producers and retailers
- Through regulation backed up by control
- Through liability of food producers and retailers



WHAT ABOUT THE INCENTIVES?

- So far market driven attempts to increase food safety via special labels have had very little success
- Food producers and retailers – as a rule – only take “voluntary” initiatives when they linked to economic incentives
- Public control of food safety is constantly struggling with limited resources and limited powers
- In Europe so far liability has played a minor role as an incentive to increase food safety



WAYS TO STRENGTHEN INCENTIVES

- Intelligent campaigns and marketing may make some consumers willing to buy food with food safety labels
- To protect reputation and brands food producers and retailers may go some way towards stepping up voluntary initiatives



CONCLUSIONS

- **People seem care less about food safety than it would be prudent of them to do**
- **This can be explained in various ways**
- **To sustain and improve food safety we need to look at incentives for the different stakeholders to step up their efforts**
- **Stepping up incentives across the food chain is the only way forward**