



ABSTRACT

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Scientific Issues Related to Codex Goals

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Public (Mis-)Perception of Food Risks

"In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes," Benjamin Franklin noted in 1789, on the eve of the French Revolution. What Franklin meant was that everything in life is uncertain and laden with risks, and we are constantly at the mercy of such uncertainty. Instead of trying to digest this uncertainty and considering actual evidence, however, people make decisions about what constitutes healthy (or dangerous) food, as well as decisions about health more generally, are often based on faith, which provides an illusory comfort of certainty. Frequently, people are most afraid of things that are barely a threat to them - and politicians and regulatory authorities respond correspondingly. One example is the BSE crisis, which created huge waves both in the general population and in politics. Beef consumption plunged temporarily, yet it turned out that humans were not really endangered. Much more severe food risks, such as salmonella poisoning, do not even remotely receive the same attention, and there are plenty of other examples for a gap between perceived and actual risks. The presentation aims to identify i) the underlying causes of risk (mis-)perception, and ii) potential solutions for how risks could be communicated more effectively, both of which are crucial for informed policy decisions and their public acceptance.