

Organisation and management of enforcement laboratories

APA conference

Based on FLEP Aarhus Sept 2009

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First round examined:

- Competence;
 - (included Accreditation, equipment and performance in External Proficiency trials)
- Qualifications of experts; and,
- Sampling ratios.

Breakdown of responses

- 52 responses
- 2 composite (Belgium and France)
- 19 Hungary (and composite information provided)
- 6 Ireland
- 6 England & Wales
- 6 Germany
- 3 Scotland
- 3 Greece
- 2 Portugal
- 1 Cyprus, Denmark, Netherlands, Malta and Sweden
- 51 Control labs
- 17 NRL
- 2 CRL
- 36 Chemical (and other)
- 8 Pesticides
- 4 Microbiological only (one composite for 12 English labs)
- 30 offered microbiological testing
- 3 Soil
- 1 Radio-analytical
- 49 provided food analysis
- 22 provided animal feed analysis



Statistical validity

- 12 out of 27 Member States responded (44%)
- Total of 276.3M people ~ 56% of the EU population
- Guesstimate ~ 25% of EU labs were covered by the responses
- The data give a strong indication. The response facilitates hypothesis formulation and enables further informed questioning and some trend information. Overall this is a very good return considering the complexities of the EU and the language barriers.

General Comments

- All are involved in sampling plans.
- 9 labs take their own samples.
- Most stated that they have a definition of adequate facilities.
- Control labs in Cyprus, Germany, Netherlands and UK also provide consumer safety testing.

Competence

- Legislative framework:
 - EN ISO/IEC 17025
- Findings
 - Q9 Do you hold EN ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation?
 - 47 responded yes, they have ISO 17025 accreditation (5 Hungarian responded no *)
- Recommendations
 - All enforcement laboratories must be accredited to EN ISO/IEC 17025

Competence (2)

Generic or flexible scopes

- Legislation:
 - Accreditation may relate to individual tests or groups of tests.
- Findings:
 - Q12 Is accreditation for each analytical method sought separately?
 - 44 responded yes
 - 28 labs do not seek any flexible/generic accreditation.
 - Q 13 Does your laboratory have accreditation which covers a number of methods e.g. a generic protocol?
 - 23 responded yes
- Interim recommendations:
 - Continue with flexible scopes and
 - FLEP request that the following work is undertaken:
 - Propose a guidance on the topic of flexible scope and accrediting a group of tests



Competence (3)

External proficiency

- Legislation:

- Not covered in the legislation but a requirement of accreditation schemes throughout the EU relate to individual tests or groups of tests.

- Findings:

- Q 34 Do you take part in external proficiency trials? 48 responded yes.
- All laboratories who gave details were successful $\sim 98\%$; $Z \leq \pm 2$ in external proficiency trials

- Interim recommendations:

- To continue to remain as a control laboratory all laboratories undertaking enforcement work must take part in external proficiency trials to a satisfactory standard $Z \leq \pm 2$
- FLEP request that the following questions are answered:
 - Should every test require a proficiency trial? And if so how often?
 - If flexible scopes are employed how should a group of tests should be involved in proficiency tests?
 - How should corrective action, in case of an unsuccessful proficiency test, be taken?

Qualifications of experts

- Legislation:
 - Not covered in the legislation (covered in Member States own legislation)
- Findings:
 - Germany and UK very similar, Masters degree and certified experience.
 - Portugal and France panel of experts outside of the laboratory.
 - Hungary and others engage chemists, pharmacists, microbiologists, biologists, veterinarian qualifications
- Interim recommendations:
 - FLEP request that further research is undertaken:
 - towards harmonised qualifications throughout the EU.

Sampling ratios based on 2008 figures

- Legislation:
 - Food composition - sample rates per 1000 population,
- Findings:
 - Cyprus 81 samples per 1000 population*
 - Hungary 7.2 food samples/1000 people²
 - Malta 6 samples per 1000 population*
 - Belgium 5 Samples per 1000 population*
 - Germany 5 samples per 1000 population (*agreed standard*)
 - Netherlands 3.5 samples per 1000 population²
 - Scotland 3 samples per 1000 population²
 - UK <1 sample per 1000 population²
 - EU average 6 samples per 1000 population

Sampling ratios and VFM

- Difficult area:
- What does effective enforcement look like?
 - No of samples (water regulations)
 - Levels of failure
 - RASFF etc
- How can we increase numbers of samples and should we?

Sampling ratios and value for money, outputs or inputs?

- If we agree that within the EU the risk of food and feed is more or less at the same level, monitoring of these risks should be at a same (minimum) level as well: a recommended minimum sample per population could be calculated for food or feed/food

Interim Recommendations:

- FLEP require that further research into the failure and sampling rates across EU is undertaken and that VFM is further considered.

Collaboration

- **Legislation:**
 - Sharing expertise is the responsibility of NRL and CRL and
 - welcomed by scientists who value peer review and further development of ideas etc.
- **Findings:**
 - Q 33 Do you exchange analytical methods (validated or otherwise) between labs?
 - 32 of the labs answering this question stated that they would share validated methods, in all of these cases there was no competition for work through tendering.
 - 10 responded no - none of the English labs (excluding HPA) share validated methods freely.
 - The situation in Scotland has recently changed, market forces are being applied through competition and as a result labs are no longer working together to provide regionalised LIMS or sharing methods.
- **Recommendations (perhaps more of a comment):**
 - EU needs to recognise that the introduction of tendering will probably lead to labs failing to collaborate which will make the legislation behind NRLs sharing methods etc more difficult to enforce if they adopt this philosophy.
 - Laboratories need to be able to develop new methods and respond to new developments some of these are expensive and perhaps a free-market approach hampers the ability of enforcement to be flexible and responsive.



The next steps

- Round two, an additional questionnaire which (further) examines:
 - Definition of adequate facilities
 - Qualifications of experts
 - Ratio of samples per population/VFM
- Considers how to move some issues forward (turn interim recommendations into working recommendations) and
- Final recommendations to FLEP

Depressed yet?

- The financial pressures on local authorities.....reduced the money available to enforcement laboratories.
- Reducing enforcement budgets and tendering procedures have forced analytical prices down to the extent that laboratories have been closing.
- The Food Standards Agency has made money available to local authorities to increase their sampling effort, but in some instances local authorities have reduced their analysis budgets to “accommodate” the FSA money.
- The enforcement authorities continually want more services provided but awarding contracts to the lowest bidder leaves insufficient resource for laboratories to invest in the technology required to service new food safety legislation.
- Food standards, imported food, safety of food stuffs, were not seen as a national priority by the Rogers review and are not CPA targets.
- There is a general concern amongst Chief Trading Standards Officers about this position but a recognition that at a local level food enforcement does not have a high enough priority to achieve additional funding from their own local authority, or a greater share of existing funding that goes to the local service.
- The Society’s view is that the reduction over a period of years in spending on food enforcement is regrettable but in the light of local and national priorities and a backdrop of tighter budgets, very understandable.

- Revelation?
- No S*it Sherlock!



Trends in Global Food Incidents

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Sources:

RASFF EU

FDA US

EFSA

Food Safety and Inspection Service (US Dept. Agri.)

FSA UK

FSA Ireland

LGC database – 11 month to Nov 2007: **Seafood study**

RASFF – all alerts: May '03 – Aug '08: **Network study**



Hampshire
County Council

AIMS

1. To analyse trends in global food alerts
2. To provide a user-friendly tool to inform “emerging” nations of patterns in global alerts
3. In the longer term, to develop a tool that analyses data in ‘real’ time to warn of emerging incidents on a weekly basis