French cuisine, risk assessment and communication

BfR
June 2014
ANSES: creation and missions

- ANSES was created on the 1st of July 2010 through the merger of AFSSA (French food safety agency) with AFSSET (French agency for occupational and environmental health)

- Recommend public health measures
- Assess nutritional and health risks and benefits
- Conduct public health monitoring missions
- Conduct, coordinate and initiate research projects
- Conduct laboratory reference missions
- Provide training and information and contribute to public debate
- Authorise marketing of veterinary medicinal products
- Collaborate with European and international agencies
How French cuisine impacts risk communication (and risk assessment)
The French eat strange foods

- French consumption survey (INCA 2, 2006)
  - % of snail eaters:
    - 1.6%
    - Average: 50g/week
    - P 95: 150g/week

- % of frogs leg eaters:
  - 0.4%
  - Mean: 71g/week
  - P 95: 168g/week
The French eat lots of wine and cheese

- French consumption survey (INCA 2, 2006)
  - % of cheese eaters:
    - 90%
    - Average: 235g/week
    - P 95: 600g/week
  - % of wine drinkers:
    - 55%
    - Mean: 1L/week
    - P 95: 3.5L/week
Three assertions

1. All the French eat gourmet meals
2. Food is more than just food
3. Food is a "secular religion"
4. Can risk communication on food be strictly scientific?
French gourmet meal assertion no.1

• All the French eat gourmet meals
  – Not just the "happy few"
  – A legacy of the French Revolution:
    • Ideal of "happiness for all"
  – The elegant manners of the high society meal have trickled down to the working classes.
French gourmet meal assertion no.2

- Food is more than just food
  - The French gourmet meal is a social practice, bringing together groups to celebrate important moments in life.
  - Strengthens social ties;
  - A feeling of belonging and continuity with French tradition;
  - Reinforced by the view of foreigners, who consider food as a marker of French identity.
French gourmet meal assertion no.3

• Food is a "secular religion"
  – A search for purity
    • The "unadulterated" product
    • The "essence of nature"
  – A ritual
    • Numerous courses/
aesthetic considerations
    • Food and wine pairing
From the gourmet meal to the everyday meal

• Rare data
  – What is the influence of gastronomy?
  – Few international comparisons between food practices exist

• Hypothesis
  – Strong influence and consequences
French food conservatism

• **Recent study on eating habits by 2020**
  
  *(Vitagora, unpublished)*
  
  – The Germans will eat more raw foods,
  – The Japanese will eat more "cosmeto-foods",
  – The French won’t change anything!
    » Tradition, local products
    » See no need for innovation in food

• **Highly conservative:**
  
  • Distrust of new products (GMOs, industrial foods, etc.)
  • Dietary minorities (vegetarians, etc.) and new eating trends (snacking, etc.) seen as a threat to the French identity
    – They hinder convivial meal-sharing practices
Food is pleasure, not risk

- Technical information and recommendations about food risks are often misinterpreted:
  - Seen as a "medicalization" of food practices
  - A loss of French identity
    - *The French Consumer Committee reports that TV spots on food hygiene are the only ones with negative feedback*
  - When recommendations target a particular population subgroup, they are seen as isolating these individuals from the community
    - "pregnancy is not an illness!"
  - Limited effects of "fish recommendation"
Raw/unprepared and cooked foods

• Seeking the unadulterated taste of foods
  – By cooking them to the extreme in order to extract their “essence”:
    • The art of sauce making
  – By presenting certain products as they are found in nature:
    • Raw or lightly cooked meats
20% of French adults eat raw beef, and 15% eat raw fish, at least occasionally (from once a week to once a month).
40% of the French eat beefburgers rare or medium rare (20% in the US)

The better the cuts of meat, the less they are cooked
Reducing the health burden of E. Coli epidemics in France

Implement new regulation in industries

Example: Systematic testing of minced meat:
More than 40% decrease in E coli epidemics

Improve consumer information:
• labelling
• TV
• School education, etc.

Good cooking practices
100% decrease in theory
30% of the global burden

Reality: ????
A french tendency?
For more information, please visit:

www.anses.fr