

Preface

The emergence of new pathogens, changes in the food system, and increased food-product trade all led to increased attention to food-safety issues during the 1990s. A number of countries implemented new food-safety regulations, including the EU Food Safety Law of 2002. Food industry is increasing efforts to certify food safety and reassure consumers. In this context, economic research during the last decade has begun to explore the costs, benefits, and trade-offs in food-safety improvement.

Food-safety economics is a new research field, which needs a solid framework of concepts, procedures and data to support the decision-making process in food-safety improvement. Food safety is a theme that plays at many levels in the community: at the consumer level, at the farm or business level, at the supply-chain level, nationally and internationally. Moreover, there are a lot of aspects involved in food safety and still a lot of questions are unanswered.

In order to frame a research agenda to meet the challenges facing industry and government, invited experts from around the world were invited to a workshop in April 2002 at Wageningen University and Research Centre in order to review the state of the art. The purpose of the workshop was to learn where and how economics can contribute to emerging policies and strategies for food-safety improvement. In the EU, the public desire for greater food-safety assurance is evoking response from both the food industry and policymakers. These responses take place within the context of changes in EU membership, in agricultural policies, and in scientific knowledge about risks. The primary focus of the workshop was on food-safety economics for animal products.

Format of the Book

The workshop was organized around the key principles outlined in the EU White Paper on Food Safety, as these will guide future developments in the EU and other parts of the world. These principles include a focus on consumer welfare, responsibility for food safety from farm to table, the use of risk analysis to design standards, prevention of hazards through the use of HACCP, implementation of traceability to ensure monitoring, and transparency of standards in international trade.

The chapters in the book are organized into four sections around these themes. Within each theme area, the chapters include different perspectives and approaches to the issues. The papers address the state of the art, areas for new research, and areas where knowledge from other scientific disciplines is needed. At the workshop, general discussions among all participants and identification of new research directions took place within each theme area. The results of these discussions are reported in the overview chapter, which also provides a summary of the chapters and presentations.

The organizers

The workshop was organized by Frontis – Wageningen International Nucleus for Strategic Expertise, and the Farm Management Group of the Department of Social Sciences, both at Wageningen University and Research Centre, Wageningen, The Netherlands.

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