

## ☀ Science and Risk-management

Earlier this year, the UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA) issued a [Science, Evidence and Information Strategic Plan](#), the reason for which, among several, is "to seek comments and suggestions on how best to progress some of the strategic science challenges facing the FSA". The FSA has cast a wide net with a launch of open competitions and an invitation to register for email notification of RFP's. Four research requirements have been prioritized:

- Understanding risks; how to evaluate and compare them;  
→e.g. foodborne pathogens, adult-onset food allergies, exploring consumer tolerance and perception of specific food risks.
- Shared use of data, information and analytics, to understand existing risks, identify new and changing risks, and to develop targeted and effective surveillance and regulation;  
→e.g. *Trichinella* in UK wildlife surveillance.
- Understanding consumers, food business operators, inspectors and other stakeholders so as to support behaviour change, and, build and spread best practices;  
→e.g. "a study of mental models shaping inspector work" stemming from an FSA-funded study which identified FSA inspector bias and inconsistency.
- Learn what has worked and what has not so as to maximize return on resource expenditure;  
→e.g. development and certification of a de-biasing tool for FSA inspectors, stemming from the aforementioned FSA study.

## ☀ Horizontal and Vertical Issues

Some of the FSA's food-and-health challenges are horizontal issues, in that incidence is manifested in several countries around the globe. [In contrast, a vertical issue is one confined to a few countries, such as human selenium deficiency due to selenium-deficient soil, as exists in parts of China.] Given the horizontal nature of much of the FSA's challenges, and the wide range of scientific endeavour required to address these concerns, it remains to be seen if the FSA's counterparts in other countries will collaborate and contribute their own resources and findings.

## ☀ Alleged chaos in government research

All well and good at the FSA. Four months on, The Economist [exposed purported mismanagement and suppression](#) in UK federal government research. The result of an enquiry led by the charitable trust [Sense about Science](#), the publication reported that only four of 24 UK government departments were able to provide a full list of the studies they had funded (one of whom was the FSA).

## ☀ Others found order and transparency

True to balanced journalism, The Economist counters the claims of the Sense about Science report, citing a study published by the [World Wide Web Foundation](#) which claims that the transparency of the UK government is the highest in the world, above that of the USA and France.

## ☀ A re-newed call for due diligence

The Economist concludes that both watchdogs have revealed a worldwide (horizontal?) prevalence of "poor government policies" due to the inefficient application of publicly-funded research. Hopefully the FSA's strategic plan will prove to be a best practice.

## ☀ Scientific and Human Limitations

The University of Berkeley quotes the three well-known limitations of science and adds a fourth of its own. [What is science?](#) credits scientific rigour as the best tool, ever, to understand the world and its mechanisms, yet it cannot measure aesthetics, morality and the supernatural (including whether the supernatural exists or not). The fourth limitation is the inability of science to govern its use. Every major scientific advance is associated with both a positive and negative application. The same may pertain to both private and public scientific findings, which may account for suppression of the data. Only with the tenacity of science, and of scientists, can potential sinister and adverse applications of scientific breakthroughs be subrogated by positive, life-affirming and enriching practices. **FF**