

IRAC Work Group
Clarification of the Various Approaches for Assessing Risk

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BACKGROUND

Stakeholders in the risk analysis community often possess differing, sometimes very rigid, ideas about what is meant by the term “risk assessment.” In reality, there is no one-size-fits-all “risk assessment” approach that can address all risk management issues, problems, and questions. Codex has ably addressed this issue, but confusion remains. The lack of understanding of the various approaches for assessing risk can unduly hamper effective communication.

The IRAC, by its collaborative nature of risk assessors from across the federal government, is an ideal body to provide clarification of the various approaches for assessing risk and informing risk managers and then to communicate this common understanding to the different stakeholders.

PROPOSAL

Form a workgroup of interested IRAC members to:

- 1) Develop a **white paper** detailing the various approaches for assessing risk that can be applied to address risk management concerns.
- 2) Develop an **outreach plan** to communicate these approaches to appropriate stakeholders.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

A **white paper** describing and clarifying the various approaches for assessing risk would include:

- 1) a description of the various types of risk assessments tools and techniques (e.g., qualitative, risk ranking, semi-quantitative, safety evaluation, quantitative, etc.)
- 2) a description of what approaches for assessing risk can be appropriate for addressing risk management issues, problems, and questions
- 3) a description how the various assessments of risk can help elucidate risk management options that would aide risk managers in their decision-making process

The **outreach plan** would include a description of who the target stakeholders are, the essential message(s) to deliver, and the target opportunities/venues for this communication effort.

TIME FRAME FOR COMPLETION

It is expected that this should take less than a year's effort. IRAC participants in the workgroup would communicate and interact periodically during this period, most likely electronically by working on the sequential drafts. Communication will occur by email and any meetings will occur by phone. A potential target for completion of at least a mature draft would be the proposed IRAC public meeting being projected for the end of March 2012.

CURRENT STATUS

A manuscript, co-authored by Kerry Dearfield, Karin Hoelzer and Janell Kause, was developed to make stakeholders and risk managers aware of the various types of risk assessments needed to inform specific types of food-safety management decisions. One of the key concepts is that a range of risk assessment tools is available, and the tool to select depends on the problem and risk management questions. The emphasis is on assessment appropriate to the circumstances, i.e., "fit for purpose". IRAC members provided input and review for the drafting of a white paper that formed the basis of the manuscript. The manuscript currently is undergoing clearance by the agencies (as of June 2013). It will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal after clearance.