

The Foundation for Science and Technology
Risk Perception and Public Policy
12 October 2004

The FSA's approach to food risks

Professor Sir John Krebs FRS
Chairman
Food Standards Agency

Context

- Mood of suspicion post BSE
- Everyone is a food expert
- Everyone is a risk expert



Making a difference

OLD

- “Absolutely safe”
- “Scientists know”
- Decide, announce, defend

NEW

- “Life is not risk-free”
- “Science often incomplete”
- Involve stakeholders early
- Judgement based on dialogue

➔ Benefits of new:
trust; judgement; robustness

The role of science



Bedrock - assessed by independent committees



Cannot always quantify risk



No set risk thresholds - uncertainty and acceptability



Perception of risk sometimes at odds with the evidence

Public protection: managing risk



Regulation



Voluntary action by industry



Information and choice

Regulation: BSE

Is Beef Safe?

www.food.gov.uk



Over Thirty Months rule (OTM)

- BSE is a slow disease
- OTM introduced in 1996
- >800,000 cattle/year; cost £300 million/year
- SRM removes >99% infectivity
- Is OTM still proportionate?

BSE incidence in Europe per 1,000 cows born 1997



Source: Donnelly et al



Replace OTM with testing of post-1996 cattle?

- 0 - 2.5 extra deaths in 60 years
- Likeliest estimate: 0.5
- Not a precise number
- Uncertainties/assumptions
- Public discussion
- Value per life: > £2 billion



Information and choice; voluntary action: salt

- Link to hypertension (SACN)
- population approach
- average 9.5g, target 6g
- children's targets
- risk reduction:
~15% stroke, ~6% CHD

Salt: risk management



75% in processed food - reformulation



A campaigner for our times

Information/awareness



Labelling - choice

Salt: labelling

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ORIGINAL

NOW EVEN TASTIER

Batchelors

Cup a

Powder, Wheat Flour.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Typical values

per serving

per 100g as served

	389kJ/92kcal	152kJ/36kcal
Energy	0.7g	0.3g
Protein	17.2g	6.7g
Carbohydrate	9.5g	3.7g
of which sugars	2.3g	0.9g
Fat	1.1g	0.4g
of which saturates	0.7g	0.3g
Fibre	1.2g	0.5g
Sodium		

PER SERVING 92 Calories, 2.3g Fat of which 1.1g Saturates.

For more information see top of pack. Store in a cool, dry place.



4 SERVINGS

Salt: labelling

www.food.gov.uk



Dioxins in salmon: scientific disagreement



Science

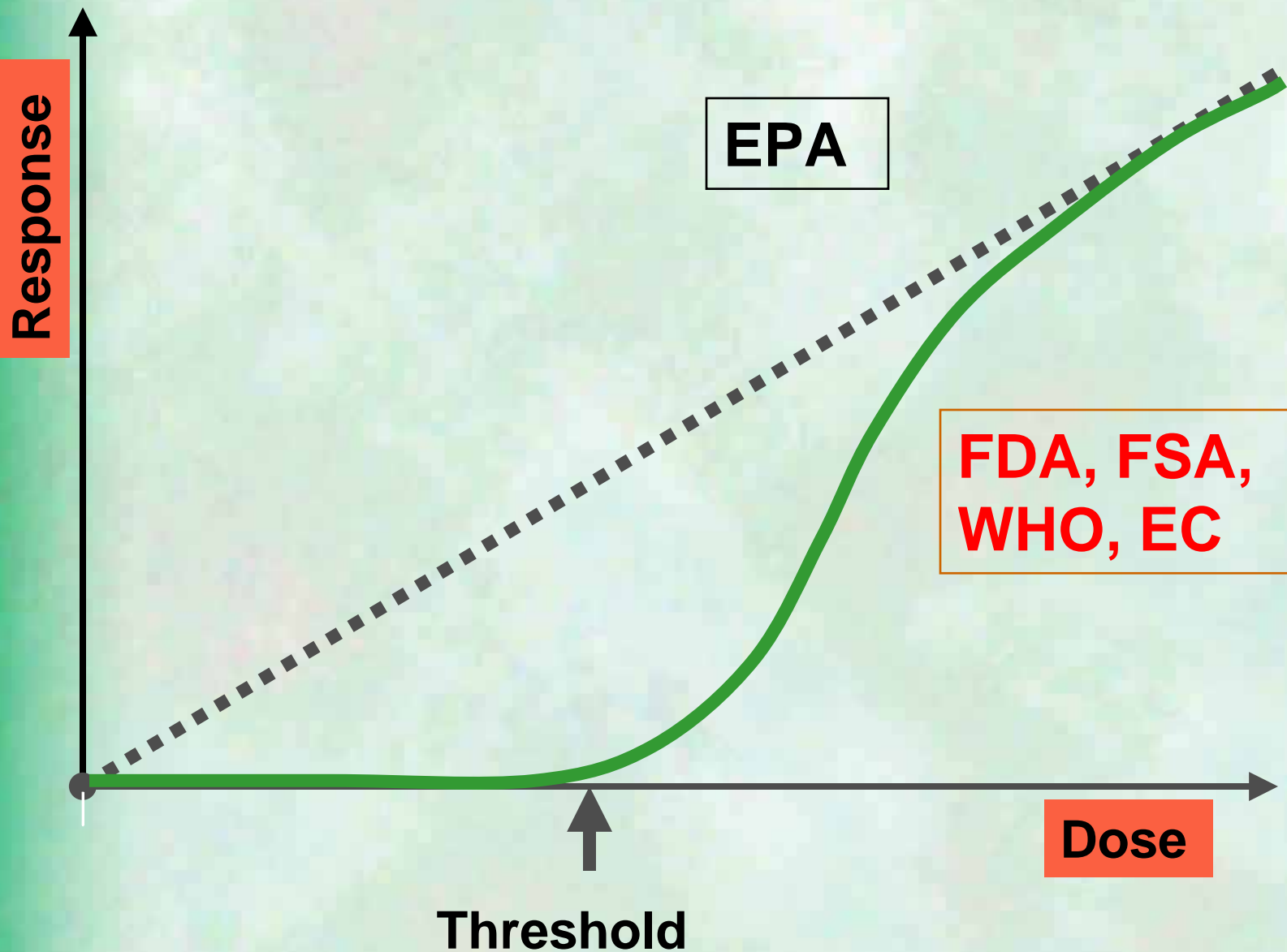
9 January 2004

Global Assessment of Organic Contaminants in Farmed Salmon

Ronald A. Hites,^{1*} Jeffery A. Foran,² David O. Carpenter,³
M. Coreen Hamilton,⁴ Barbara A. Knuth,⁵ Steven J. Schwager⁶

- 2,000kg analysed for dioxin-like compounds
- Farmed Atlantic salmon more contaminated than wild Pacific
- Max three portions/year Scottish farmed salmon

Salmon: risk assessments compared



Is it working?



UK has highest consumer trust in food safety of six EU countries studied

Trust in Food in Europe, NICR, Oslo 2003



FSA is the body most often mentioned spontaneously as a source of information about food safety and standards

Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards
2003

www.food.gov.uk

