

Food Additive Risk Communication

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Summary

A large part of consumers' vague concern about food is attributable to several factors such as some TV and newspaper reports including those in variety shows, comments by self-appointed specialists taking advantage of the reporting, as well as momentary "labeling to declare non-use of food additives" by some companies.

While state and local administrative institutions are providing good information through the Internet and other means, several include baseless information based on self-assertions that is included at the same location. Because consumers cannot judge which information is correct, they pay attention to the worrisome information. The Ministry of Health and Welfare is asking for comments on the Internet but few comments from consumers have come back. A gap exists between those using the Internet and those handling food at home, which is mainly composed of housewives.

Some food-related companies have established a division such as a customer support room to provide information, integrate comments from consumers and improve their own products. The level of such efforts by some companies is high. However, there are quite a few people who do not believe much of what companies say.

In some school textbooks used in educational institutions, unscientific descriptions are found. Educational institutions need to offer easily understandable information and make students learn correct knowledge. It takes time before the results are seen but I consider it will be the fastest way in the end. Academic societies related to food safety are offering information to consumers through lecture meetings but the effect is not large when the total number of consumers is considered. Even if they transmit correct information, so long as they tolerate any actions that will mislead consumers out of mere curiosity, the effect of transmitting correct information will be negligible.

Although consumers often write "they are concerned" in questionnaires, they place high priority on good taste, good (use) until date and price in their daily consumption behavior. The best interest of the industrial world is not to violate the food sanitation law or JAS regulations regardless of whether there is actual risk or not. Knowing all this, I consider it important to continue providing consumers with easily understandable and correct information through close cooperation among the industry, government and academic societies.