Role of RASFF in food crisis management

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Case: Listeria in frozen vegetables
Human cases – where it all started

- Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare reported in Nov 2017 four human clusters of *Listeria monocytogenes* (Lm) confirmed by whole genome sequencing (WGS) since 2016 to Epidemic Intelligence Information System (EPIS) because no common food source had been identified.

- Commission transmitted a RASFF news about the outbreak in Nov 2017

- Clusters of Lm ST6 had also been detected in Austria, Denmark, Sweden and the UK

- European Union -wide investigation to find the source was triggered
Food – at the same time

- Finnish importer found in Jan 2018 from an own-check sample Lm exceeding 100 cfu/g in one batch of sweet corn. FBO informed Finnish Food Safety Authority. A product recall was launched by the FBO.

- RASFF alert on Lm in sweet corn was published by Finland in Jan 2018

- More information, questions, follow-ups were shared in RASFF
One Health co-operation

• Finnish Lm strains from sweet corn and humans were sequenced and compared in a Swedish laboratory and a match with outbreaks in Finland found in Feb 2018

• In the EU joint work to link human and food isolates of Lm by ECDC - EU Reference Laboratory for *Listeria monocytogenes* /NRL network – EFSA was carried out

- link to frozen corn was confirmed in all affected MS – microbiological link
- consumption of frozen corn was confirmed by patients in FI and SE – epidemiological link
Tracing the source

- The "matched" food product connected to an importer in Finland was used to trace the source of contaminated corn
- EFSA started a massive tracing in the supply chain
- Investigation lead to a freezing plant in an EU-MS
- FBOs in several EU-MS recalled the implicated products
- Risk management measures in the freezing plant were started (marketing ban, order to withdraw or recall the products, closure of the plant, sampling, cleaning etc.)
Outbreak

- 47 human cases (9 fatalities) were found between Dec 2015 and March 2018, most of them in Finland
- The case showed that cross-sectoral collaboration in food-borne outbreak investigation is crucial
- The value of WGS is emphasised
International dimension: RASFF - INFOSAN

- The products were distributed to all EU Member States, as well as, countries outside the EU
- The number of recipient countries was altogether 107
- Information was effectively shared between RASFF and INFOSAN to trace products and to facilitate recalls and other risk management measures
EFSA-ECDC co-operation

- Rapid outbreak assessments by EFSA and ECDC
- MS and EU-RL network contribution
What you need to tackle a cross-border food crises – lessons learned

- Data – facts, quickly!
- Public – private co-operation – mutual interest to protect human health (e.g. own-check samples)
- Co-operation: public health – food, across borders
- Laboratory capacity, advanced methods (WGS)
- Data sharing – RASFF, EWRS, EPIS, INFOSAN, laboratory network, crisis coordinator network etc.
- Public information (authorities, FBOs)
Cross-border co-operation to protect human health

- EU Member States
- National Food Authorities
- National Public Health Institutes
- National Reference Laboratories
- EU Commission
- EFSA
- ECDC
- EU Reference Laboratories
- WHO
- 107 countries
- EPIS
- RASFF
- EWRS
- INFOSAN
"All you need is RASFF?"

...and a lot more – including tons of transparency, co-operation and expertise based on sound science!
Thank you!

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