Government Chemist contributes to food allergen guidance

News story

The GC team collaborated with experts to develop quantitative risk assessment guidance for food allergens

Selection of foods that can cause allergic reactions

Background

Food allergen risk assessment (RA) is the use of information on the characteristics of unintended allergen presence in food to estimate the likelihood and nature of potential adverse effects experienced by consumers with food allergy, due to exposure in the consumed final product.

Quantitative risk assessment (QRA) of cross contamination by food allergens brings sharper focus to decision making in the subsequent risk management. This includes the interpretation of analytical findings, handling of potential food recalls and the management of precautionary allergen labelling. Allergen QRA exists in many different forms with different requirements placed on the risk assessor depending on the question that needs to be answered.

Published guidance

Representing the Government Chemist, Professor Michael Walker is co-chair of an International Life Sciences Institute, European section, ILSI Europe Expert Group (EG) on food allergen QRA. The EG was created to attempt to achieve consensus on the methods needed for allergen QRAs by food business operators, and their implementation. An electronic workshop was held in October 2020 with representatives from a wide range of food allergy and allergen stakeholder groups. The workshop identified that a summary of current best in class guidance, identified gaps, potential improvements & harmonization of allergen QRA arising largely from cross contact would be

very beneficial.

The EG have now published an introduction to allergen QRA and an overview of inputs potentially needed for different QRA methods, when deemed feasible and necessary. The paper also introduces the EG.
Areas of focus include proactive assessments for food production under normal conditions, both in the upstream supply chain and in food production facilities, and reactive assessments as part of an allergen incident response. The paper offers insights into more detailed guidance for allergen QRA that will be published later in the year in open access as an ILSI Europe report.

The paper is currently available as a pre-print.

Published 21 March 2022