
INTER-AGENCY FORUM: Toward integrated epidemiologic surveillance

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EXAMPLES OF EXPERIENCES

The EU's Rapid Alert System for Feed & Food (RASFF)

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The guiding principle of the EU towards food safety can be summed up in one phrase - "food shall not be placed on the market if it is unsafe". Following a number of threats to the safety of the food chain, dating back to the 1970s and 80s, the EU completely revamped its legislation relating to food safety. One of its earliest actions was the establishment of the RASFF network. The network consists of 34 members, including the 27 Member States, 4 associated countries and 3 transnational bodies, including the European Commission. Threats to the food or feed chain may be placed into any one of 25 different threat categories (e.g. presence of pathogenic organisms, pesticide residues, etc). If a member discovers a threat to the safety of the food or feed chain, it must notify the other members, describing the nature of the threat and the distribution of the affected product in the market place. This allows for an informed decision to be taken on the actions needed to protect the health of the consumer. Increasing legal obligations on Member States to use the RASFF system has resulted in a large increase in the number of alerts over the last decade. Approximately half of the Rapid Alerts relate to detections at a Border Inspection Post, where the threat to the consumer is contained. However, approximately 33% relate to products that are already in the open market, which may lead to costly, and potentially damaging, product recalls.
