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RESEARCH TENDER CALL



TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Project Reference No.: 01-2020

Project Title:

“Communicating Allergen Information to Consumers on the island of Ireland”

1. Objective/Knowledge Gap:

The aim of this project is to encourage better allergen communication in the catering sector by (a) determining how best to communicate the potential for allergen cross-contamination, and (b) by improving the usage and understanding of food allergen labelling.

Objectives:

There is a need to communicate the meaning of allergen information, and any associated uncertainties, to the food hypersensitive (FH) customer. For this to work in a catering setting, it must be provided in a manner that is both accessible and intelligible to the customer and easy to apply and protective of the food business. Such information clarifies for the customer exactly what the allergen-focussed labelling means and, just as importantly, what it does not mean (there may still be a risk of cross-contamination with certain allergens). This will provide greater protection for the FH customer and the food business as it should reduce the risk of accidental allergen exposure.

2. Background

The introduction of Regulation (EU) 1169 of 2011 greatly increased the level of information available to consumers at the point of sale concerning fourteen specific foods that cause allergies or intolerances¹. The legislation requires all food businesses, including those that

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, amending Regulations (EC) No 1924/2006 and (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Commission Directive 87/250/EEC, Council Directive 90/496/EEC, Commission Directive 1999/10/EC, Directive 2000/13/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, Commission Directives 2002/67/EC and 2008/5/EC and Commission Regulation (EC) No 608/2004. (OJ EU, L 304/18, 22/11/2011)

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sell loose food, to state if any of these foods have been used as ingredients in their food products. In the Republic of Ireland, this information must be provided in writing while in Northern Ireland it can be imparted verbally. While this provides valuable information for the FH consumer, it gives no indication of the potential for allergen cross contamination. This presents a significant risk to these consumers who need as much information as they can get so as to make informed and safe food choices.

Caterers face a dilemma as to how best to communicate the risks around allergen cross-contamination to their customers along with any associated uncertainties. Unlike food manufacturing, the catering environment is highly variable both in terms of the diversity of businesses and the intrinsic variability within a catering environment. This presents unique challenges when trying to apply 'one-size-fits-all' formats for assessing risk. Deficits in awareness or training can impact on the robustness of a risk assessment with consequences for the information given to the customer. A further consideration is precautionary allergen labelling on ingredient labels. **safefood** research shows considerable variation in how caterers utilise this information; some ignore it while others treat it as an actual allergen declaration².

A further demand on caterers is the popularity of free-from requests both for health and lifestyle reasons. Consumer demands for 'clean label' (including free-from) food products, is growing year on year and caterers are bound by the same legislative obligation not to provide food that is "not of the nature or substance or quality demanded by the purchasers"³. The evidence to date suggests there is still a certain amount of confusion as to what statements such as gluten-free or dairy-free, etc. actually mean⁴. This is important for those who need to avoid certain foods for health reasons. It is also important for caterers who need to understand the basis for such claims and also any risks for both their business and their customers when using them.

3. Approach

The contractor will source the key target groups (FH consumers, caterers and regulators) for participation in the research and will utilise appropriate instruments (focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, etc.) to generate the required data in both jurisdictions, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The contractor will make the necessary contacts and arrangements within the catering sector to trial potential solutions emanating from discussions with the key target groups.

² **safefood** research (unpublished)

³ Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety (OJ L031, 01/02/2002)

⁴ Food Standards Agency (2010). Understanding of Food Labelling Terms Used to Indicate the Absence or Reduction of Lactose, Milk or Dairy Research among Consumers, Health Professionals and Food Businesses.

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4. Technical Specification

- (a) Scope of research
- (b) Literature review
- (c) Qualitative and quantitative work
- (d) Analysis
- (e) Data handling and Reporting
- (f) Quality assurance

(a) Scope of the research

The proposal will detail and use appropriate methodology to (a) ascertain the perspectives of FH consumers with regard to their understanding of food allergen labelling and the potential for allergen cross-contamination, (b) identify the specific challenges faced by caterers in communicating allergen information to their customers, and (c) the perspectives of regulators with regard to the allergen information, any associated uncertainties, available to FH customers in a catering setting.

The key deliverable will be a final report detailing recommendations on innovative ways to communicate the meaning of allergen labelling, and the potential for allergen cross-contamination, to FH consumers in the catering sector, and the trialling of these approaches in the catering sector.

(b) Literature review

This issue is relevant to consumers, regulators and the catering sector in other jurisdictions as well. Therefore it will be necessary to investigate how this issue is being addressed in other jurisdictions. A full and thorough review of the literature concerning the subject matter of this tender will be carried out. This will include:

1. Peer reviewed publications and also a full search of the grey literature including government and other organisational reports, conference proceedings, etc.
2. An evaluation of efforts employed elsewhere to explain allergen labelling and any associated uncertainties and the potential for cross-contamination.

(c) Qualitative and quantitative research

It will be necessary to capture the perspectives of three different groups – FH consumers, caterers and regulators – on (a) the meaning of allergen labelling and (b) the potential for cross-contamination within a catering setting. The proposal must demonstrate and justify the approach that will be taken to capture this information. **In addition, any agreed solutions emanating from the qualitative research will need to be trialled to ensure their effectiveness.** The proposal must demonstrate the elements of an implementation plan in this regard. A variety of methods may need to be used.

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(d) Analysis

The perspectives of FH consumers, caterers and regulators will be captured and analysed for feasible and agreed solutions. These will subsequently be tested in a trial implementation in a catering setting to see if they are (a) workable and (b) acceptable to all stakeholders. The outcomes of the research will be detailed, together with the literature review, in a final report to **safefood**.

(e) Data Handling and Reporting

1. On completion of the literature review, the contractor will discuss the outcomes with **safefood** at which point the proposed work plan will be reviewed and updated.
2. Thereafter, the contractor will submit to **safefood**, on a six monthly basis, an interim report containing details of the progress for each deliverable of the project.
3. The contractor is responsible for collating all results and a final report will be submitted to **safefood** on completion of the study.
4. All forms, documentation and electronic files must be retained by the contractor until further notice for **safefood** in case of issues arising after the completion of the research.

(f) Quality Assurance

1. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, all data sources used in the research must be specified, and all data used must be explicitly specified and justified.
2. **safefood** will regularly liaise with the contractor during the course of the research to assess how the work is being carried out.

5. Proposed Activities/Deliverables

- a) A systematic literature review submitted to **safefood**.
- b) Report on the perspectives of FH consumers, caterers and regulators on the island of Ireland on (a) the meaning of allergen labelling, and (b) the provision of information on allergen cross-contamination.
- c) Submission on a 6 monthly basis of an interim report on progress.
- d) Report on agreed solutions and how these were trialled in a catering setting.
- e) Report on the success or otherwise of the trialled solutions.
- f) Analysis of the final dataset, collation of the results and drafting of a final report to be submitted to **safefood** at the end of the 12 month study period.
- g) Recommendations for future **safefood** interventions

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6. Evaluation of Tenders

Tender bids will be evaluated according to the quality of proposals and applicants using the following criteria:

Quality of the proposal:

- ✓ Anticipated deliverables;
- ✓ Research method and facilities;
- ✓ Value for money;
- ✓ Potential for application;
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.

Quality of Applicants:

- ✓ Experience in subject area;
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

7. Duration of Project

Estimated duration of the project: Total of 12 months. A detailed timescale of research should be submitted by the applicant. Preference may be given to an application that can achieve the objectives in shorter timeframes.

8. Tender Application Forms and Guidelines

The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from www.safefood.eu. They can also be obtained by emailing research@safefood.eu, quoting the project reference number **01-2020**. Alternatively please contact **safefood** as per the details below.

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The closing date for receipt of applications by **safefood** is no later than **4pm on Thursday 9th April 2020**.