



**Consumer Federation of America**

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# Food Safety: Perceived Risk And Public Trust

Remarks by

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Infectious Disease

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# Perceived Risk & Public Trust

- Nature of risk perception
- U.S. consumers perceived risks from food
- U.S. food safety risk management—  
Can citizens trust the Dept. of  
Agriculture to protect public health?

# Nature of Risk Perception- Slovik

Risk perceived in qualitative terms  
Personal ability to control-

**“How safe am I and those I care  
about?”**

# Nature of Risk Perception-Slovik

- Interrelationship of 15 risk characteristics
  - ◆ Dread factors—uncontrollable, globally catastrophic, consequences fatal, not equitable, high risk to future generations, not easily reduced, risk is increasing, involuntary

# Nature of Risk Perception—Slovik

## ■ Interrelationships—continued

Unknown risk factors—not observable, unknown to those exposed, effect delayed, new risk, risk unknown to science

Examples—low on scale caffeine, water chlorination, bicycles. High—nuclear weapons fallout, nuclear reactor accident, DNA technology

# Different Groups Perceive Risk Differently-Slovik

- Gender effects in environmental survey
- White males different from all other groups---perceived risks as smaller
- Conclusion---power, status, alienation, trust strong determinants of risk perception/acceptance

# Factors Amplifying Perceived Risk-Slovik

- New, possibly catastrophic risk emerges
- Risk managers can't be trusted
- Risk Managers not in control
- Experts don't understand risks

# Factors Diminishing Perceived Risk-Slovik

- Risk doesn't spark public concern/dread
- Media reporting limited
- Benefits of hazard are necessary
- Hazards well understood/controlled
- Managers trusted; display control, expertise



# Risk Management & Trust-Slovik

- Asymmetry of Trust—easier to destroy than create
- Risk management institutions as sources of risk
  - ◆ Human factors
  - ◆ Organization factors
  - ◆ Faithlessness

# How Risk Managers Build Trust

- Perceived as reducing, mitigating, minimizing risk
- Communicate effectively
- Actually reduce risk

# U.S. Shoppers Perceptions of Food Related Risks

- Derived from U.S. Food Marketing Institute (supermarket trade association “Trends” survey of 1000 shoppers, conducted annually 1989-2000

# U.S. Shoppers Importance of Various Factors in Food Selection

- 1989-1995 ----

1.Taste, 2.Nutrition, 3.Price, 4.**Safety**

- 1996-2000 ---

1.Taste, 2.Nutrition, 3.**Safety**, 4.Price

# U.S. Consumer Confidence in Food Safety

Most are confident, BUT

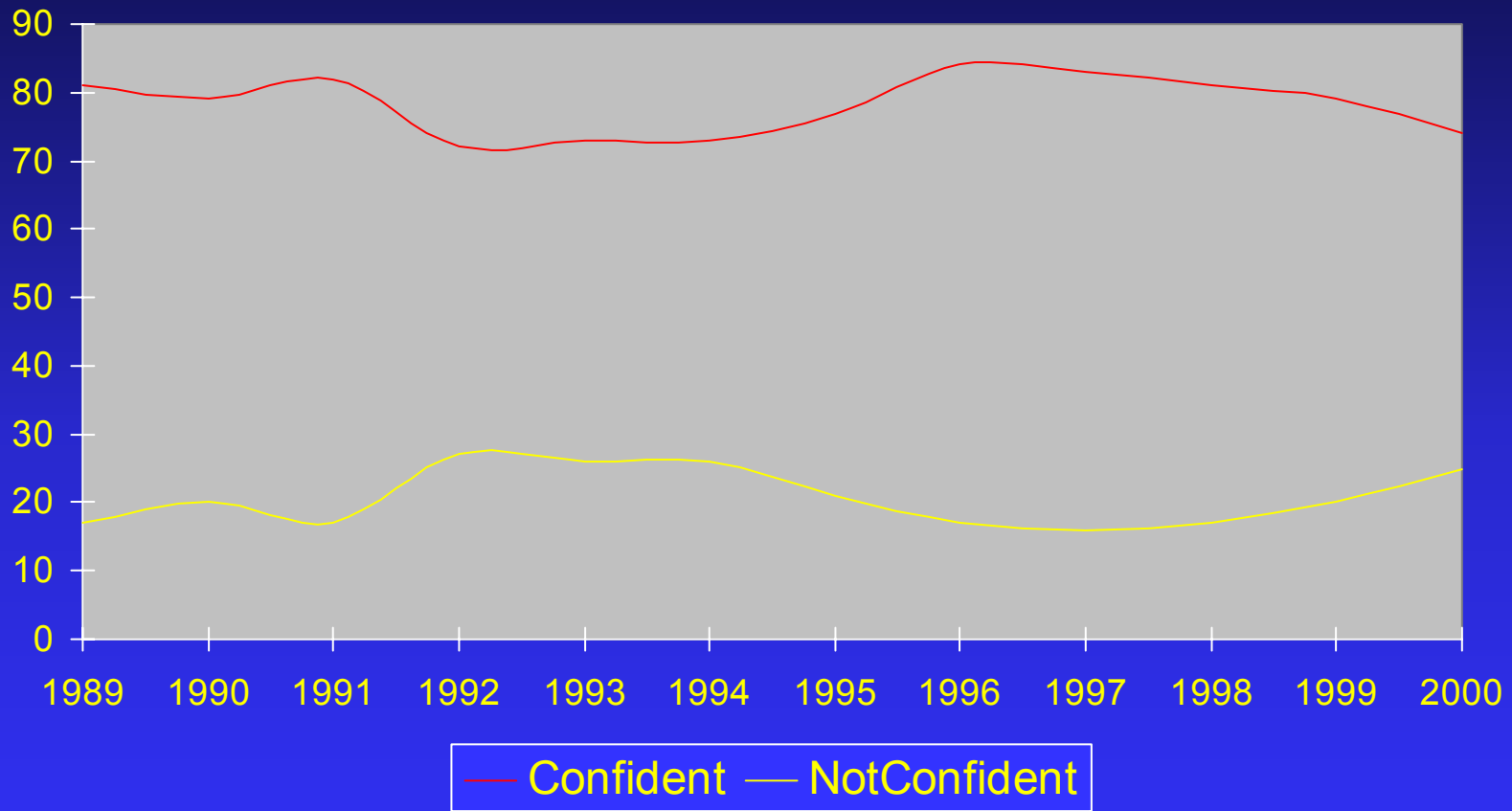
- ◆ Confidence trending down since 1996—Dropped 5% from 1999-2000
- ◆ About one-fifth doubt food safety
- ◆ Virtually all consumers have specific concerns

# Consumer Confidence in Food Safety 1990-2000

% Completely or Mostly Confident

1991	82%
1992	72%
1993	73%
1994	73%
1995	77%
1996	84%
1997	83%
1998	81%
1999	79%
2000	74%

# Consumer Confidence in Food Safety 1989-2000



# Perceived Risk from Selected Food Attributes 1989-97

## % Viewing as a Serious Hazard

		1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Bacteria		X	X	X	X	X	X	76%	77%	82%
Pesticides		82%	80%	80%	76%	79%	72%	74%	66%	66%
Antibiotics&										
Hormones		61%	56%	56%	53%	55%	50%	52%	42%	43%
Additives&										
Preservatives		30%	26%	29%	26%	23%	25%	22%	20%	21%
Nitrites		44%	37%	41%	40%	35%	34%	28%	24%	28%
Irradiation		42%	42%	42%	35%	35%	38%	30%	29%	33%
GM Foods		X	X	X	X	X	X	14%	16%	15%
Source: TRENDS-Consumer Attitudes and the Supermarket, 1996/1997										



# Concern About Food-borne Pathogens Justified

## CDC estimates:

- +76 million cases of food-borne disease each year
- +325,000 hospitalizations
- +5,000 deaths

## USDA-ERS estimates:

- + \$7 billion annually in medical costs, lost wages

# U.S. Food Borne Illness Risk Management Archaic, Inadequate

- Responsibility spread over 12 agencies
- Governed by dozens of laws
- Resources not allocated according to risk

# Major Food Safety Agencies

- FDA-regulates all food except meat, poultry and processed eggs
  - ◆ public health agency,
  - ◆ not prevention oriented
  - ◆ underfunded,
  - ◆ understaffed
  - ◆ inadequate authority to regulate imported foods

# Major Food Safety Agencies- cont

- U.S. Department of Agriculture-Food Safety and Inspection Service
  - ◆ Not a public health agency—animal health & quality assurance oriented
  - ◆ Departmental conflict-of-interest
  - ◆ Has prevention powers but
  - ◆ No authority to limit pathogens in raw meat & poultry
  - ◆ Well funded

# USDA & Risk Management

- Spends \$1 bill. Annually; employs 7,600 inspectors; examines every animal & bird
- Stamps every package of meat, poultry with government seal of approval BUT
- Historically argues it has no responsibility or authority to limit pathogens in raw meat and poultry

# USDA INSPECTION SEAL



# USDA Risk Management— cont.

- Leaders shift prevention from packer to consumer
- Often disdainful of public concerns

# USDA, Risk Management & Trust

- Trust-losing what it built in 1990's
- At USDA- human and organizational biases under mine trust
- Losing trust because
  - ◆ not perceived as reducing, mitigating, minimizing risk
  - ◆ Not communicating effectively
  - ◆ Not actually reducing risk