

Beijing Citizens' Perception of Food Safety Risks

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A questionnaire survey in Beijing China was made by Chinese Academy of S&T Strategic Development in Sept. 2007. It included: the citizens' perceptions on the food safety risks such as "stale food", "fake food", "pesticide-polluted food" and "food additives"; the distributing of the food safety risks; the citizens' satisfaction at Chinese food safety situation; the approach to gain knowledge and information of food safety; the habits to buy foods and the strategies to avoid food safety risks and so on. Based on this questionnaire survey, the report describes the perception of food safety risks of Beijing citizens.

The results show that Beijing citizens have stronger perceptions on those issues which are closely related to their healthy and daily lives and difficult to evade. Beijing citizens rank the harm and possibility of food safety risk in the more prominent position during the 15 familiar risks. Around one third of them especially the old people and the family living out their lives at subsistence level are not satisfied with the current situation of food safety, while most of them believe that the main problem relates to insufficient management. Farther, the "satisfaction" has negative relevancy to "attention" and "knowledge" about food safety, which shows that the citizens' satisfaction at the current situation of food safety is not based on enough information. Most of the citizens are well informed with food safety accidents. The women and the old are more interested in the information about food safety, while the men, the young and middle-aged people, the high-degree and high income groups have more knowledge and information about food safety. Comparatively, the citizens are more familiar to "stale food" and "fake food" than "pesticide-polluted food" and "food additives".

The results also show that Beijing citizens are seriously lacking the sense of security in food safety, while they optimistically believe in science and society to understand and resolve the problem of the food safety risks. Beijing citizens have strong perceptions on the harm of the four kinds of food safety risks. They are so worried and scared that they wouldn't like to accept the risks even there are some benefits, Especially the "fake food". As a whole, the people's economic situation and

other background factors have weak influence on the perception of food safety risks of Beijing citizens.

As for the distribution of the food safety risks, More than 20 percent of Beijing families have encountered health problems caused by unsafe food in the last two years, which have some influences on their satisfaction with the food management but little influences on the perception. Evidences show that, at least in big Chinese cities like Beijing, the perception and allocation of risks have shown a somewhat “deviant” logic from that of traditional social stratification. It seems to imply that, to some extent, China is stepping into a “risk society.