

How to Communicate with Dairy Consumers about FMD

by

Richard P. Horwitz, NESASA Consultant, April, 2013

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Consumer Confidence.....	1
FMD Concerns	2
Trusted Sources	4
Key Messages.....	5
Message Maps for the Public, Media, and Farmers	8
Risk Communication Resources:.....	12
Message Maps for a FMD outbreak	12
E-resources	12
Guides to Communication with Consumers about FMD	12
General Guides to Risk Communication and Message Mapping.....	13

Introduction

Two of the most useful, recent studies of strategies for communicating with consumers about Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) were conducted in 2007 for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and in 2008 for Dairy Management Inc. The following is a summary of key common findings. They suggest that an outbreak of this disease would incite consumer fears, especially about personal health effects. Demand for foods that consumers associate with FMD, including dairy products, would likely drop. The duration and depth of the drop could be minimized with straightforward – clear, consistent, respectful, and honest – assurance that these products are safe.

Consumer Confidence

The vast majority of Americans ordinarily trust that their food is safe. Dairy products are considered especially wholesome and prominent among people's favorite foods. Virtually everyone eats some ice cream, yogurt, or cheese at least once per week. Nearly as many (95 percent) say that their household buys milk as often, and about half of them say they drink it every day.

More than nine out of ten Americans say that milk is at least as safe or even safer than alternatives, including packaged foods, meats, fruits, and vegetables. In general, the more milk they drink, the greater their agreement and degree of confidence that buying and drinking milk is compatible with good health.

FMD Concerns

By far Americans' biggest food-safety concern is contamination, the chance of something harmful finding its way into their diet. About 80 percent of people surveyed say they worry about it occasionally, and half say they worry about it a lot. Bacteria or germs are the contaminants that worry them most.

Public understanding of FMD is very limited, but it readily incites fear. In particular, about 80 percent of Americans say that in an outbreak they would worry about getting infected, despite the fact that humans are not susceptible to the disease. Their chief concern is protecting themselves and their families from harm.

Common responses: "How would I feel if I heard that there was an outbreak of FMD?"¹



Popular concern is also apt to rise because of confusion between "Foot-and-Mouth Disease" (also known as "hoof-and-mouth disease" – not a pathogen for people) and unrelated maladies such as "mad cow disease" (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, BSE) or "Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease" (HFMD) which commonly infects children. In fact, Internet searches for FMD tend to bring up information on HFMD, counseling confusion of livestock and human disease.

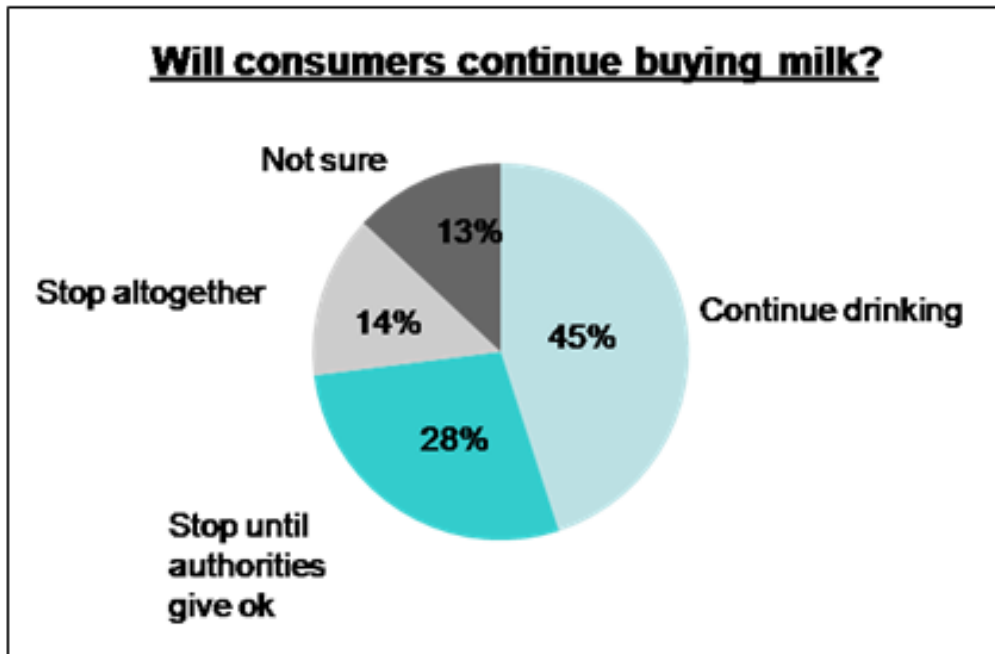
Worry is apt to be strongest among people who are the most frequent milk drinkers, mothers of young children, and the elderly. Reactions are also likely to be stronger among people who live near an outbreak or who are otherwise anxious about their diet.

Conversely, worry is apt to be weakest among young adults, people who ordinarily don't drink much milk, who trust government capabilities, who live far from an outbreak, or who are already convinced that the disease cannot harm them.

Although no one can be sure how consumers will respond to actual (vs. hypothetical) circumstances, nearly half of Americans polled say that in an FMD outbreak they would stop or suspend buying milk until convinced otherwise by appropriate authorities.

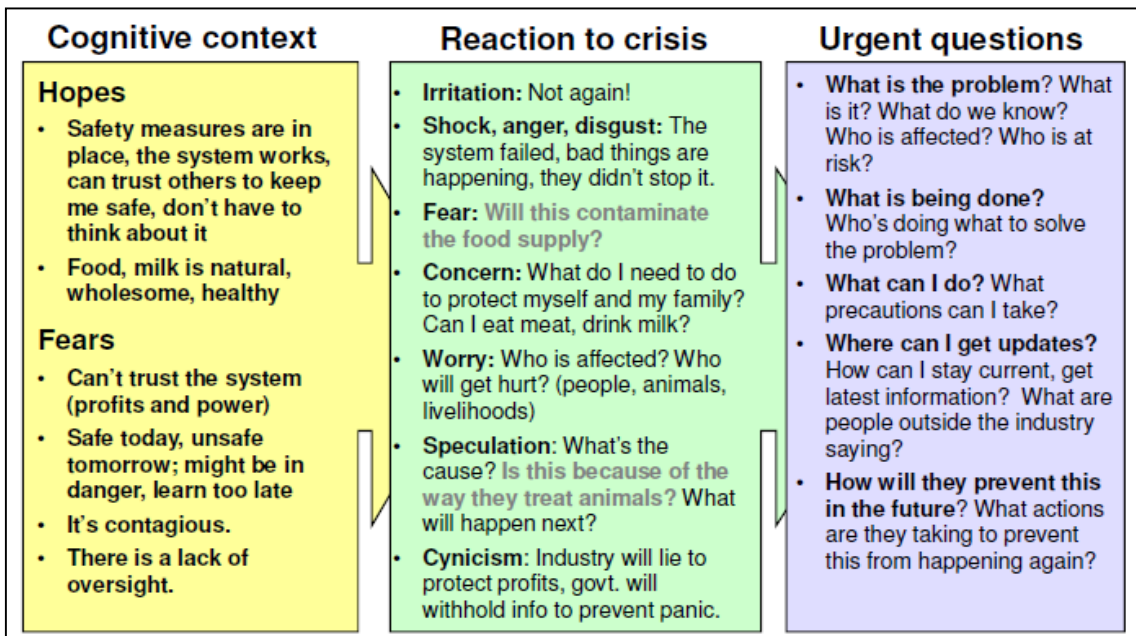
¹ KRC Research for Dairy Management Inc., *DMI Consumer Crisis Messaging Results Webcast* (September, 2008), Slide 29.

Projected Consumer Milk Purchases in an FMD Outbreak²



In short, concerns about food contamination, germs, and FMD in particular are apt to shape public response to FMD, and dairy consumption is apt to decline accordingly.

Mindset of FMD response among consumers³



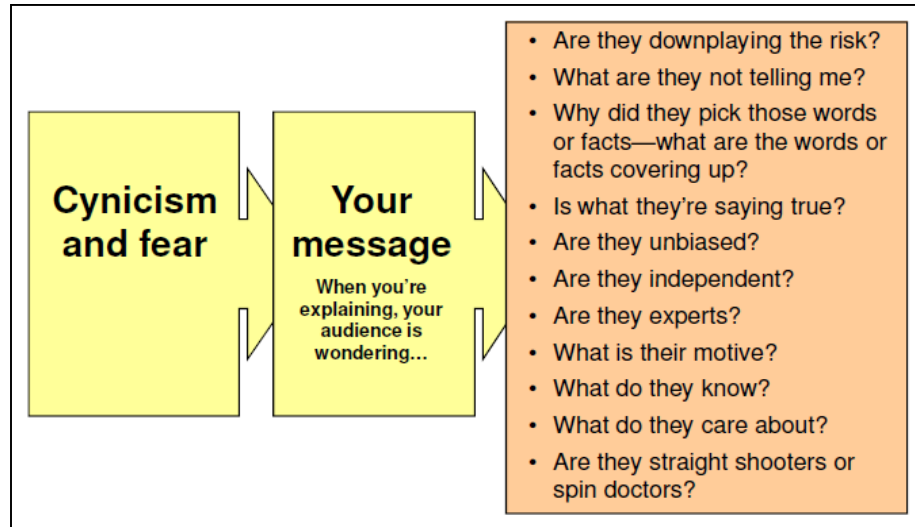
² Dairy Management Inc. (DMI), *Communicating Dairy Safety during an FMD Outbreak: Best Practices Based on Dairy Industry Crisis Messaging Research* (2011), p. 1.

³ KRC Research for Dairy Management Inc., *DMI Consumer Crisis Messaging Results Webcast* (September, 2008), Slide 33.

Trusted Sources

In an outbreak, consumers will be wary of advice they receive. They are especially likely to resist advice that could be considered patronizing or self-serving.

How people filter information⁴



For example, in the absence of independent corroboration, representatives of the dairy industry will be expected to belittle actual health risks for consumers, to care more about business as usual than the public concerns.

Since consumers feel the most reassured and informed about food and food safety when consistent information comes from the dairy industry, government *and* independent food safety organizations and experts, it is essential that the industry continues to work with third-party experts, universities and government agencies to ensure that consumers receive accurate, informative and useful information during a milk safety crisis. Both “moms” and mature adults should be considered high priority audience segments.⁵

Americans are most inclined to trust their personal primary health care provider, followed by well-respected national scientific and medical organizations.

⁴ KRC Research for Dairy Management Inc., *DMI Consumer Crisis Messaging Results Webcast* (September, 2008), Slide 38.

⁵ Dairy Management Inc. (DMI), [Research Brief: What Consumers Need to Hear in a Dairy Crisis](#) (October 2008), p. 6.

Who do consumers say they would trust the most for accurate information about food and food safety:⁶

1. My doctor
2. Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
3. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
5. Pediatricians
6. The Surgeon General
7. American Dairy Association
8. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
9. Veterinarians
10. My state health officials

Messages from all of these sources gain trust when they are honest, useful, and agree.

Key Messages

In general, when thrust into a situation that they fear, people will change not only the way they feel but also the way they seek and receive relevant information. Messages intended to reassure consumers should anticipate such challenges and a good deal of skepticism.

When stressed or concerned, people typically:

- Have more difficulty hearing, understanding, and remembering information.
So, make no more than three points at a time.
- Want to know that you care before they care what you have to say.
So, show honest empathy within the first thirty seconds.
- Focus most on what they hear first and last.
So, repeat each point three times.
- Focus much more on negative information than positive information.
So, avoid repeating unfounded rumors or false allegations.
- Process information at well below their education level.
So, aim for 27/9/3: 27 words in 9 seconds for 3 messages.
- Actively seek out additional sources of credible information.
So, prepare three supporting messages or credible sources for each point.

Kinds of messages to avoid:

- Absolutes (e.g., never, always, everywhere)
- Repetition of false rumors or unproven allegations
- “Spin” that seems to diminish the problem or unfairly shift the context.
- Broad assertions without substantial proof or signs of action (e.g., “Safety and security are our top priorities.”)
- Self-congratulations or unqualified praise for the industry (e.g., “The dairy industry is often cited as a leader . . .”)

⁶ KRC Research for Dairy Management Inc., *DMI Consumer Crisis Messaging Results Webcast* (September, 2008), Slide 24. See also [Ready, Set, Go in 30 Minutes or Less: Working Together for Effective Dairy Response via Social Media](#) (DMI webinar, recorded October 16, 2012).

Impacts of information on consumer worries⁷

Consumer Reactions to FMD Information	
Less Worried	More Worried
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pasteurization effectively eliminates FMD so it does not affect food safety or human health • FMD has never been transmitted from pasteurized dairy products to humans • There is a plan – govt. officials and industry are taking clear and coordinated steps • Euthanize/putting sick animals to sleep – no cure; working on vaccine • Quarantine, protection and surveillance zones, temporary ban on livestock movement • Past successful examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not “usually” fatal • Not a problem since 1920s • Epidemic/endemic confusion • Highly contagious among livestock • Imported products, transportation questions • Vague or unclear information • Safety assertions without proof or sense of action • Apparent lack of oversight, systemic breakdown • Pats on the head (“the dairy industry is often cited as a leader. . .”)

Kinds of messages to use:

- Show that you care and are open to everyone’s concerns.
- Prepare to answer frequently asked questions, such as:
 - What is the problem?
 - What is being done to control the problem?
 - What can consumers do to help or to learn more?
- Use examples, describe specific steps in action and share relevant findings when they are available.
- Balance bad news with positive, constructive developments.

Alternatives to “I Don’t Know” or “No comment”:

1. Express a wish that you could answer.
2. Explain why you can’t answer, such as:
 - “I don’t know the answer.”
 - “I am not the right person or in the right position to answer.”
 - “I don’t yet have enough information or adequate data” (e.g., because it is still under investigation).
 - “I am limited in what I can say” (e.g. because of security, litigation, privacy).
3. Explain specifically how to redirect the question (e.g., to the Public Affairs Officer, to the Joint Information Center, or to you again at a particular time, phone number, or place).
4. Segue to what you can say.

⁷ Dairy Management Inc. (DMI), [Research Brief: What Consumers Need to Hear in a Dairy Crisis](#) (October 2008), p. 4.

Messages that communicate milk is safe to drink:

- Consumers can continue to drink milk. Although Foot-and-Mouth Disease is a serious animal disease; it does not affect food safety or human health.
- Pasteurization of dairy products effectively eliminates Foot-and-Mouth Disease Virus, so it does not affect food safety or human health.

Note: Simply asserting that FMD doesn't affect human health is not sufficient to communicate milk safety in a climate of fear. People want to know why. Knowledge that pasteurization effectively eliminates the FMD virus helps convince them that milk is safe to drink

- Foot-and-Mouth disease has never been transmitted from pasteurized dairy products to humans. There is not a single case on record.
- Foot-and-Mouth Disease has been reported to affect human health in very few, rare cases. Human health effects are so rare that no major scientific or public health organization considers it a significant risk. Even in those very rare cases, the person who was supposedly affected had worked closely with FMD-infected livestock and recovered quickly.

TOPIC: Foot and Mouth Disease

Stakeholder: Public/Media

Question: What should I know about Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Foot and Mouth disease is a viral disease of animals.	FMD is not a human health threat.	Public awareness and participation in prevention efforts are critical to keeping the U. S. free of the disease.

Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
It affects cloven (split) hooved domestic and wild animals including: cattle swine, sheep goat and deer.	Evidence shows that the disease is not passed to humans from contact with infected animals or food products.	The public should know the signs of foot and mouth disease and report any cases of wild or domestic animals they believe may be showing symptoms.
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
FMD does not affect dogs, cats or horses.	Meat and milk are safe for human consumption.	When traveling abroad report any contact you may have had with animals or farms and properly disinfect clothes and shoes
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
The virus is very contagious and is typically spread through contact with infected animals or infected objects like equipment, vehicles and clothing and through the air.	FMD is not at all related to Hand, Foot and Mouth disease which is a common virus that affects children.	You can learn more at the USDA's website, www.usda.gov or the [State] Department of Agriculture's website, www.xxx.xxx

⁸ Multi-State Partnership for Security in Agriculture, [Message Maps for Common Food and Agricultural Threats, Foot-and-Mouth Disease](#) (2012). Note that USDA/APHIS has been preparing to release its own version since August, 2011.

TOPIC: Foot and Mouth Disease

Stakeholder: Farmers/Ranchers

Question: How can I protect my farm from Foot and Mouth Disease?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Use strict bio-security measures on your farm.	Prevent disease introduction into your herd.	Know the signs of the disease and regularly monitor your livestock.

Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
Monitor and record any movement of people, vehicles or animals on or off your farm.	Isolate new or returning animals for at least two weeks before reintroduction into the herd.	Signs of FMD include blisters or ulcer on the mouth, tongue, feet and udder; excessive drooling; reluctance to move; decreased appetite.
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Wash and disinfect items going on or off your farm, such as boots, vehicles and equipment.	Wash and disinfect shoes and clothing after traveling abroad. Avoid farms in countries known to have FMD.	Monitor your herds daily and notify your veterinarian if livestock show signs of the illness.
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Isolate any animals showing signs of the disease and immediately contact your veterinarian.	Do not bring foreign meat products into the U.S.	Learn more about the disease at the USDA's website, www.usda.gov or the [State] Department of Agriculture's website, www.xxx.xxx

TOPIC: Foot and Mouth Disease

Scenario: An outbreak in the U. S. has occurred.

Stakeholder: Public/Media

Question: What are you doing about FMD?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Local state and federal partners are working jointly to contain the disease.	The State emergency response plan has been activated.	Incident Management Teams are acting to eliminate the spread of the disease.

Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
The State Veterinarian has quarantined the area(s) and stopped movement of animals.	Surrounding states have been notified.	Quarantines have been established.
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
<i>Provide information on the testing process, protocol. For instance, samples are being tested at xxx, or positive test results have been received.</i>	Tracking and trace-backs to determine sources and extent of disease have begun.	<i>Provide information about procedures for dealing with infected or exposed animals (may be humanely destroyed, etc.)</i>
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Preliminary teams have been deployed to expand surveillance efforts.	The Governor has declared a state of emergency for [State] and the emergency operations center has been activated.	If applicable, provide any information about disposal and decontamination.

TOPIC:

Scenario: An outbreak has occurred.

Stakeholder: Public/Media

Question: What can you tell us about the situation?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
The disease is currently being contained and investigated by state and federal response teams.	State and Federal agricultural officials are taking protective measures.	The public's cooperation and action is critical to the containment of this disease.

Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
State animal health officials have quarantined the area and submitted samples for diagnosis.	State animal health officials are conducting surveillance.	While the disease does not affect humans, people can spread it.
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Tracking and trace-backs have been initiated to determine the source and extent of disease spread.	We are notifying veterinarians in the state to raise awareness.	Please comply with local quarantines and limit your movement on and off farms.
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
The emergency operations center is staffed and an incident management team has been deployed to the site.	Working with industry to raise awareness and encourage vigilance.	Know the signs of the disease and report any cases of wild or domestic animals believed to be showing symptoms.

Risk Communication Resources:

Message Maps for a FMD outbreak

[Multi-State Partnership for Security in Agriculture, Message Maps for Common Food and Agricultural Threats, Foot-and-Mouth Disease](#) (2012). Note that USDA/APHIS has been preparing to release its own version since August, 2011.

E-resources

[Crisis Communication Update: Messages and Channels](#). Presentation by Stacey Stevens for [DMI](#) at the National Institute for Animal Agriculture ([NIAA](#)) FMD Symposium in Louisville, KY, April 17-18, 2013 (YouTube, 2013).

[Crisis Preparedness Toolkit](#). A step-by-step guide for dairy processors on building a crisis communications plan (DMI, 2014).

[Dairy Emergency Response Network](#) (Linedin.com). Website maintained by national dairy organizations – Dairy Management, Inc. ([DMI](#)), National Milk Producers Federation ([NMPF](#)), International Dairy Foods Association ([IDFA](#)), Milk Processor Education Program ([MilkPEP](#)) and U. S. Dairy Export Council ([USDEC](#)) – in association with state and regional dairy organizations, aiming to speak with one voice and manage crisis communications to protect public health and business continuity.

[Dairy Response Center](#). Website initiated by the dairy checkoff, with links to tools for communication with consumers and producers about animal health issues.

[FMD Newsroom](#). USDA website with the latest news and links to additional information about FMD.

[Foot-and-Mouth-Disease Information](#). National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) website with information resources [for producers](#) and [for consumers](#), plus answers to [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

[Latest Dairy News](#). Password-protected source of information for producers.

Guides to Communication with Consumers about FMD

Communicating Dairy Safety during an FMD Outbreak: Best Practices Based on Dairy Industry Crisis Messaging Research (DMI, 2011).

[Consumers Want a Human Health Reassurance Message in the Event of an FMD Outbreak](#), Research Brief by Rick McCarty for the [National Cattlemen's Beef Association](#), Issues Update (September-October, 2007), pp. 47-48.

[Dairy Industry Crisis Preparedness Websites Overview](#) (DMI, 2013).

DMI Consumer Crisis Messaging Results Webcast (KRC Research, September, 2008).

[Issues Management Message Manual](#) (National Dairy Council, 2010).

[Ready, Set, Go in 30 Minutes or Less: Working Together for Effective Dairy Response via Social Media](#) (DMI webinar, recorded October 16, 2012). A slightly earlier version is also available as a set of slides, [Social Media and Crisis Response: A Strategy for the Dairy Industry](#) (March 18, 2011).

[Research Brief: What Consumers Need to Hear in a Dairy Crisis](#) (DMI, October 2008).

[Speaking Out: Animal Health and Dairy Product Safety](#) and [Communications Tips and Techniques](#) pocket reference (DMI, [Dairy Response Center](#), 2011).

General Guides to Risk Communication and Message Mapping

[Advanced Risk Communication Templates](#) , a pocket guide (Vincent Covello, 2008).

[Best Practices in Effective Risk Communication](#), one page of bulleted points, [The Ten Best Practices for Risk and Crisis Communication](#), on-line training, and [Risk Communication Message Development Template](#), two-page guide for developing your own message map, (National Center for Food Protection and Defense, University of Minnesota, 2008-2010).

[Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002)

[Crisis and Risk Emergency Communication](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 2002) and [CREC Basic Quick Guide](#) (CDC, 2008)

[Effective Media Communication During Public Health Emergencies: A WHO Field Guide](#), a compact [Wall Chart](#), or the full [Handbook](#) (Randall N. Hyer and Vincent T. Covello for the World Health Organization, July 2005).

[Effective Risk and Crisis Communication during Water Security Emergencies: Summary Report of EPA Sponsored Message Mapping Workshops](#) (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2007).

[Health Communicator's Social Media Toolkit](#) (CDC, July 2011).

[Questions Commonly Asked by Journalists During an Emergency or Crisis](#) (Vincent T. Covello (2005).

[Risk and Crisis Communication: Communicating Effectively in High Concern, High Stress, or Low Trust Situations](#), a presentation by Vincent T. Covello (August 2010).

[Risk Communication Planning Guide](#). (National Center for Food Protection and Defense, January 20, 2007).

[Risk Communicator Training for Food Defense Preparedness, Response and Recovery](#) (International Food Information Council Foundation, March 19, 2010).

[Speaking Out: Animal Health and Dairy Product Safety](#) (Dairy Response Center, 2011).