

Nano & Food Meeting - March 4th 2009

Task List:

The meeting defined three key areas which would make an important contribution to improving the understanding, communication and responsibility in relation to nanotechnologies in food and packaging. While not all are able to be addressed by members of the group, some provide an opportunity to make a useful contribution to the debate in a relatively short time.

1 Creating a shared understanding of the spectrum of nanotechnologies used in food

While various safety and risk initiatives are looking at definition and characterisation of nanotechnologies, there is currently no shared understanding of the basic spectrum of nanotechnologies in food - from uses which occur naturally or are very close to existing technologies to those which are genuinely novel.

The group felt that a simple description of this spectrum, which can be developed through an inclusive approach with all stakeholders, would be very useful in a number of ways. It would:

1. facilitate a shared understanding of the technologies currently used and those available to use. This will be useful for a variety of stakeholders including supply chain relationships.
2.help to distinguish those areas in which there may be real concerns about safety or usage and those where there is little or no concern. This may also have an implication for reporting and even legislation.
3.allow us to classify the individual product areas available more effectively and focus on those areas which were of greater concern
4.improve the dialogue between the different stakeholders by helping focus on specifics rather than generic uses of technology. Many studies, including the EFSA opinion and the recent Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution emphasise the importance of case by case data.

Do you think this is a useful idea?		
	Comment	Suggested action, by whom
Yes, let's do it		
Possibly though not in that form		
No, it's already been done		
No, it wouldn't be useful		
No, it wouldn't be possible		

2. Shared knowledge of research and testing from science and business

Linked to this is the need for shared knowledge on research and testing and transparency on outcomes on risk - from both scientists and businesses.

It is understood that there are various initiatives afoot to research and document such testing, both in the UK with the National Research Coordination Global Appraisal Report conducted by EmergingNano and others in Europe, funded by the European Commission and further work from ICON in the US and the OECD.

However, these initiatives all focused on government funded research initiatives. Those undertaken by individuals as Phd's or the toxicology research done by businesses as part of product development in this area are not usually included in these initiatives.

There is a pressing need to ensure that this information is obtained, harmonised, duplication is minimised and the information is made publicly accessible. Whilst there are plans to ensure that happens in some areas it is not clear if there is an overall global strategy for this, though the OECD seems to be the most likely place for this to happen.

It was felt by the group that this was not in the remit of an individual organisation or even country, but that this was a matter of importance which the group wished to know more about an understand whether it would be resolved.

Possible actions?			
Ideas	Yes	No	Action - by whom?
Obtain a clear view of the current information disclosure initiatives, their strengths and weaknesses and plans for harmonisation?			OECD? EU? Gov? IOM? FSA? RNF?
Can individual organisations in the Group play their part or stimulate such a coordinated effort?			
Is there a way to elicit company co-operation in the provision of such information, perhaps anonymously? This is different from a voluntary reporting scheme approach, and there are some examples of this working - eg Oxonica submitting its testing to assist the British government with its OECD commitment to test Titanium Dioxide Will this assist in communication up and down the supply chain Is this worth exploring further?			

Public engagement

Issues of public engagement were explored and the group considered that more needed to be done to engage the public and help, not just with providing information on nano, but education about how products come to market from research to commercialisation through to use and recycling.

Public engagement was considered tricky until the clarity of understanding of the spectrum was cleared up, but also trust in the institutions communicating was considered key.

The Responsible Nano Forum believes that the pilot initiative 'Nano&me' may help address some of these issues, though the full concept of the site was not explored. Some ideas were given about content for the site which will be incorporated either in the pilot or the final site.

Taking forward public engagement			
Ideas	Yes	No	Comments
Do you think Nano&me sounds like a useful contribution to public engagement?			
Would you like to know more about Nano&me?			
Do you have views on what should be in it and what it needs to achieve?			
Would you like to be involved in an advisory panel on aspects of nano&me for the pilot project?			
Do you have any views on how nano and food should be represented on the site?			
Do you have any views on taking forward public engagement on nano and food?			
Anything else?			

Benefits of nanotechnologies

Members of the group felt that the focus was very much on the risks of nanotechnologies and that the benefits of the technology and linkages to some of societies pressing problems has not been adequately explored, particularly in relation to the important challenges facing the UK - eg obesity, poverty, energy, ageing etc.

This was supported by the Responsible Nano Forum's previous research which findings that though there were ad hoc initiatives looking at the benefits of the technology in specific areas (eg environment, nanomedicine) that a cohesive strategy had not been developed which makes these connections and links nano development with the UK research strategy, the commercialisation incentives for the technology and the UK development strategy.

Do you think this is an important issue?			
Ideas	Yes	No	Comments - who should do it?
Do you think the benefits of nano are not sufficiently articulated?			
If you think more should be done in this area do you have ideas on what this should be?			
Do you think there should be a cohesive strategy on nano benefits for the UK?			
Do you think it should be communicated/aligned at European or OECD level?			
Do you think enough is being done at EU/OECD level on this also?			
Do you think stakeholders, including yourselves and the public should be involved in developing that in the UK?			

Meeting follow up

It was agreed that the group would look at the notes from the meeting and decide whether or not to meet up again or to pursue or support any of the issues which arose from the meeting. The 'voting' from this note will be compiled into a short report which will be sent to participants and we hope that next steps will become clear from this process. These notes will be sent only to those who participated and those who were to attend the first meeting but were unable to come to the second meeting and had participated in the development of the first paper.

Next Steps			
Possible Actions	Yes	No	Comments
The Group meets again to discuss potential actions outlined			
Something should be done about these issues but I won't be able to be involved			
Sorry, but don't want any more involvement			

Please email this note with your comments before Friday 13th March to hilary@responsiblenanoforum.org. Please call 0207 520 9086 if you would like to discuss it further.