



# Consumer expectations

Sue Davies

Chief Policy Adviser

# Consumer expectations



- Attitudes and awareness
- Key expectations
- Conclusion - maximising benefits, minimising risks

# Which?'s interest



- Independent consumer organisation testing a range of consumer products through our magazine
- Broader responsibility representing consumer interests
- Our mission is to make individuals as powerful as the organisations they have to deal with in their everyday lives
- We want to ensure that consumers can take advantage of nanotechnologies, enjoying the benefits without being put at unnecessary risk

## What do we mean by nanotechnologies?

- Deliberate manufacture of nano materials to create new properties
- Clear that not all nano materials are new
- Following ISO and EU debates about definitions
- Important to have consistency, but must not detract from other issues
- Consensus: functionality as well as size

# Consumer awareness



- November 2007 survey:
  - 37% had heard of nanotechnologies
- October 2008 survey:
  - 45% had heard of nanotechnologies
- Even those who had heard were unclear what the technology is

# Understanding consumer views: The Which? Nano Panel



- Held in Birmingham 29<sup>th</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007
- 14 panellists broadly representative of the population
- Over-seen by a Steering Group (Royal Society, Nanotechnologies Industries Association, British Retail Consortium, Demos, University of Sheffield)
- Heard evidence from a range of expert witnesses
- Focused on four main areas: food, medicines, cosmetics, general consumer products

# Food vs other applications



## Medicines

*'I think people who have cancer won't care about the effects, they just want to survive'*

*'I think it's like with anything new, you're always a bit wary before it's been tried and tested.'*

## Cosmetics

*'You don't doubt anything you pick up off the shelf'*

*'You do not allow anything on to the market without safety tests'*

# Food vs other applications



## Food

*‘Anything to do with food and the manipulation of it worries people’*

*‘I don’t eat fruit so I’d love to be able to take something in a drink that would taste nice and give me all the good things in it’*

## Other consumer products

*‘One of the things that impressed me most, the idea of being able to walk into my GP and say my blood pressure has gone up...’*

*‘I’ve never had a problem with my fridge - I don’t need an anti-bacterial’*



Expectation: Consumer engagement and informed choice

# What's really going on?

Food Manufacture September 2004:



*'...smart' nano-filters that could allow only the beneficial molecules to reach the consumer, trapping the ones that could cause an allergic reaction ... 'smart' packaging that could release a dose of calcium molecules, for instance, to people suffering from osteoporosis'.*

*'using nanotechnology to customise and personalise food .....nanotechnology would create new food and packaging materials with self-assembly, self-healing, and self-maintaining properties. These would allow the precisely targeted delivery of nutritional and health benefits'.*



# House of Lords: Nanotechnologies and Food January 2010



*‘the Committee notes that transparency and honesty are key components for ensuring public trust in both food safety and scientific developments, and argue that the approach of food companies in not publishing or discussing details of research is unhelpful’*

# Consumer engagement and informed choice



*“You might as well be speaking French to me - it’s a lot to take on board”*

*“I’m feeling a bit ‘hoo’ - it’s mind boggling!”*

*“Don’t trample over public opinion - it might be that a drug has great benefits for a community but you need to take the community with you, otherwise a community might reject something that is good for them.”*

*“It’s about being informed to start with”.*

# Consumer engagement and informed choice



- Openness and transparency
- Mandatory reporting
- Early engagement
- Labelling (Food Information Regulations)
- Broader consumer information



Expectation: Safety

# Safety



*“It seems the further we go along, the less answers there are. I’m OK with the technology, but if you ask what applications, they don’t seem to know, or where the funding is, or what the downsides are.”*

*“If the people who are developing it aren’t sure it’s safe then that’s frightening.”*

*“I was quite pleased initially that there was so much rules and regulations already - but some of it doesn’t apply as nano is a new technology.”*

*“I can’t see why we can’t say we’ll look at it and test it properly - head forward as if we’re going to go for it and then when the test results come back say go ahead and start producing.”*

# Safety



- Understanding what's going on
  - areas of most/ little concern
- Address research gaps
- Address regulatory gaps (eg. Novel Foods Regulation) and ensure clear guidance
- Ensure meaningful, independent risk assessment
- Effective enforcement



# Expectation: Benefits for consumers

# Benefits



*“Now they can take advantage of people and charge the earth for something - all this nanotechnology can be a big con and an excuse for charging a lot more.”*

*“Will I benefit from it? Or is it just a money-spinner to benefit rich people with cancer?”*

*“It will help us - how much food do we waste and throw away because it’s gone off?”*

*“It’s fascinating about the colour coding. How many times do we throw things away because we’re not sure? So this could save us a lot.”*

# Benefits



- Ensure benefits are in line with people's expectations
- Need a more strategic approach - how nano can contribute to today's challenges (obesity, sustainability etc)
- Ensure honesty - genuine claims
- Need meaningful engagement early on.

# Conclusion: Learn from GM



- Be open early
- Effectively engage and listen to consumers
- Be honest about, and address, uncertainties
- Ensure regulation keeps pace with developments
- Label nano ingredients
- Offer (and deliver on) genuine consumer benefits