

Quantitative food safety risk analysis training of a diverse team located in different countries

The UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) needed state-of-the-art remote training on quantitative risk analysis for a diverse team of its regulatory scientists and policy-supporting staff. The training had to be online as their teams are based in different countries and locations, and had an ambitious deadline. EpiX developed and delivered in 3 months, to the great satisfaction of the FSA.

The UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) is responsible for food and feed safety in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. FSA identified an urgent need for strengthening and expanding its capabilities in quantitative risk assessment (QRA) for food safety. EpiX worked closely with FSA to identify all specific learning needs, and developed and delivered a customized training with two key components:

- A hybrid training program delivered to a large group of participants and that included a mixture of live lectures, hands-on exercises, diverse reading materials, on-demand videos, quizzes, and one-on-one time with course instructors
- A longer-term mentoring program, during which a limited group of selected participants worked on hands-on projects based on the participant's interest and day-to-day work. EpiX mentored this group through regular conference calls, help with modelling, and detailed discussions about the decision questions, potential data sources, modelling approaches, and alternative ways of presenting the results.

While the FSA staff had a wide variety of backgrounds (e.g., toxicologists, microbiologists, radiation specialists and statistical backgrounds), the course and mentoring program provided all course participants with an in-depth, hands-on knowledge of QRA for food safety applied to a range of hazards under FSA's regulatory oversight. FSA leadership was very satisfied with the valuable skills gained by its staff, and impressed with how EpiX managed to put together a customized course under such an ambitious timeline. The two-module approach was well-received by participants, and they valued the opportunity to work directly with the EpiX team on applied research questions. Participants also valued being able to work through the online material at their own page pace while also being able to have one-on-one office hour interactions with the experts and live lectures to reinforce the methodology learned.

“EpiX was able to quickly understand our needs and propose a format that worked well for our teams and our ways of working. The course was challenging but with the varied teaching formats and learning strategies, our colleagues were able to learn at a pace which suited them and practice parts they found particularly tricky. The real time individual progress data was useful to see where colleagues were beginning to struggle, so we could put in place more support for them whilst the course was still running - enabling them to get the most from the training. Many thanks to Francisco and team.” - Dr Amie Adkin, Head of Risk Assessment, FSA UK