

**From the International Food Information Council (IFIC):
We Call It IFIC's War Plan**

In early September, 1991, we received the following anonymous letter from someone who claimed to work for a food company that used MSG in its products, but didn't always label it.

"It appears 60 Minutes is going to do a story on MSG and I'm concerned that [the International Food Information Council (IFIC)] is out to cover up some facts. I understand this group was formed to defend [aspartame] and then caffeine and now MSG!!.... I was so shocked when I read this document that I thought the least I could do was send it to you. Since I still work for my company, I have to send it anonymously."

International Food Information Council

MSG Committee/MSG Coalition

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

July-December 1991

(As revised at 7/22/91 meeting)

I. Analyze *60 Minutes* MSG Program

- A. Review all *60 Minutes* contacts, interviews, intelligence to prepare likely scenario of segment.
- B. Evaluate potential worst case impact, ways that 60 Minutes could provoke a major public controversy.
- C. Evaluate research on reach/credibility of 60 Minutes programming.
- D. Retain appropriate communications experts who have dealt directly with 60 Minutes for advice and counsel.

II. Analyze MSG Scientific/Public Issues

- A. Review scientific commentary/position statements of major regulatory and health/medical groups
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- B. Review member company and others' research on media and consumer attitudes for insight on target audiences/issues.
- C. Gather data on other food ingredient controversies that might provide insight, i.e. sulfites, tropical oils, etc.
- D. Retain appropriate communications experts who have dealt with controversial food ingredients and public acceptance for advice and counsel.

III. Analyze Potential Critics' Activity

- A. Evaluate potential actions by critics in advance of 60 Minutes; counter misinformation as usual.
- B. Evaluate potential activities related to *60 Minutes*; develop standby contingency plans.
- C. Evaluate potential activities immediately post-60 Minutes; develop standby contingency plans.
- D. Develop long-term plans for counteracting misinformation/ influence of critics.

IV. Establish Best Possible Climate for 60 Minutes Program

- A. Develop basic IFIC educational materials on MSG in order to provide science-based information in most credible format.
 - 1. "What You Should Know About MSG" -- as part of IFIC's ingredient brochure series. *Have reviewed by the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.*
 - 2. "IFIC Review" -- [*Postponed until time permits; will use IFT white paper in background briefings.*]
 - 3. *Food Insight* story in July/August issue on European Community Scientific Committee for Foods review of MSG safety; also highlight availability of new IFIC educational materials.
- B. Coordinate multiple educational "hits" about MSG issues apart from any discussion of pending *60 Minutes* program.

1. Food Opinion Leaders

- a. Direct mail of new IFIC educational material, as well as distribution of *Food Insight* (circulation 20,000).
- b. Distribute materials and talk informally with colleagues at professional meetings through regular IFIC exhibits -- American School Food Service Association (July),-National Conference of State Legislatures (August),'American Academy of Family Physicians (September).'
- c. Promote materials in all relevant health organization publications through news releases; evaluate wisdom of advertisements in key journals.

2. News Media

- a. Direct mail of background educational materials, circulation of *Food Insight* with MSG article, materials highlighted; seek to place positive stories; distribute mat release to weekly newspapers.

V.

B. Implement targeted programs to provide information/ perspective to these groups before 60 Minutes.

1. Develop "Briefing Kit" with basic MSG educational materials, fact sheets on various topics from regulatory status to labeling (for optional use depending on groups' interest), brief fact sheet on potential 60 Minutes misinformation; use as basic backgrounding tool in individual meetings with groups above.

2. Reach each of the above groups (and possibly others) with most personal communication possible; one-on-one meetings with credible parties are best, but in some cases, we recognize that we'll have to send materials by mail.

C. Develop specific programs for reaching important groups that have unique needs.

1. Retail/Food Industry

a. Develop "Retail/Food Industry" binder with all relevant background information on MSG, fact sheets, Q&As, additional sources, scientists for media referral, commentary on likely *60 Minutes* approach; work in conjunction with food trade associations to distribute to food manufacturers, supermarkets, trade associations in advance of program.

b. Include samples of IFIC consumer booklet on MSG; offer free or at reduced cost to companies for consumer centers, retailers to distribute to customers, etc.

2. Childhood Nutrition/Safety Advocates

a. Develop a brief fact sheet with information specifically related to children's issues; include basic safety data and sources/phone numbers for additional information.

b. Working in conjunction with professional associations, distribute these materials to key members throughout the country to prepare school food service personnel, school administrators, etc. for responding to inquiries generated by *60 Minutes*.

3. Known Media Sources -- working with professional associations, distribute basic briefing kits described in (B.1.) above to all ADA/IFT media spokespersons.

VI. Preparation for 60 Minutes Event

A. Research

1. Complete focus group message testing in August to aid in preparing communications materials, expert spokespersons on most effective message points.

2. Complete nationally projectable quantitative survey of consumer attitudes toward MSG in August to establish baseline.

3. Arrange 'real-time' focus groups to watch program Sunday evening and discuss messages, concerns, reactions.

4. Complete nationally projectable quantitative survey of consumer viewership, attitudes toward MSG on Sunday evening following broadcast.

5. Depending on course of events, be prepared to repeat quantitative research in the weeks that follow.

B. Preemptive News Conference

(RULED OUT IN FAVOR OF STRATEGY BELOW)

C. Targeted Media Briefings

1. Selectively background key media the week before the broadcast, as more controlled alternative to a preemptive public event such as a news conference. This strategy will allow greater interaction with reporters without the pressure of having to write a story about the press conference.

2. Such briefings should be done by individuals with the best personal ties to individual journalists. In some cases, friendly reporters will agree; in others, we will at least get factual information to reporters with sufficient time to read it before Monday deadlines.

D. Central Office

1. On Friday before the broadcast, set up a central office to coordinate all activities and serve as a clearinghouse for industry information.

2. On Sunday, monitor, the program and begin all responsive activities from this location.

VII. Response to *60 Minutes* Event

A. Preplanned Media Activity

1. Print news release(s)/PR Newswire -- to be issued Sunday night by TGA/others? representing the industry; IFIC, and possibly selected professional groups such as IFT.

2. VNR with background footage, sound bites with scientific experts, health groups, government -- to be transmitted Monday if needed.

3. Satellite news conference/media tour, with similar experts as above -- prepared for Monday if needed.

4. Placement of spokespersons on national news programs, including *Good Morning America*, *Today*, etc.

B. Preplanned Opinion Leader Activity

1. Immediately prepare response statements to 60 Minutes allegations, keeping in mind interests of all opinion leader groups; have overnight deliveries, mailing labels, etc. prepared should distribution be needed.

2. On Monday, send by overnight mail an updated fact sheet, Q&A, and response statement on 60 Minutes to all retailers and industry members who received "Retail/Food Industry" binder.

3. Government briefings with FDA/USDA should be scheduled for Monday to update one another on event, response among consumers/media.

C. Optional Activity

1. 800 Number Hotline -- could be advertised for all consumers to call with questions/concerns about MSG; alternatively, could be limited to industry and opinion leaders needing more information.

2. Follow-up News Conference -- depending entirely on course of events

3. Advocacy advertising, specifically countering allegations made in program; consider only if issue generates major controversy.