

The European Food Safety Authority: Fostering Scientific Cooperation in Europe

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The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has been the keystone of European Union (EU) risk assessment regarding food and feed safety since 2002. EFSA is committed to providing objective, science-based, advice as well as clear and coherent communication on possible risks associated with the food chain, based on the more up-to-date scientific data and information.

EFSA's scientific advice supports risk managers at the European Community, European Parliament and Member States in taking coordinated, effective and timely decisions in the field of food and feed safety. To most efficiently fulfil this mission, EFSA intensely fosters scientific cooperation with Member States, organisations and experts, particularly to share information, data and expertise. EFSA has established proficient networks, involving almost 40 national agencies in 30 EU Member States and neighbouring countries, over 400 competent scientific organisations and more than 1500 experts, and has developed dedicated tools to help pool resources, allowing it to make use of synergies and avoid duplication of work.

Member States and EFSA join forces in addressing European risk assessment and risk communication issues through several networks. EFSA's Advisory Forum connects EFSA with the national food safety authorities of all 27 EU Member States, Iceland and Norway as well as Switzerland and Candidate Countries participating as observers. Members use the Forum to advise EFSA on scientific matters, its work programme and priorities. Emerging risks are also discussed in the Advisory Forum, as well as risk communication. Since 2007 the members of the Advisory Forum are diligently supported by their national EFSA Focal Points¹. These act as an interface between EFSA and the national food safety authorities, research institutes, consumers and other EFSA-related stakeholders to share information, support competent national organisations and experts, as well as to raise EFSA's scientific visibility within their countries. In addition, EFSA's scientific networks were established to facilitate scientific cooperation in specific fields within EFSA's remit. Currently 13 scientific networks are operational².

In addition to working together with Member States, EFSA also promotes networking of organisations operating in the fields within its mission, as stipulated in Article 36 of EFSA's Founding Regulation³. Consequently, EFSA has drawn-up a list of competent organisations capable of assisting in meeting its mission⁴. Organisations on the list comply with pre-set criteria⁵ and have been designated by Member States. EFSA has established the grant and procurement schemes to carry out scientific cooperation projects with scientific organisations. Since 2007 EFSA has more than doubled its annual budget on outsourcing work and supporting scientific cooperation with organisations⁶, such as through the formation of consortia. All calls under the two schemes are published on EFSA's website⁷ and organisations are encouraged to apply. Through networking, EFSA and organisations can use a wider spectrum of scientific excellence in Europe and can help respond more effectively and flexibly to growing workloads.

Last, but not least, EFSA also works closely together with highly qualified, independent scientific experts with a thorough knowledge of risk assessment. These experts are particularly active in EFSA's Scientific Committee, Panels and Working Groups. EFSA's ten Scientific Panels are responsible for EFSA's risk assessment work, including delivering scientific opinions. Each Panel focuses on a different area of the food chain. The Scientific Committee supports the work of the Panels on cross-cutting issues, being responsible, amongst others, for the general coordination to ensure consistency in the scientific opinions prepared by the Panels.

In order to enhance the transparency of the process through which experts are invited to participate in scientific activities and to effectively pool information on scientific excellence across Europe, EFSA, in cooperation with Member States, has set up a database of external scientific experts interested in supporting EFSA and Member States in risk assessment activities. Scientists with expertise in any field of EFSA's remit are invited to apply online⁸. At the beginning of June 2012 the Expert Database held information of over 3,000 experts from 68 countries. This pooling of expertise enhances the capacity of Member States and EFSA to conduct risk assessment in areas associated with the food chain and enables them to respond more effectively and flexibly, particularly in cases where very specialised, unexpected and urgent work is required.

In addition to pooling and sharing expertise, Member States and EFSA also share information on risk assessment activities and outputs in food and feed safety. Countries use the Information Exchange Platform to make available relevant documents from their national bodies responsible for scientific risk assessment. These documents are collected and uploaded by the Focal Points, thereby providing instant access to the information. EFSA, on the other hand, publishes its scientific outputs in the EFSA Journal⁹. It is an open-access, online scientific journal which is free of charge and contains all scientific outputs since EFSA's inception in 2003. EFSA's technical reports are available in the "Supporting Publications" section on EFSA's website¹⁰.

Sharing information, data and expertise will augment in importance in an increasingly more globalised world where resources are also becoming more limited. Scientific cooperation within Europe and beyond is crucial to help ensure that the food we eat is safe.

References

- 1 <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/fp.htm>
- 2 <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/supportingunits.htm>
- 3 Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety (OJ L 31, 1.2.2002, p. 1–24)
- 4 <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/art36.htm>
- 5 Stipulated in Commission Regulation (EC) No 2230/2004 of 23 December 2004 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of European Parliament and Council Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 with regard to the network of organisations operating in

the fields within the European Food Safety Authority's mission (OJ L 379, 24.12.2004, p. 64–67)

- 6 More information is available in the reports on EFSA's website: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/art36.htm>
- 7 Calls for tenders (procurement): <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/procurement/tenders.htm>; calls for proposals (grants): <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/calls/art36grants.htm>
- 8 <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/expertdb.htm>
- 9 <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/publications/efsajournal.htm>
- 10 <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/publications/supporting.htm>