

EFSA Strategy 2020

Trusted science for safe food

Draft for public consultation 2015



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Introduction

EFSA's corporate strategy reached its end date in 2013, while the EFSA Science Strategy will remain in force only until the end of 2016. EFSA therefore decided to develop a new overarching strategy for the period 2016-2020 which would cover all aspects related to the Agency's strategic planning and execution.

The draft of the EFSA Strategy 2020 presented here for consultation outlines EFSA's high-level strategic and operational objectives for the next five years.

The document has been drawn up by EFSA staff in close consultation with the Management Board, taking particular account of the obligations outlined in EFSA's founding regulation, the main external drivers that are expected to influence the direction EFSA takes between now and 2020, and the challenges and opportunities that the Agency will encounter during that period. The document also takes account of the overarching priorities of the European Commission that are most relevant for EFSA, such as those related to jobs, growth and investment, the digital single market, energy union and climate, the internal market, the EU as a global actor, migration, and democratic change.

The EFSA Strategy 2020 document will not stand in isolation. Indeed, the draft already makes extensive use of existing planning and programming documents. Detailed planning of the work to be undertaken in the next years as well as indicators to monitor and report progress will be included in EFSA's programming and activity reports, as part of its performance management cycle.

Regular evaluation of progress made and of EFSA's external and internal environment will ensure that EFSA's strategy stays relevant. It will be revised according to the strategic review cycle.

EFSA is now inviting key stakeholders and the general public to comment on the document, which will remain open for consultation for six weeks. This is a key step in the process of ensuring that EFSA's strategic objectives are in line with the expectations and priorities of stakeholders; it will also give them the chance to contribute to its development.

I. EFSA and its environment

i. Our vision: Trusted science for safe food

Protecting consumers by providing independent scientific advice on risks in the food chain.

ii. Who we are

EFSA is a decentralised agency of the European Union, funded by the EU and issuing scientific advice independently of the European Commission, the European Parliament and EU Member States. It was set up in 2002 as an impartial source of scientific advice and communication on risks associated with the food chain.

The advice that EFSA provides to risk managers underpins laws and regulations that are in place, as well as evolving policy priorities and needs, to protect European consumers from food-related risks – from field and factory to fork.

iii. Our mission

The Authority contributes to the safety of the EU food and feed chain by:

- providing EU risk managers with independent, up-to-date scientific advice on questions linked to the food chain;
- communicating to the public on its outputs and the information on which they are based;
- cooperating with Member States, institutional partners and other interested parties to provide consistent advice to increase trust in the EU food safety system.

iv. Our values

All of EFSA's activities are guided by a set of fundamental values. These are:

Scientific excellence: EFSA provides accurate, up-to-date and timely scientific advice that helps risk managers to take decisions for the protection of consumer, animal, plant, and environmental health. EFSA's excellence is founded on the expertise of its network of scientists and staff and the quality of its science-based information and methodologies.

Independence: EFSA produces objective, science-based advice that is grounded in the quality, integrity and transparency of its working processes. EFSA is continually adopting measures and processes that promote the most rigorous

and transparent use of evidence and ensure the objectivity of our scientists, inspiring public trust in our work.

Openness: Communicating openly and promptly on its scientific work helps foster trust in EFSA. As well as being transparent, we aim to engage civil society in our risk assessment work and connect with untapped scientific potential.

Innovation: Being pro-active and forward-looking enables EFSA to anticipate new challenges. We believe that scientific assessment must keep pace with developments in society, science and industry. We continuously hone and improve our working methods to ensure that the EU food safety system stays at the forefront of scientific thinking and practice.

Cooperation: Working together and exchanging knowledge between food safety experts ensures excellence and efficiency and maximises Europe's risk assessment capacity and potential. We believe that the whole of food safety expertise is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

v. How we work

EFSA is governed by a Management Board whose members are appointed to act in the public interest and do not represent any government, organisation or sector. The 15-member Board sets EFSA's budget and approves the annual work programme. EFSA's Executive Director is responsible for operational and staffing matters, and drawing up the annual work programme in consultation with the European Commission, the European Parliament and EU Member States. EFSA's scientific work is led by its Scientific Committee and its 10 Scientific Panels, which are composed of leading scientists in their fields. Additional external experts participate in working groups when more specialised knowledge is required. Both groups are supported by EFSA staff.

vi. Who we work with

EFSA collaborates with partners throughout Europe. These include institutions with whom the Authority is tasked to work under EU law, specifically policy makers/risk managers in the European Commission, the European Parliament and Member States.

EFSA also works with national food safety authorities and other scientific organisations responsible for aspects of risk assessment through its Advisory Forum, Focal Points, Scientific Networks and organisations identified through article 36 of EFSA's founding regulation. In addition, EFSA seeks to foster partnerships with other EU agencies.

This collaborative approach is not confined to Europe; EFSA works with global risk assessment bodies as well as institutions in non-European countries,

particularly to take stock of scientific developments and to develop or revise assessment guidance.

As part of its interaction with a broad range of stakeholders the Authority proactively engages with various groups, such as non-governmental organisations, industry associations and applicants for regulated products as well as the wider scientific community. This broad spectrum of dialogue ranges from face-to-face meetings with stakeholders and public consultations, to calls for data and surveys on the views of our partners.

II. EFSA's core tasks

The Agency's overall priority is to deliver fit-for-purpose scientific advice that contributes to public health and meets the requirements of our stakeholders.

EFSA's core "engines" are the delivery and communication of advice on general scientific assessment priorities set by decision makers and society, and the evaluation of food and feed products that require a safety assessment before they can be used on the EU market. These tasks are established in our mission; they represent the bulk of our customer requests and will continue to do so.

Over time there will be fluctuations and evolutions in the nature and the volume of these two core working areas – as a result of new risk management priorities, new legislation or new foodborne outbreaks, for example – but they will continue to be the staple activities of the Agency, and their detailed planning and prioritisation will be addressed in EFSA's work plans.

III. Challenges and opportunities – drivers for change

i. Expectations of greater transparency and engagement

Transparency and engagement – which together are the two facets of openness – are fundamental aspects of EFSA's work and are enshrined in the Authority's founding regulation. Expectations of more openness have been increasing and are expected to increase further, e.g. as a product of today's better informed, faster connected society. This is also the case in EFSA as shown, for example, by the number of requests for access to documents. There are also expectations related to transparency and engagement in the process of scientific assessment, and access to underlying methodologies and data. All of the above pose a challenge to EFSA, particularly in terms of extra demands on resources and time, and safeguarding the independence of scientific assessments.

In addition, increased openness brings important possibilities. A broader engagement with risk managers and stakeholders provides opportunities for developing efficient data collection systems to support risk assessment and for monitoring the safety of food on the European market.

Such engagement will also make it possible to harvest scientific knowledge, experience and tools developed by other sectors and organisations, including EU Agencies that provide scientific advice in other societal areas, and to tap into the unexplored expertise of citizen-scientists.

Meeting these expectations proactively will be essential to EFSA's ability to maintain and strengthen the trust of its stakeholders.

ii. Emergence of new risks and hazards, requiring complex food safety questions

As highlighted in the [study](#) commissioned by the European Commission on future scenarios for food safety and nutrition, new risks and hazards in food production will continue to emerge, thereby increasing the need for data, methodologies, expertise and scientific advice on new and complex food safety questions.

Demographic changes – ageing populations, increasing migration flows – and changes in consumer attitudes and behaviour towards nutrition will lead to further diversification of diets in Europe. Population growth, climate change and food waste all pose challenges to global food security and food safety. New technologies, such as biotechnology, animal cloning and nanotechnology add to the complexity of the food chain and the task of risk assessment.

EFSA and its partners will have to address these new developments within the context of societal expectations of broader, sustainable levels of protection of human, animal, plant and environmental health.

iii. Evolving scientific knowledge, creating a need for innovative and collaborative approaches

Scientific knowledge continues to evolve rapidly, with methodologies, information and data becoming available on an increasingly global scale. Emerging research areas and scientific developments are constantly bringing new insights to EFSA's work. For example, new findings in biomedical research such as in neurotoxicity, reproductive toxicity, and epigenetic toxicity may directly affect the nature of EFSA's scientific assessments.

EFSA collects and analyses existing evidence and data but does not generate primary evidence to carry out its scientific assessments. It will be increasingly important for EFSA and the wider risk assessment community to partner with research bodies, risk managers and funding bodies to identify and prioritise research funding for the generation of data for its on-going work.

EFSA will have to monitor and take stock of new scientific developments generated by these partners, thus ensuring that its work, and particularly its risk assessment methodologies, remains relevant and continues to reflect the newest scientific developments and evidence available.

iv. The impact of globalisation

Further integration of regional and national economies, societies and cultures – so-called globalisation – is expected as a growing number of countries sign up to free-trade agreements and emerging economies' share of global trade increases. This will lead not only to an increasingly globalised trade in food and feed products, but also to a more complex food supply chain, which poses challenges for EFSA, such as for the tracing of food-borne outbreaks.

The future of EU food safety and nutrition will depend increasingly on the actions of global players – for example, trade blocs and multinational companies – and the extent to which global cooperation can be achieved on the setting and enforcement of standards throughout the food chain. In this process, the EU will need to ensure that existing high standards on food safety are adopted universally or improved, rather than undermined through a “race to the bottom”.

To address these major challenges EFSA will need to play a leading role in the development of a global risk assessment community to promote high levels of risk assessment standards and harness expertise in the EU and internationally.

v. Efficient operation of the agency's activities

In the coming years EFSA will continue to execute its core and supporting activities in line with EU legislation. This will become more challenging as the agency's resources are becoming scarcer, as is the case with other public organisations i.e. staffing is being reduced by 10% over five years and the budget over the next five years will, at best, remain stable. At the same time there is an increasing demand for additional services, such as support to applicants for regulated products, as well as for more self-tasking on general scientific assessment priorities.

Efficiency will therefore be key to the successful execution of core and supporting activities, and to this end enhanced cooperation with Member State and international scientific assessment bodies and technological advances present a particular opportunity for improving efficiency. Emerging technologies may also further standardise and automate routine tasks of the agency, while the development of collaborative digital platforms will help to harness the grassroots movement of citizen-scientists.

EFSA will need to explore all possible solutions to achieve the needed efficiency gains, from closer collaboration with its partners to innovative approaches in the conduct of its working methods.

vi. Availability of expertise for EFSA's multidisciplinary needs

EFSA currently provides support to the members of the Scientific Committee, 10 Scientific Panels and their working groups. A key challenge in this area is to

maintain EFSA's attractiveness and access to diverse, competent and independent scientific experts. The reasons for this are multifactorial, but include the fact that organisations making experts available to EFSA face similar resource constraints; that the population of potential experts is limited by requirements related to independence and the need to be well-versed in scientific assessment approaches; and potentially limited attractiveness given the demands made on experts' time.

EFSA will have to carefully and comprehensively assess these underlying factors and address them in cooperation with EU and international partners.

IV. Strategic Objectives

EFSA has formulated five strategic objectives that will transform the way we operate and enable us to address the challenges, opportunities and evolutions described above, without compromising our core values or the quality of our work. In particular, we have identified the need to invest in:

- strengthened transparency and engagement throughout the risk assessment process and an organisational culture that reflects EFSA's values and delivers EFSA's strategic aims.
- key assets and capabilities, i.e. our evidence base, expertise and capacity building, risk assessment methodologies and anticipation of risk assessment priorities.

The five strategic objectives up to 2020 are:

1. Prioritise public engagement in the process of scientific assessment
2. Widen EFSA's evidence base and maximise access to its data
3. Build the EU's scientific assessment capacity and knowledge community
4. Prepare for future risk assessment challenges
5. Create an environment and culture that reflects EFSA's values

We are confident that these objectives will contribute significantly to the priorities of the European Commission. For example, we expect that:

- strengthened transparency and engagement will boost harmonised EU safety assessment and trust in the food chain, and together with our open data approach – sharing re-usable data that will in turn generate new knowledge – will help to make the EU more democratic, bolster growth and competitiveness, and reinforce the internal market;

- opening up data and methodologies and making them available online via dedicated EFSA hubs will stimulate the development of the digital single market;
- fostering the EU and international risk assessment community will strengthen EFSA's role in promoting high risk assessment standards globally and will support the EU's trade agenda in key areas, such as plant health;
- finally, investing in preparedness – by developing data, methodologies and expertise in cooperation with our partners – will be key in addressing on-going priorities such as antimicrobial resistance, as well as emerging risks and hazards, such as those resulting from increased migration, climate change, increased trade of food, plant and animal products, and new technologies.

These strategic objectives are presented below. For each objective, operational objectives have been identified. In addition, main actions that are envisaged to implement these strategic and operational objectives are provided; this is not an exhaustive list, as additional actions will be added with the development of a detailed implementation plan, and its regular review in the years to follow.

i. Strategic Objective 1

Prioritise public engagement in the process of scientific assessment

EFSA aims to enable citizens to contribute more widely to its risk assessment work and thereby to increase trust.

EFSA will introduce more checkpoints to its risk assessment and risk communication processes by increasing transparency on assumptions and data used and uncertainties in outputs. Furthermore, it will promote dialogue with the scientific community and society. The potential challenges and limitations linked to such an approach will be evaluated and balanced against the benefits.

Operational objectives	Description/Actions
1 Ensure that mandates capture societal needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable participation in the framing of complex mandates and in the prioritisation of self-tasking initiatives to better take account of societal needs. • Strengthen engagement with applicants for regulated products, through dedicated events (e.g. info sessions, webinars, applicant hearings) and enhancement of guidance on administrative and scientific issues related to the preparation of application dossiers.
2 Make documentation on information gathering and the evaluation process available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information on selection and use of evidence (e.g. key studies used, guidance followed) and methodologies. • Provide access to non-confidential data/information and methods used in the risk assessment process. • Improve traceability of discussions and the decision-making process (e.g. minutes reflecting the flow of discussions, decisions available via post-meeting flash summaries). • Increase available information during various stages of the life-cycle of applications for regulated products through an enhanced EFSA catalogue of support initiatives (e.g. targeted support to SMEs and other applicant types, electronic management of dossiers).

<p>3 Foster engagement throughout the development of scientific assessments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more external input through increased use of public consultations and participation of experts and stakeholders in the development of EFSA outputs (e.g. technical hearings), including on the approach to the selection and use of evidence and methodologies. • Strengthen the tools to engage with applicants throughout the risk assessment process of regulated products, e.g. for the provision of support initiatives (clarification teleconferences, applicant hearings), including during the completeness/suitability check. • Develop EFSA's website into a gateway for engagement and cooperation for EFSA staff, experts, and the general public, incorporating social media.
<p>4 Ensure clarity in the communication of findings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a process to improve post-publication interaction/communication with stakeholders, e.g. enabling the posting of comments on opinions. • Raise the visibility, impact and accessibility of the EFSA Journal; strengthen peer reviewing of scientific opinions. • Build a global network on risk communication to internationalise messages. • Improve communication by providing more information in scientific opinions on data inclusion or exclusion, the weight of evidence approach, uncertainty and the applied assessment methodology. Expand publication of plain-language summaries.

ii. Strategic Objective 2

Widen EFSA's evidence base and optimise access to its data

EFSA aims to enhance the quality of its outputs by giving direct access to data and promoting the development of collaborative platforms in Europe and internationally.

EFSA will be an advocate for openness by working with data providers and organisations funding research to adopt open data concepts and standards; gaining better access to, and making better use of, data from a wider evidence base. EFSA recognises that its efforts to make data more accessible will have to take account of data confidentiality and security issues.

Operational objectives	Description/Actions
1 Adopt an Open Data approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Data Warehouse to offer better access to the data underpinning EFSA's scientific outputs – provided there are no confidentiality issues. • Work with data providers and research funders to promote a culture of openness and sharing. • Initiate a data innovation campaign(s) and collaborative opportunities to promote new knowledge and applications of scientific data.
2 Improve data interoperability to facilitate data exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in European and international interoperability working groups. • Identify partnerships to facilitate wider access to data outside EFSA's hub. • Co-develop tools to facilitate exchange of data from different sources. • Improve EFSA's role as a key contributor to European Open Science projects and integrate with relevant European and international data portals.
3 Migrate towards structured scientific data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify scientific data that could be harmonised using a structured format, building on existing international standards. • Ensure that data in regulated product dossiers are submitted in a structured format and develop tools and methods for validation of such data. • Improve on-line access to validated scientific data by providing support for their re-use, e.g. for in silico, bio-informatics and simulation methods within EFSA remit.

iii. Strategic Objective 3

Build the EU's scientific assessment capacity and knowledge community

EFSA aims to set up cooperation initiatives that make the best use of expertise for scientific assessment through a partnership between EFSA staff, scientific experts and Member State organisations.

EFSA will invest in competence development and capability transfer, common programming and work-sharing, to grow EU (and international) expertise, thus increasing the EU's scientific assessment capacity and efficiency.

Operational objectives	Description/Actions
1 Set up and implement a common risk assessment and research agenda with Member States and EU agencies, in collaboration with international partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and coordinate key EU food safety priorities on which to cooperate and coordinate actions at EU and international level. • Establish clusters with other EU Agencies to identify research priorities and establish close collaboration with DGs JRC, R&I and Agri for the funding of key research projects and the monitoring of their early results. • Optimise operations of EFSA's cooperation fora (Scientific Networks, Advisory Forum, Communications Working Group, Focal Points, Article 36 organisations) to maximise impact at national and EU level, and assess the need for strengthening them (e.g. with new partners or new areas) or developing new ones (e.g. with other EU Agencies or in the international sphere).
2 Foster the growth of the EU and international risk assessment community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the drivers and implement initiatives for attracting and retaining the best scientific assessment scientists (experts and staff). • Analyse the drivers and promote and coordinate initiatives that stimulate competent organisations to build and share their expertise and resources. • Identify and foster the continuous development of key, interdisciplinary competencies and capabilities for scientific assessment in the remit of EFSA, spanning

young to senior scientists: set up dedicated mobility schemes as well as knowledge management and training programmes (e.g. guest scientists, PhD exchanges, fellowships, training courses).

- Support cooperation and mentoring within the EU and internationally (e.g. by sharing tools, data and expertise and setting up twinning projects).
- Organise events and initiatives (on- and off-line) to support networking between experts, national bodies and other Centres of Expertise.
- Prioritise the use of virtual channels and web tools as primary means of cooperation.

**3 Review and further develop
EFSA's scientific
assessment model**

- Review the available capacity, roles and tasks of Panels, working groups, EFSA staff and networks within the scientific evaluation process and coordinate initiatives towards a more effective and efficient model.

iv. Strategic Objective 4

Prepare for future risk assessment challenges

Anticipating risk assessment priorities and related methodology and evidence needs will ensure EFSA is prepared for present and new challenges in a dynamic food safety system, whilst driving harmonisation of methodologies to improve food safety across Europe and promote trust.

EFSA will ensure its scientific assessments remain relevant by innovating, providing stimulus to the EU research programme on safety in the food chain; working with its European and international partners to promote consensus on identifying risk assessment priorities, on how evidence-based risk assessment should be performed; and making risk assessment more accessible by providing online access to methods and tools.

Operational Objectives	Description/Actions
1 Strengthen EFSA's preparedness to anticipate and respond effectively to food safety risks in cooperation with EU and international partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and implement a process for the identification, planning, implementation and reviewing of research and scientific assessment priorities and follow-up self-initiatives. • Strengthen processes and tools related to emerging risks. • Develop a "toolbox" for crisis preparedness.
2 Develop and implement harmonised methodologies for risk assessment across the EU and internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the implementation of existing guidance documents within EFSA. • Implement the 2015 Scientific Committee Opinion on Guidance Review by establishing a timetable for the review of all existing sectorial and horizontal guidance, in collaboration with EU and international partners. • Perform coordinated monitoring and review of the application of guidance documents in EFSA and beyond, and monitor EU and international risk assessments to keep EFSA guidance up to date.
3 Become a hub in methodologies and tools for risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement an open access online platform for methodologies and tools, in cooperation with stakeholders. • Transform EFSA tools into international standards that are used regularly in training.

v. Strategic Objective 5

Create an environment and culture that reflect EFSA's values

EFSA aims to foster a culture of openness, innovation, cooperation, independence and scientific excellence among its experts, partners and staff.

EFSA will launch initiatives and foster an environment that allow it to put into practice its values that sustain organisational performance improvements, hence the delivery of Strategic Objectives 1 to 4.

Operational Objectives	Description/Actions
1 People: build a culture that puts EFSA's values into practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out initiatives to ensure the work culture in EFSA delivers the organisation's strategic intent (to be an open, proactive, cooperative, independent, excellent organisation). • Embed reputation management in the daily practices of managers, staff and experts. • Invest in leadership awareness and development. Introduce standards and related indicators to set expectations and measure managerial performance. • Promote and maintain a reward culture for EFSA staff.
2 Organisation and processes: develop an environment focused on improving organisational performance and capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a system (organisation, processes and technology) to transform EFSA's values into concrete processes and practices, e.g. physical and virtual cooperation spaces, mobile and Web 2.0 solutions for sharing information, professionalised project, programme and portfolio management practices, implementation of a quality management system towards continuous improvement.

