

89th MEETING OF THE EFSA ADVISORY FORUM



04 October 2023: 9:30-13:00

05 October 2023: 9:30-13:00

MINUTES

Location: Webconference

Members	Attendance
Austria (AT)	Johann Steinwider
Austria (AT)	Klemens Fuchs
Belgium (BE)	Axel Mauroy
Belgium (BE)	Fabien Bolle
Bulgaria (BG)	Donka Popova
Croatia (HR)	Andrea Gross - Bošković
Cyprus (CY)	Charitini Frenaritou
Czech Republic (CZ)	Jitka Gotzova
Denmark (DK)	Christine Nellemann
Denmark (DK)	Dorte Lau Baggesen
Estonia (EE)	Piret Priisalu
Estonia (EE)	Mari Reinik
Finland (FI)	Pia Mäkelä
France (FR)	Matthieu Schuler
France (FR)	Salma Elreedy
Germany (DE)	Andreas Hensel
Greece (EL)	Stavros Zannopoulos
Hungary (HU)	Ákos Bernard Józwiak
Iceland (IS)	Katrin Gudjonsdottir
Ireland (IE)	Wayne Anderson
Italy (IT)	Alessandra Perella
Latvia (LV)	Vadims Bartkevics
Lithuania (LT)	Apologies
Luxembourg (LU)	Danny Zust
Malta (MT)	Mark Cassar
Netherlands (NL)	Antoon Opperhuizen
Norway (NO)	Harald Gjein
Poland (PL)	Jacek Postupolski
Portugal (PT)	Pedro Portugal Gaspar
Portugal (PT)	Filipa Vasconcelos
Romania (RO)	Monica Mariana Neagu
Slovak Republic (SK)	Kristína Lépesová
Slovenia (SI)	Urška Blaznik
Spain (ES)	Icár Fierros
Sweden (SE)	Helena Brunnkvist



Observers & Other Participants	Attendance
Albania (AL)	Amarilda Keli
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA)	Dzemil Hajric
Kosovo*	Apologies
Montenegro (ME)	Mirjana Lekic
Republic of North Macedonia (MK)	Nikolche Babovski
Switzerland (CH)	Katharina Stärk
Türkiye (TR)	Apologies
European Commission – DG SANTE – E.3 (Observer)	Ilenia Ciabatti
European Commission (Observer)	Frans Verstraete
European Commission (Observer)	Anastasia Alvizou
European Commission (Observer)	Athanasios Raikos
German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR)	Nicole Gollnick
Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell’Abruzzo e del Molise (IZS)	Angelo Cerella
National Veterinary Institute (SVA)	Frida Broman
French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES)	Celine Druet
French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES)	Dylan Cherrier
Portuguese Economy and Food Safety Authority (ASAE)	José Vieira
Cyprus State General Laboratory	Rebecca Kokkinofa
EFSA Representatives	
Bernhard Url (Chair)	Tiago Rebelo (Advisory Forum Secretariat)
Barbara Gallani (Co-Chair)	Donna Lucas (Speaker)
Nick Kriz (Co-Chair)	Frank Verdonck (Speaker)
Guilhem de Seze (Co-Chair)	Ernesto Liebana (Speaker)
Carlos Das Neves (Co-Chair)	Tommaso Raffaello (Speaker)
Victoria Villamar (HoU ENREL)	Domagoj Vrbos (Speaker)
Sérgio Potier Rodeia (Team Leader, Community Management)	Maria Bastaki (Speaker)
Maria Azevedo Mendes (Advisory Forum Secretariat)	Lucian Farcas (Speaker)
Virginia Spurio Salvi (Advisory Forum Secretariat)	Georges Kass (Speaker)
Cristina Alonso Andicoberry (Advisory Forum Secretariat)	Valentina Rizzi (Speaker)
Andrea Laroni (Advisory Forum Secretariat)	Ana Luisa Afonso (HoU NIF)



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Item 1: Opening and welcome address

Bernhard Url, Chair, opened the 89th Meeting of the Advisory Forum (AF) by welcoming the members of the AF in the virtual session. The meeting included participants from 33 countries and the European Commission (EC). The AF welcomed external speakers from Italy and Sweden. New representatives from Iceland, Bulgaria, and Slovak Republic were introduced. Greetings were given to colleagues from DG SANTE. A warm welcome was extended to the new observer from Montenegro and to the hearing participant from the Cyprus State General Laboratory.

Item 2: Adoption of agenda and action points from last meeting

The Plenary adopted the agenda of the meeting as it was proposed by the chair. No AOB's were noted. The Chair informed the Plenary that the [final minutes](#) of the 88th Advisory Forum Meeting had been published on 19 September.

Item 3: Update on the Advisory Group on Data (AGoD)

Akos Jozwiak (Hungary) presented the progress of the AGoD. The group held its 17th (online) and 18th (online) meetings on 7 September and 29 September, respectively. The discussions covered the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the changing landscape of digitalization. AGoD emphasized the need for considerations on risk assessment processes influenced by AI and various AI-related aspects such as ethics and data standardization. The group discussed upcoming projects, such as creating an infographic to transparently communicate AGoD's work, setting up a website, organizing a session on AI during future meetings and planning a data-related conference in 2024 to facilitate collaboration between AGoD members, subgroups and AF members. Three FP tailor-made activities are presented: data capture at point of sampling, data model mapping tool, and data flow mapping consultancy.

The Plenary enquired about the data flow mapping timeline, the link between AGoD and the EC, and the content of the proposed website. Akos Jozwiak mentioned that mapping is scheduled for January, highlighted the EC presence at AGoD meetings, and described the website as a hub for AGoD's outputs and discussions. It was emphasized that AGoD aims at supporting existing EU initiatives such as the European Chemical Data Platform. The chair identified the need to foster a closer link between AGoD and MSs projects on data/AI and expresses gratitude to all AGoD members for their work. Collaborative efforts and contributions from MSs were also acknowledged.

Action 1: EFSA, with input from AGoD, to organise a thematic session on AI and its impact on the risk assessment processes at the December AF meeting.

Item 4: Focal Point Operational Framework 2023-2027

4.1. State of play of current tailor-made activities

4.1.1 "European Excellence Label (EEL)" under the FP tailor-made activities

Nicole Gollnick (Germany) presented on the status of the EEL project led by Germany under the FP tailor-made activities. The EEL aims to increase and secure a pool of competently trained food risk assessors through harmonised high-quality training from many European countries. The idea of EEL was developed by EFSA's Advisory Forum Discussion Group on Capacity Building and will be implemented under the Focal Point Framework 2023-2027. Under German leadership and Danish coordination, 9 countries are currently working on the EEL criteria, communication and web platform. The launch of the EEL website is planned for 2024. The onboarding phase is completed; work in sub-



groups is kicked-off; the workflow of EEL website was analysed in a scenario workshop in Berlin; technical specifications for EEL website were drafted.

France raised the question about the process of application and subsequent awarding of the EEL: what would be the criteria to be met and the competencies that might be needed to award the label as well as the body that would take the decision to award it or not. Germany replied outlining how quality, content, and methods of training will be assessed. There will be a reviewer panel (one or two reviewers per training submitted; online review process). Trainings will be assessed depending on how they meet the needs of the community, the standards of the EEL, and whether they are something that can be advertised on the website. The EEL project is not responsible for the organisation and delivery of the trainings in any form but rather to point out where these excellency trainings are available. Norway conveyed a very positive feedback on their experience with the initiative.

4.1.2.a) The Sigma-est: Beyond the mapping

Angelo Cerella (Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell’Abruzzo e del Molise – Italy) presented the main features of the Sigma-est, a tool already in use for some data providers to manage big populations such as for the African swine fever. The tool can transform generic data structures into specific data-models, convert your own data values into specific data values, and performs data checks to ensure the quality of the transformation. At the end of this process, Sigma-est is capable of producing an output file ready to be submitted to another system.

EFSA expressed its support to the initiative as a key tool to address the issue of MSs having different ways to approach data collection and mapping with potential application also to other areas.

4.1.2.b) Data Mapping Tool – The Swedish Prestudy

Frida Broman (SLV – Sweden) presented on the tailor-made activity 4.4 – the Swedish preliminary study on data mapping tool. The tool aims at making the conversion between national format and SSD2 format automatic and easier for MSs through a data mapping core based on AI that facilitates automated mapping. The preliminary study aims at identifying and documenting the expectations and requirements, propose features and functionalities tailored to meet the identified needs, present a recommended technical solution, and lay out the plan for the implementation stage. At the core of the project lies the integration of AI models and algorithms into the data mapping tool.

EFSA emphasised the value of this initiative. Together with the Sigma-est project, the aim should be to synergise these tools, avoiding overlaps between MSs projects and ensuring harmonised data mapping at the general EU level.

4.2. Overview of proposals of tailor-made activities for 2024

Sérgio Potier Rodeia (EFSA) provided an overview of the tailor-made (TM) activities for 2024, indicating activities to be finalised and ongoing ones as well as proposals currently under assessment. The Plenary was informed about an important new development, namely the possibility to subcontract core tasks to Art. 36 organisations. The FP would still retain overall responsibility for the implementation of specific agreements vis-à-vis EFSA and the recourse to subcontracting of both core and non-core tasks will need to be justified and approved by EFSA on a case by case basis. This will materialise in practice via an amendment of Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) and is set to occur by January 2024. The Plenary was also informed about the upgrade of the submission tool for TM proposals and the updates of the microsite (to improve the accessibility and visualisation of MSs activities as per requests received by EFSA), the guidelines on the use of the TM tool, and the explanatory document on the FP framework.



4.3. AF Trio Advice on tailor-made proposals

Icía Fierros Sánchez-Cuenca (Spain) presented on behalf of the AF Trio (which also includes Germany and Sweden) the role in providing advice on tailor-made activities proposals. The presentation outlined the main features of the tailor-made activities proposal assessment and decision-making process emphasising importance of AF Trio role. During the presentation, Icía Fierros Sánchez-Cuenca informed about all steps and actors involved in the assessment and decision-making process, including the ones taken by AF Trio, described the criteria used by EFSA for the assessment and criteria used by AF Trio for advice. The presentation highlighted the AF Trio's role to bring MSs perspective into the process. As supporting material EFSA together with the AF Trio, has recently developed the document called "Dossier for trio advice on tailor-made proposals".

4.4. Discussion

As regards the subcontracting of core tasks to Art. 36 organisation, Ireland asked for the confirmation that the FP organisation must maintain the lead in the implementation of TM activities. EFSA confirmed this is the case as FPAs are monopoly agreements between EFSA and FP organisations, the latter retaining ultimate responsibility for the implementation of activities.

The Netherlands asked to pay attention also to the balance of proposals' distribution among the five different areas of FP activities. EFSA agreed and noted the importance for proposal ideas to stay well-focused on these five areas.

The main focus of the discussion revolved around finding the equilibrium between financial support that EFSA could provide through standard Grants & Procurement and support obtained via FP TM activities. The deliberation stemmed from the acknowledgment that EFSA's resources may not cover all potential funding needs. In addition, the need to consider in the future a EFSA-MSs co-funding system was highlighted by the general discussion and put on the table for further deliberation. Moreover, the Netherlands suggested to have an evaluation in 2024 of the value delivered by the TM activities.

Action 2: EFSA to organize with the Member States a dedicated session on the added value of the Focal Point tailor-made activities, in principle to be held in the second half of 2024.

Item 5: Partnerships

5.1. Financial possibilities for partnerships – rules & process

Donna Lucas (EFSA) presented on the use of Grants and Procurement (G&P) to facilitate the funding of partnerships. Following up on feedback from Art. 36 organisations, EFSA increased the outreach and clarity of information about funding opportunities for partnerships through procurement and grants. To address these requests, EFSA developed infographics on the [procurement](#) and [grants](#) processes. A [short animation](#) was also designed to explain the differences between procurement and grants, but also to outline the differences in the application processes and explain the documents to be submitted. Stakeholder engagement has been another area of focus for outreach activities. In December 2022, EFSA organised a webinar to explain and promote EFSA scientific funding opportunities for 2023 and a similar event is being planned for the end of 2023 to highlight opportunities for the coming years. Moreover, EFSA participates regularly in meetings with representatives of MSs, aiming to increase dissemination of G&P information at the national level. For G&P calls of particular complexity or high value, EFSA has been organising pre-launch webinars involving scientific units and Art. 36 organisation to provide information on the calls and receive feedback to improve the design of the calls. Post-launch webinars were also organised to provide further information on already launched calls to incentivise applications. In terms of outcomes, engagement activities produced an increased number



of applications (including increase in applications by consortium) and a reduction in the number of failed calls so far in 2023.

5.2. EU Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare

Frank Verdonck (EFSA) provided an overview of the EU Partnership on Animal Health (EUP AH&W), a co-funded project under Horizon Europe which passed the selection step and is now advancing towards signing the grant agreement around mid-December 2023. The Partnership will work on the following priority topics: surveillance and monitoring; diagnostic procedures, methodologies and tools; risk assessment and alert communication; vaccines and treatments; and socio-economic aspects. For the first time, EFSA will participate as a 'full partner' in an EU Partnership, meaning active involvement in different work packages, namely WP2 Monitoring and update of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), WP3 Joint Initiatives & Integration (i.e. topic-specific projects), and WP5 Communication, exploitation, education and dissemination. Many MSs will also be involved in the EUP AH&W, via their research organisations and via their participation in the Governing Board.

France expressed its support to the Partnership and appreciation for the presence of the question of safety assessment among the work packages. EFSA stressed the importance of close cooperation between MSs and EFSA in order to maximize mutual benefits stemming from this type of big research investment projects and given their direct impact on our regulatory activities. Appreciation was expressed towards the EC for its role in facilitating the participation of EFSA in the Partnership.

Item 6: Engaging in Risk Assessment

6.1. EFSA

6.1.a) Carbapenem resistance in E. coli in food producing animals: detected signals and next steps

Ernesto Liebana (EFSA) presented the recent findings on the emerging resistance to carbapenems which are broad spectrum antimicrobials of paramount importance for the treatment of serious infections in humans. In the last years, several sporadic published studies have reported the occurrence of carbapenems-producing (CP) bacteria in food-producing animals and their environment, including in the EU. In addition, data from the EU harmonised monitoring scheme revealed the presence of carbapenems-producers in several Member States and animal sectors. The presentation aimed at raising awareness of this worrying trend and raising the question of how EFSA and MSs can collaborate to generate the data needed to inform risk managers' action.

The Netherlands stated that NVWA has been working on carbapenems for a long time and expressed its availability to collaborate on the issue. It also mentioned the [Conference on Antimicrobial Resistance](#) to be held on 5-6 October, in Amsterdam.

France mentioned that surveys are also performed in their country, with - for the moment - no signs of resistance detected as regards animals grown for economic purposes, although some resistance was detected in domestic animals.

The Commission stated that there is a need to fully understand the general picture first, before potentially considering a mandate to EFSA. In this endeavour, MSs are kindly invited to collaborate with EFSA to generate the data needed.

6.1.b) Mandates; Public consultations; RA plans; other updates.

Guilhem de Seze (EFSA) discussed various risk assessment activities and flagged specific points of interest. Ongoing activities related to herbal compounds in Serbia, nano and



microplastic work in Italy, and nutrition biomarkers in Ireland were identified. The assessments of aspartame by IARC and JECFA were addressed. IARC classified it as a possible carcinogenic to humans, but with the ADI recently confirmed by JECFA, the general population is protected based on current exposure data.

Additionally, the presentation mentioned ongoing public consultations by EFSA, with 21 currently open, primarily related to pesticides and nutrition. Guilhem de Seze emphasized that the higher number of consultations reflect the increasing number of dossiers submitted after the transparency regulation entry into force. Finally, the presentation touched on calls for data, specifically focusing on food additives and Article 8, highlighting calls related to herbal compounds such as fennel tea, hydroxycitric acid, and berberine-containing plant preparations.

6.2. MS

6.2.a) State-of-play of the collaborative approach on Perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

Matthieu Schuler (France) outlined the ongoing PFAS initiative involving Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and France, along with representatives from the EC and EFSA. The initiative comprises a Risk Assessment Group and a Steering Group, both aiming to facilitate information and sharing. Other countries were invited to join the initiative, as long as they appoint representatives to both groups. It was emphasised that there was a need to determine the types of information and possibly data to be shared, including national and/or EFSA-collected data. It was announced that the terms of reference for these groups are in the draft stage and expected to be finalized soon.

6.2.b) Report on the “Webinar on the PFAS in the Nordic Region”

Christine Nellemann (Denmark) provided an overview of the PFAS webinar held on September 18th, organized by four Nordic countries: DTU National Food Institute, Finnish Food Authority, Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food and Environment and Swedish Food Agency. The webinar addressed various aspects of PFAS, including human health risks, risk assessments in the Nordic Region, consumer exposure, risk management and monitoring. Participants identified key areas for future focus, emphasizing research into PFAS substitutes and they recognized the importance of public knowledge and communication. The [initiative](#) was recorded and will be shared on the DTU National Food Institute by October 12th. There are plans to organize another PFAS webinar in the coming years.

France indicated that ANSES colleagues attended the Webinar which they found of much interest. He finds it particularly noteworthy that the top expectation from participants was related to substitution, which aligns with the restriction proposal submitted to ECHA. The importance of ECHA and need to eliminate non-essential uses of PFAS was emphasized. Nikolaus Kriz (EFSA) observed that the coming together of countries who take the lead is always a vehicle for future progress.

Item 7: Session on New Genomic Techniques (NGT)

7.1. Introduction on background and EFSA work

Guilhem de Seze (EFSA) introduced the session as a follow up to discussions occurred during the 88th AF meeting in Stockholm, outlining EFSA’s role so far in support to the preparation of a proposal for a new regulation by the EC. Emphasis was also posed on the opportunity for deeper discussion on the role that EFSA and MSs could play in this new framework.

7.2. EFSA highlights on NGT:



a. GMO scientific network discussions

Tommaso Raffaello (EFSA) presented an overview of the relevant discussions on NGTs that took place at the GMO Network meetings in the last three years. The primary objectives of the network include enhancing risk assessment practices and methodologies, and exchange of information between EFSA and MSs regarding the risk assessment of genetically modified organisms. With a closer focus on the more on the recent discussion on NGTs, in April 2022, the network reflected on proportionate RA and case-by-case approach and discussed the possible criteria for proportionate risk assessment of NGT plants. In November 2022, following the EFSA presentation of two documents, namely the criteria for RA of NGT plants and the updated opinion on cisgenesis and intragenesis, the network discussed the criteria proposed by EFSA within those documents. Finally, in June 2023, the network discussed two recent EFSA mandates on the RA of microorganisms and animals developed via NGTs.

b. Societal insights

Domagoj Vrbos (EFSA) gave a presentation about the societal insights on NGTs. In 2021, EFSA conducted a flash poll with around 8000 citizens in 24 EU Member States covering the topics of knowledge, perception, and information needs related to NGTs. The results revealed that around one third of Europeans had heard about the topic, with higher awareness among the younger population; around 8 out of 10 people found it difficult to distinguish between the old and new techniques. The perceived impact of NGTs across multiple areas (e.g., human health, climate change, food security) was overall neutral - people worried about GMOs in general tended to perceive the impact less positively; those with more knowledge on the topic tended to have more positive views. In terms of information, respondents were mostly interested in risk assessment (e.g. what the potential risks of NGTs are). EFSA also presented social media analysis of the topic, where the discourse tends to be generally lower compared to other topics monitored (for example novel foods or food additives) but has witnessed peaks in moments of legislative discussions, such as the EC proposal launched on 5 July 2023. The interplay of knowledge and perceptions as per the above insights warrants risk communication and engagement activities that inform about the progress and results of ongoing risk assessments and ensure dialogue among interested parties, examples of which were also presented.

c. Discussion

France asked for a clarification about the objectives of the GMO network as it was mentioned that EFSA may entrust to the network certain tasks (i.e., preparatory work for scientific opinions). EFSA clarified that preparatory work refers to input in discussions on scientific methodology, exchanges on knowledge, and the scientific state of knowledge rather than in the sense of preparing draft opinions or even providing any contribution that would eventually be integrated into an EFSA opinion.

Ireland asked whether there were indications about the nature of concerns among participants in the survey. EFSA outlined that this was a brief survey without the ability to dive too much into details. However, some questions, as well as available literature imply that concerns are linked to the fact that NGTs are not observable, unknown, man-made or to the concern that they could interfere with people genes (this was one of the statements tested in the survey) or have consequences for human health.

Germany emphasised how MSs may have completely different views when it comes to GMOs, hence inquired on whether it is advised to conduct surveys at the EU level instead of switching to a more detailed analysis at MS level. EFSA specified that data is collected at the MS level and made available to MSs for their use via dedicated dashboards – the presentation focused on EU level results and social media discussions that were relevant to EFSA within its EU-wide communication mandate. EFSA welcomes use of data at MS level for specific and tailored communication activities.



7.3. ANSES working group on the evaluation of plants obtained by new genomic techniques

Dylan Cherrier (ANSES – France) provided an overview of ANSES working group on the evaluation of plants obtained by NGTs. Following a referral procedure from the French ministries of Environment and Agriculture, a working group on plants obtained by NGTs has been launched by ANSES. Objectives of the WG included to determine whether (and how) the current requirements regarding health and environmental risk assessments should be adapted for plants obtained by directed mutagenesis, and to document and analyse the social and economic stakes associated with NGTs in plants. As the work of the WG is still ongoing, an overview of expected actions was provided. Regarding the on-target and off-target undesired effects on the plant genomes, ANSES is conducting a systematic review of the literature to understand the nature, frequency, and factors that could affect the appearance of those effects. Regarding the adaptation of the requirements for health and environmental risk assessments, ANSES is conducting a careful analysis of current requirements and their applicability for plants obtained by NGTs, together with a case study aiming at identifying potential new risks associated with these plants. The mandate is expected to end in December 2023, and the scientific opinion to be published in early 2024.

7.4. Presentation of the proposal by DG SANTE – E3

Iliaria Ciabatti (EC – DG SANTE) presented to the Plenary the EC legislative proposal on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques. The proposal aims at maintaining high level of protection of health and environment, enabling developments to contribute to sustainability and climate adaptation in a wide range of plant species, and providing opportunities for research and innovation, including for SMEs. The scope of the proposal covers the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of plants obtained by targeted mutagenesis and cisgenesis, including intragenesis, and of food and feed containing, consisting, or produced from NGTs, as well as other products containing or consisting of NGT plants. Building on the evidence collected through a thorough impact assessment of different policy options, the proposal envisages two categories of NGT plants (equivalent or not to conventional plants) with two different regulatory pathways.

7.5. Discussion

Germany raised the question on how to address weak points of traceability or detection of NGT products in the prospect of future increases in the entrance of such products from third countries into the European market. DG SANTE outlined that detection challenges and opportunities have been investigated and analysed in two reports by the European Union Reference Laboratory on GMOs/European Network of GMO Laboratories and that MSs adopt national control plans where they have to implement a number of control measures, including but not limited to analytical testing.

Czech Republic voiced concerns about labelling and specifically the inability for MSs to check the information detailed via this kind of labelling.

Denmark thanked DG SANTE for bringing this balanced proposal to the AF, but raised the need for collaboration between DG SANTE, MSs, and EFSA on risk assessment and risk communication.

EFSA outlined how value-based judgements are affecting scientific risk assessments of MSs. This poses the question of how to assess risk, non-risks, and even benefits linked to the use of new techniques since different approaches utilized by MSs may result in different scientific assessments. This complicates the implementation of a coherent risk communication effort at the EU level and raise the question on how to ensure a right and coherent scientific basis as a prerequisite to coherently address the other challenges outlined so far.



Germany remarked the need for a EU level process that clarifies how MSs are to proceed in the risk assessment on the future evaluations of GMOs. Céline Druet (ANSES – France) indicated that it is important for a MS to have its own reflection on such a topic yet agreed that it is important to share views on risk assessment of NGTs, and though highlighting the complexity of organizing such collaborative processes.

Item 8: Cooperation with Global Partners

8.1. Current and upcoming initiatives

8.1.a) Introduction

Barbara Gallani (EFSA) highlighted the importance of global collaboration in addressing food safety issues. The need to exchange data, increase data access and establish international working groups to overcome challenges was emphasised. EFSA's focus lies within Europe and pre-accession countries, as well as supporting Codex efforts by the EC and MSs. The 20th anniversary of the Japanese Food Safety Commission in Tokyo was mentioned, where EFSA engaged in discussions regarding novel foods and technologies. Interactions with the US have intensified, particularly with the FDA, with whom EFSA has held two bilateral meetings in recent months. Upcoming activities include organizational meetings with the OECD, a meeting with WHO Europe in Copenhagen and a trilateral meeting between WHO, DG SANTE and EFSA.

8.1.b) Update of the Guidance for Risk Benefit Assessment of foods

Maria Bastaki (EFSA) provided insights into the ongoing update of the EFSA guidance for the risk and benefit assessment (RBA) of foods. The risk-benefit assessment process follows a tiered approach, beginning with a simple assessment for straightforward comparisons. As complexity increases, more refined, data-intensive assessments are performed. The harmonization of methods for conducting risk-benefit assessments was identified as one of the key challenges. Comprehensive assessments require sufficient data and may differ from what is feasible, depending on data availability. EFSA organised a scientific colloquium before embarking on the update of the Guidance. It was reiterated that EFSA is engaged in international collaborations and has participated in international conferences and workshops to contribute to global harmonization and best practices. Regarding upcoming activities, there are plans to engage with partners through the International Liaison Group on Methods for Risk Assessment and Chemicals in Food (ILMERAC) and there is the intention of conducting a public consultation in early 2024. This would also include a public technical meeting for more targeted input from experts. Discussions are ongoing regarding the possibility of a technical meeting with MSs during the public consultation. In addition, with the opportunity of this update to the AF, a survey was prepared to be disseminated to MSs, to gather feedback that can be incorporated into the guidance before the public consultation.

The Netherlands supported the proposal to disseminate the survey. Denmark conveyed its availability to be contacted for the risk benefit assessment and emphasised the project they are working on with WHO. Denmark also supported the survey proposal as a means of improving awareness about what is happening at the international and MS levels.

Ireland inquired about plans or best practices for effective risk communication to ensure that risk managers have a clear understanding of the assessment results. EFSA mentioned that they are including a separate section on risk-benefit communication in their guidance and the Communication Department at EFSA has undertaken a project related to this.

Action 3: MSs to disseminate the survey to MSs technical experts soliciting their experience with RBA of foods and their input in the ongoing update of the Guidance.



8.1.c) Progress Update on the Development of the Guidance on Biomarkers of Effect

Lucian Farcas (EFSA) provided an overview of the project, aimed at supporting risk assessors in applying a harmonised approach and integrating additional biological parameters into the risk assessment. The main goals are to establish guidance and achieve international agreement through consultations and collaboration with EU and international partners. The project is divided into two phases. The first phase focuses on defining biomarkers of effect and mapping existing initiatives. The second phase entailing the development of the guidance based on the outcomes and discussions from the first phase. It was highlighted that they are already engaged in collaboration with various organisations and international partners, such as OECD, US-FDA, PARC and ILMERAC.

EFSA remarked the importance of collaboration and emphasises the need for cooperation from experts across different MSs and international partners. EFSA concluded by highlighting the significance of having Member States, other EU agencies, and international partners onboard as co-creators right from the project's inception.

8.2 Milestones, plans ahead & advocating for global cooperation

8.2.a) Feedback on the Conference 'Science Meets Policy'

Valentina Rizzi (EFSA) presented on the second edition of the "[Science Meets Policy](#)" conference. The first edition took place in 2020, focusing on the absence of a legal framework for data sharing within the EU and the status of an EU-wide data sharing platform. The second edition, held in September 2023, addressed new methodologies and standards for data sharing, obstacles to data sharing, and potential solutions. Key takeaways from the conference were the need to build capacity in all EU Member States, establish trust, create common understanding, and put governance in place to facilitate data sharing while ensuring data confidentiality. It was outlined that next steps include coordinating the activities of the subgroup on Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) within the Zoonoses Network to promote further sharing of WGS data and to establish a specific protocol for cross-sectoral collaboration for responding to foodborne outbreaks, focusing on NGS data sharing. The work will involve engaging various stakeholders both within and outside the EU.

EFSA mentioned the unique situation regarding analytical tools and data sharing, as challenges emerge when fully utilizing these tools due to blockers related to confidentiality and concerns about sharing data. EFSA concluded by underlining the need for a bottom-up approach to build trust among various stakeholders, ensuring confidentiality where necessary and promoting openness where required.

Ireland highlighted the importance of building trust in data sharing and how issues can arise when data isn't correctly represented in reports. EFSA was commended for its flexibility in addressing such issues and amending interpretations when valid points are raised.

France inquired about the presence and participation of risk managers in the conference. EFSA replied by stating that there was active participation from risk managers at the country level and passive participation from risk managers at the EU level

8.2.b) 13th Global Summit on Regulatory Science (GSR)

Georges Kass (EFSA) reported on the recent Global Summit on Regulatory Science (GSR) organized by the Global Coalition for Regulatory Science Research (GCRSR). The emphasis was on how this coalition conducts annual conferences and establishes working groups to address crucial matters related to regulatory decision-making. The most recent Summit discussed the implementation of emerging technologies for food and drug safety, emphasizing the rapid pace of technological advancement and the growing confidence in



these technologies' regulatory applications. The remarkable acceleration in the speed at which AI and machine learning are progressing was mentioned, as it will provide new tools to aid regulatory processes, information collection and interpretation.

8.2.c) ASAE's International Cooperation – The Case with the Portuguese Speaking Countries

José Pedro Neto Vieira (Portugal) discussed international cooperation, particularly focusing on Portuguese-speaking countries. The cultural and language bond shared among these nations was mentioned, as this makes cooperation more accessible. Portugal aids these countries in replicating its food safety and economic safety model, formalizing cooperation through MoUs and protocols. Capacity building, technical visits, training sessions, lab support, and the exchange of information and documentation are key aspects of this cooperation. Neto Vieira shared examples of challenges, such as counterfeit high-end wines and locust bean gum contamination in Angola. A multilateral forum for Portuguese-speaking countries was mentioned, which meets every two years to address common issues, conduct coordinated inspections, and establish a rapid alert system among authorities.

EFSA stressed the importance of what ASAE does, emphasizing that Europe not only exports food, but also aims to export its food safety system and standards. Jose' Neto Vieira commented on the goal of their cooperation, which is to "export" not only the administrative model of ASAE but also the food safety standards and regulations used in their country. Cape Verde is the best example of this and Angola aims to follow suit.

8.2.d) Science in the Service of Humanity – Global Cooperation for Sustainable Food Safety

Andreas Hensel (Germany) underscored the importance of international collaboration and harmonization in the context of food safety. The need for countries to import safe food from foreign countries was highlighted and the challenges of investing in surveillance systems to remove unsafe products from the market were mentioned. Prof. Hensel underlined the value of exporting food safety standards and regulations, stating that it is crucial for both importing and exporting countries. Expressing the desire to collaborate and support others in achieving their vision for global food safety. Some core aspects were outlined: Share, Build, Create, and Ensure, with the goal of achieving food and feed safety worldwide and mitigating food crises and emerging foodborne diseases. Prof. Hensel stressed the importance of communication and trust in food safety agencies' work and mentioned the need for regulatory harmonization. Moreover, capacity building, the need for regulatory harmonization, and the value of sharing knowledge and standards were all mentioned in the presentation. To conclude, the was a description of core working areas: capacity building, global networks, exchange of information, and partnership programs, emphasizing that working together can lead to a better future for food safety.

8.3) Discussion

France emphasized the importance for ANSES of regular collaboration with BfR and EFSA in the context of international activities, mentioning that these collaborations often involve common partners in various countries, particularly those with which agreements have been signed. France suggested the value of sharing information about ongoing collaborative projects in a country / institution, ensuring that all of us can be informed about the work being conducted by different organizations in different countries and institutions. This would help in building a better understanding of who is working with the same institutions and projects, both currently and in the past.

Germany suggested the establishment of a platform that would facilitate discussions about collaboration plans with various countries. This would help coordinate efforts and resources, especially since different organizations possess diverse capabilities and expertise. This



would contribute to achieving more effective and comprehensive collaboration on a global scale.

EFSA proposed using the existing FP network to share information, coordinate projects, and discuss potential collaborations on an international level.

Portugal proposed EFSA to take the lead in the creation of a dynamic map tool in which AF members could insert information on their collaboration projects taking place with different countries. EFSA outlined that technically the idea would be feasible, but it would be a responsibility of MSs to keep the information in the tool up-to-date. The proposal is currently being considered together with the possibility to come back to the AF for a feasibility consideration.

In addition to collaboration, the discussion also touched on the exchange of staff between different food safety organizations. It was noted that staff exchanges could significantly enhance understanding and cooperation. The idea is to allow staff from various agencies to visit each other's organizations, building a deeper understanding of their activities. Germany suggested that a bi-directional approach would enable personnel to gain valuable insights into the workings of other agencies. Such an exchange could be instrumental in strengthening cooperation and achieving better results in the field of food safety.

AOB Item: Announcement of the Summer School on Risk Communication.

Antoon Opperhuizen (The Netherlands) announced to the Plenary the proposal for the next edition of the Summer School on Risk Communication organized under the umbrella of the FP TM activities. The proposal for the next year will aim to involve two people per country for a maximum of seven countries per session with the objective of covering all European countries, aiming at nurturing a community of risk communicators, managers, and assessors. The Netherlands extended an invitation to MSs who may want to participate in next year's sessions.

Norway, Ireland, Estonia, Portugal, Croatia, conveyed very positive feedback on the outcomes and organization of this year's edition and encouraged MSs to participate in the future edition on the activity. EFSA remarked the importance of the initiative as a key part of the vision for coordinated communication across Europe and to strengthen the existing community of communication coordinators.



SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action reference	Who	Agenda topic	What
Action 1	EFSA	Item 3. Update on Advisory Group on Data	EFSA, with input from AGoD, to organise a thematic session on AI and its impact on the risk assessment processes at the December AF meeting.
Action 2	EFSA	Item 4. FP Operational Framework 2023-2027	EFSA to organize with the Member States a dedicated session on the added value of the Focal Point tailor-made activities, in principle to be held in the second half of 2024.
Action 3	MSs	Item 8.1 – b) Update of the Guidance for the Risk Benefit Assessment of foods	MSs to disseminate the survey to MSs technical experts soliciting their experience with RBA of foods and their input in the ongoing update of the Guidance.