35th meeting of the EFSA Stakeholder Discussion Group on Emerging Agenda of the 11-12 June 2026
Web-minutes

EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

These web minutes summarise the topics presented and discussed at the 35th meeting of the Stakeholder Discussion Group on Emerging Risks.

1 Welcome and Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed participants to the meeting and noted the apologies received from members unable to attend.

2 Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without amendments.

3 Introduction to the event

4 StaDG-ER members - Presentation and discussion of new emerging issues

4.1 Reporting on the Survey -EFSA

Covert Mortality Nodavirus (CMNV) in human ocular disease

New evidence suggests that CMNV, previously considered an aquatic animal pathogen, may have zoonotic potential and be associated with human ocular infections. Although important uncertainties remain regarding transmission and causality, the signal was considered sufficiently strong to warrant classification as an Emerging Risk, particularly due to be identified as a potential new hazard and significant knowledge gaps.

Hydrocyanic acid in nuts, oil seeds and derived products

Hydrocyanic acid is a well-known and regulated hazard. The discussion focused on whether new trends increasing consumption of nuts, seeds and plant-based products could lead to higher dietary exposure. Given the limited data on occurrence, consumption patterns and exposure, the topic was classified as Further Information Needed.

Emerging mycotoxin remediation methods

Novel technologies for reducing mycotoxin contamination were reviewed. While uncertainties remain regarding potential residues, degradation products, and environmental impacts, these technologies are not yet considered ready for large-scale implementation and are currently regarded as emerging technological developments. It was also noted that any application of such technologies at commercial scale would first require a risk assessment by EFSA. Consequently, the topic was classified as "Not an Emerging Risk."

Increasing inclusion of probiotics, prebiotics, paraprobiotics and postbiotics in foods

The growing use of "biotics" in foods and supplements and recent publication (Wang et al., 2026) raised a number of concerns incl. discrepancies between label information and actual product content; the potential presence of microbial species carrying transferable antimicrobial resistance genes; the use of unauthorised microbial species; and the possible exposure of vulnerable groups (e.g. risks of drug interactions), particularly as these products can be purchased without a prescription or medical consultation. Considering the increasing consumer exposure, the growing

complexity of products on the market, and the need for more comprehensive information on products available in the EU, the network recommended classifying this topic as "further information needed under increased concern." The network also recommended improving communication to the general public regarding the risks associated with these types of products.

Hepatitis A contamination of berries

Although changing consumption patterns and international trade may influence exposure, Hepatitis A contamination of berries remains a persistent and well-known food safety issue. The topic was classified as Not an Emerging Risk.

Clouds as a potential reservoir and transport pathway for pesticides

The participants discussed the overlooked role of clouds in storing and transporting pesticides, with current monitoring systems failing to capture atmospheric pathways effectively. Scientifically, clouds can accumulate and redistribute pesticide residues from multiple sources through long-range transport and transformation processes, increasing uncertainty in source attribution and exposure assessment. key drivers such as climate change, evolving agricultural practices (e.g. use of precipitations water for irrigation, use of drones for spraying pesticides), and limitations in existing monitoring frameworks, potentially lead to underestimated environmental and food contamination risks. This complex emerging signal requires further evidence to link environmental data with the actual exposure to these pesticides via food and feed; as such, the network concluded the topic as "further information needed.

Insect-mediated delivery technologies

Emerging biotechnology applications using insects as vectors to deliver vaccines or other biological agents in wildlife were discussed. While potential biosafety, biosecurity and ecological concerns were identified, the debate remains largely theoretical and the evidence is insufficient to determine whether technology represents an emerging risk. The topic was classified as "Further Information Needed".

Increase of Cryptosporidium infections in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany

Updated evidence indicates increasing incidence of Cryptosporidium infections, potentially linked to climate change, water management practices and zoonotic transmission. Participants highlighted concerns about underdiagnosis and underreporting and considered that the issue warrants greater attention than reflected by the current category of "Further Information Needed", while not yet meeting the threshold for an emerging risk. The topic was therefore assessed as "further information needed" under increased concern.

4.2 Reduced levels of zinc for weaners - consequences and new knowledge - Jahn Dahl

Jan Dahl presented Danish data (VETSTAT, DTU) suggesting that the ban on zinc oxide in pig feed was associated with increased post-weaning diarrhoea and higher antibiotic use (≈5% initially, up to 17% later). He also reported indications of increasing AMR in clinical *E. coli* isolates, coinciding with the increased use of antibiotics to manage post-weaning diarrhoea. Experimental data from Aarhus University showed that around 1000 mg/kg of zinc in weaning pigs is needed for optimal growth. A revised dosing strategy (≈1400 mg/kg for 2 weeks, then 100 and 50 mg/kg) is proposed. This approach is expected to improve animal health and productivity. It may also reduce antibiotic use overall and lower zinc excretion in the environment. However, evidence on reduced antibiotic use is based on Danish data only. Concerns were raised about the feasibility of very low zinc levels

(e.g. 50 mg/kg) in adults and limited data re. AMR impact. It was concluded that reconsideration of current zinc limits, requires submission of new scientific evidence to the European Commission who will then decide whether a reassessment is needed. Ongoing or future additional studies (e.g. in Spain and Portugal) would be valuable to strengthen the evidence base.

4.3 The Plastisphere as a vector for pathogen enrichment and horizontal gene transfer (HGT) of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in the food chain - Maurizio Ferri (FVE)

Maurizio Ferri presented the plastisphere as a microbial ecosystem on microplastics acting as a vector for pathogen enrichment and antimicrobial resistance (AMR). He explained that microplastics serve as mobile biofilm hotspots, enabling transport of pathogens and gene transfer. Evidence shows enrichment of pathogens such as Vibrio, Salmonella and Listeria, together with high levels of AMR genes, with potential implications for resistance transmission through marine and agricultural food chains. He highlighted that current risk assessments mainly address chemical hazards and insufficiently consider microbiological risks. The discussion confirmed that EFSA is advancing the European Parliament mandate, including a specific workstream on microplastics as vectors of foodborne pathogens and AMR. The work is currently at the stage of literature review and gap mapping, covering pathogen identification, detection methods and occurrence data within a broader multidisciplinary framework. The microbiological component is being prioritised due to limited evidence. A key limitation identified is the difficulty of linking AMR genes to specific bacterial taxa, as well as the lack of data on pathogen viability and transmission. It was agreed that, although microplastics likely act as vectors, evidence remains insufficient for full risk characterisation. Follow-up actions include promoting data sharing and integrated research along the food chain to support the future scientific opinion.

5 Follow up on previous issues discussed and updates

5.1 Update on Micro and Nano plastic soil contamination and migration through the Food chain - Luigi Tozzi (SAFE Europe)

Luigi Tozzi presented an update on micro- and nano plastics in soils, focusing on organic recycling streams (digestate, compost, biosolids) as relevant sources of contamination along the food chain. He highlighted that these materials contain microplastics, particularly biosolids, although their contribution can be minor compared to high background soil contamination. Evidence shows microplastics affect soil processes, reducing plant-available nitrogen through enhanced denitrification and potentially increasing nitrate leaching to groundwater, with implications for soil fertility and human health. It was noted, the absence of harmonised EU monitoring, standardised methods and comparable datasets. During the discussion, BIOHAW highlighted that EFSA's mandate on microplastics already includes reviewing analytical methodologies, exposure pathways and risk assessment aspects under a One Health framework, with the aim of proposing harmonised methods and reporting requirements. Participants highlighted the need for a proportionate approach, noting existing regulatory limits and the high background presence of microplastics. They emphasised prioritising better methods, monitoring and identification of sources. It was also noted that increased use of organic fertilisers, driven by geopolitical and supply constraints, could raise future exposure, underlining the importance of controlling inputs upstream to prevent microplastics entering recycling streams.

5.2 Updates on mycotoxins management report - Gianluca Nurra (COCERAL)

Gianluca Nurra presented the 2025 update of COCERAL's biannual Mycotoxin Management Report, highlighting results from a significantly expanded survey (37 responses covering ~27% of EU+UK grain trade) on practices across the food and feed supply chain. The report shows that mycotoxins remain a major, largely climate-driven risk, with operators implementing prevention, control

corrective measures, while relying on standard methods and rapid and laboratory testing. Key challenges include heterogeneous distribution of mycotoxins complicating sampling, operational constraints, and some concerns on transparency and delays in official controls. Future risks are expected to increase due to climate change, with aflatoxins, Fusarium toxins, OTA and emerging issues such as ergot becoming more relevant, alongside co-occurrence of multiple toxins. During the discussion, the importance of a risk-based and harmonised EU approach was emphasised, while EC highlighted the need to better understand the uptake and effectiveness of EU-funded predictive models for mycotoxin risks and questioned their practical use by operators. Participants noted given natural variability and climate pressures, that future mitigation will require a combined approach (good practices, forecasting tools and innovation), with increased cooperation across the supply chain and improved data sharing to support robust risk assessment.

5.3 Topic updates and recent signals - Nicola King (PHF Science New Zealand)

Rat Hepatitis E Virus (rat HEV)
Rat HEV was discussed as an emerging zoonotic concern. Although human cases remain limited, evidence supporting zoonotic transmission is increasing, while important uncertainties persist regarding transmission routes, exposure pathways and prevalence. Continued monitoring is needed.

Rat Lungworm
The group noted the geographic spread and establishment of rat lungworm in parts of Europe, including recent detections in Spain and Italy. The reported findings were considered relevant for ongoing monitoring, and further information is needed to better understand emergence, transmission, and public health implications.

Metal-Organic Frameworks (MOFs)
The discussion highlighted that MOFs could fall under EU legislation for food contact materials and would require a safety assessment prior to authorization for use in Europe. A key consideration would be the potential migration of substances into food or feed. Further research is needed to address outstanding safety questions.

Infant Formula Dispensing Machines
Participants were informed about the existence of infant formula dispensing machines in Australia/New Zealand. The discussion underlined that the safe use of these machines depends primarily on adequate cleaning and maintenance to prevent microbial contamination. Participants considered poor hygiene control a potential emerging food safety concern and noted that allergen management in shared-use settings could merit further investigation.

5.4 EFSA rapid risk assessment on cereulide- reporting back – EFSA

EFSA reported on the rapid risk assessment conducted during a crisis involving cereulide toxin contamination in infant formula; the assessment was completed under very limited timelines, toxicological data, methodological uncertainties, and challenges linked to extraction methods and particularly sensitive population group. This event raised the issue of toxin carry-over and enrichment during downstream processing of fermentation-derived ingredients, which may not be detected by traditional microbiological controls. The group asked whether EFSA could provide a list of toxins to look for. Priority should be given to heat-stable toxins . The issue will be further discussed within EFSA and with the European Commission.

6 Horizon scanning

6.1 Catalogue of circular feed measures - Arnaud Bouxin (FEFAC)

The catalogue introduces potential measures to increase circularity in animal feed within the EU. It highlights regulatory restrictions that currently limit the use of certain materials (e.g. animal by products, food waste, or biomass from waste) and explores where these could be reviewed in light of new knowledge, technologies, and experience. The group noted that some restrictions, particularly those affecting the use of former foodstuffs and certain secondary nutrient streams, could merit review in the short to medium term, while more complex issues would require longer discussions. The participants supported a possible EU circular feed roadmap, balancing sustainability gains with regulatory requirements and safety considerations.

7 AI and Technology in Emerging Risks

7.1 Beyond human vision – Use of Computer Vision Systems in Meat Inspection - Lis Alban (UECBV)

Computer vision systems (CVS) are emerging as a promising tool to complement or enhance traditional meat inspection, which currently relies on veterinarians' skills and may therefore vary between inspectors-. The use of CVS as assisting tools could help prioritise carcasses requiring further assessment and support official veterinarians in focusing on higher-value tasks. The importance of robust validation, continuous performance monitoring and access to performance data was emphasised, as system reliability may be affected by operational factors such as lighting conditions and equipment maintenance. The possible role of EFSA in developing guidance on the validation of such technologies was also discussed. The group concluded that CVS show significant promise for meat inspection, but their wider adoption should be supported by harmonised validation approaches, appropriate regulatory oversight and continued veterinary supervision.

7.2 Risks of AI Driven HACCP Monitoring in Animal Source Foods: Implications for Risk Assessment - Paolo Patruno (CLITRAVI)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used in HACCP monitoring to support documentation, process monitoring, computer vision and predictive analytics. While these technologies can improve efficiency and compliance, challenges remain regarding false negatives, automation bias and the capacity to detect novel hazards. AI systems may also generate incorrect outputs without obvious warning signs, reinforcing the need for human oversight. The discussion focused on the practical use of AI in food businesses, its acceptance during audits, and the importance of maintaining operator training and human supervision. Participants highlighted that AI should support rather than replace human decision-making and stressed the need for appropriate validation and control measures. The discussion concluded that AI offers significant opportunities for food safety management, provided that human oversight, training and robust validation remain integral parts of HACCP systems.

7.3 Emerging Risks in Food Fraud - A view from the Global Harmonization Initiative- Asli Solmaz-Kaiser (GHI)

The Global Harmonization Initiative (GHI) presented its work on identifying emerging food fraud risks through the analysis of regulatory data, market intelligence, media monitoring and whistleblower reports. The approach aims to detect signals that may indicate vulnerabilities in food supply chains before formal regulatory notifications become available. Examples included contamination from processing equipment, unauthorised substances in food products, adulteration and fraudulent substitution of commodities, illustrating how food fraud can have implications for both economic integrity and food safety. The discussion focused on the use of artificial intelligence to screen and prioritise large volumes of information, the validation and reliability of signals, and the role of whistleblower reports as an additional source of intelligence. EFSA noted that GHI's focus on identifying vulnerabilities and potential future incidents complements EFSA's work on detecting novel hazard–commodity combinations, unusual exposure pathways and previously

unrecognised food safety risks. Both approaches may contribute to strengthening early warning activities.

8 AOB/Final discussions & Conclusions

8.1 Food supplements TMA - EFSA

A project coordinated through the EFSA Focal Points network established a community of knowledge to identify potential emerging risks associated with food supplements other than vitamins and minerals. The work was organised into two packages:

- Vigilance: collection of alerts from nutrivigilance and monitoring systems, poison centres, and other information sources to detect emerging risks.
- Plant: identification of marketed food supplements containing plant-derived substances predicted to be toxic according to the EFSA Compendium on Botanicals.

Even if none of the two work packages highlighted clear emerging risks, they did result in the identification of a shortlist of substances for which further data are needed to better estimate consumer exposure in Europe and to characterise the associated risk. A call has recently been launched to continue work in this area, further supporting the systematic investigation of potential risks associated with plant-based food supplements (link).

The report of this project is available on the EFSA Journal: https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.2903/sp.efsa.2026.EN-10226