EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

EFSA 2028-2034

9TH STAKEHOLDER FORUM – 12 OCTOBER 2026 CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

FLASH REPORT



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1. Introduction and setting the scene

As part of the consultation process for EFSA's Strategy 2028–2034, an online workshop with the Stakeholder Forum was held on 12 October 2026. The workshop brought together 87 representatives from EFSA's community of Registered Stakeholders, EFSA staff and external facilitation support to gather perspectives on the proposed Strategic Objectives and explore how scientific innovation and external expertise could contribute to more timely and actionable scientific advice.

Nikolaus Kriz, EFSA's Executive Director, introduced the strategic context, presenting the new Strategy as an evolution rather than a revolution. Claire Bury, from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), addressed the relevance of stakeholder input and EFSA's performance evaluation, while Carlos das Neves, EFSA's Chief Scientist, presented the proposed Vision, Strategic Objectives and expected outcomes. Particular emphasis was placed on speed, innovation and joining forces as drivers of the new Strategy.

The workshop combined facilitated discussions across four breakout rooms, individual contributions recorded on Miro, plenary exchanges and a Mentimeter voting exercise. Activities focused on the proposed Strategic Objectives, priorities for keeping pace with emerging science and innovation, future cooperation with stakeholders and EFSA's organisational values.

A central objective was to explore how EFSA could accelerate the translation of scientific advances into regulatory science, drawing on external knowledge, innovative methodologies and practical experience while safeguarding independence, transparency and trust.

The findings below synthesise the contributions captured during the workshop. They represent perspectives and proposals for consideration rather than formally agreed positions of the Stakeholder Forum.

2. Activity 1 – EFSA Strategy 2034: opportunities and challenges

The first activity invited participants to assess whether the proposed Strategic Objectives and expected outcomes would enable EFSA to achieve its Vision for 2034, identifying areas requiring clarification, refinement or greater emphasis.

Timeliness, predictability and actionable scientific advice. Participants highlighted the importance of combining timely scientific delivery with greater predictability and consistency throughout risk assessment processes. Contributions called for clearer timelines, earlier communication of scientific expectations and greater transparency when assessments are delayed or requirements change.

The meaning of actionable scientific advice was also discussed. Participants emphasised that scientific opinions should not only be robust but also practically useful for risk managers, clearly explaining the available evidence, uncertainties and implications of scientific findings. Earlier technical dialogue and more substantive pre-submission advice were proposed as ways to clarify scientific requirements, reduce unnecessary testing and improve efficiency.

Innovation, proportionate methodologies and regulatory preparedness. Participants welcomed the ambition to strengthen EFSA's scientific capabilities but emphasised the importance of accelerating the practical adoption of innovative methodologies, particularly New Approach Methodologies (NAMs).

Contributions called for faster evaluation and regulatory acceptance of emerging approaches, including methods that could reduce reliance on animal testing. Proportionality was a recurring consideration, with participants stressing that evidence requirements should reflect the risks, scientific questions and characteristics of different products rather than extending beyond what is necessary for a robust assessment.

The need to adapt methodologies to evolving food systems, technological developments and real-world conditions was also highlighted, alongside greater attention to data quality, representativeness and scientific preparedness.

Stakeholder engagement and external scientific expertise. Participants called for earlier and more structured engagement with stakeholders, particularly during the development of scientific guidance and methodologies.

While existing public consultation mechanisms were valued, contributions suggested complementing them with technical hearings, targeted scientific exchanges and opportunities to draw on practical expertise from industry, academia, national authorities and other relevant organisations.

Greater access to external knowledge was seen as potentially valuable for identifying methodological limitations, understanding emerging technologies and improving the practical applicability of scientific assessments.

Responsible innovation, scientific independence and communication. Artificial intelligence and digitalisation were recognised as opportunities to improve scientific processes, although participants emphasised the need for appropriate governance, scientific oversight and specialised expertise.

Contributions also highlighted the importance of maintaining scientific independence, impartiality and transparency as cooperation with external stakeholders develops.

Improved risk communication emerged as another priority, particularly in relation to explaining scientific uncertainty, making EFSA's work more accessible and addressing

misinformation.

Overall, the activity identified opportunities to make the Strategic Objectives more operationally meaningful and better connected to the practical conditions required for **responsible innovation, regulatory predictability and actionable scientific advice**.

3. Activity 2 – Keeping pace with science and innovation: Priorities

The second activity explored how stakeholders could help EFSA keep pace with emerging science, data and innovation so that new knowledge could be translated into regulatory science more quickly.

A central message was that **scientific innovation does not automatically translate into regulatory innovation**. Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening the connection between emerging research, practical experience and the methodologies used in regulatory risk assessment.

Accelerating the regulatory uptake of innovative methodologies. Participants identified a gap between the development of new scientific approaches and their practical acceptance in regulatory assessments.

NAMs received particular attention, with calls for stronger engagement in their evaluation, validation and implementation. Contributions suggested that EFSA could work more closely with researchers and other scientific stakeholders to determine the suitability of emerging methods for specific regulatory questions.

Participants also emphasised that methodologies should reflect real-world conditions, including differences between product categories, complex food matrices and practical analytical limitations. The objective should be to ensure that innovation improves scientific assessments and reduces uncertainty rather than generating additional requirements without clear regulatory value.

Improving data sharing and evidence quality. Access to relevant, high-quality data was identified as an important factor in supporting innovation and more efficient scientific assessments.

Participants highlighted opportunities to improve the availability of occurrence data, real-world evidence, historical consumption information and data from different Member States and sectors. Suggestions included simpler submission tools, standardised formats, greater interoperability and more effective reuse of existing evidence.

Administrative complexity and demanding data requirements were considered potential barriers, particularly for SMEs.

Participants also proposed exploring secure platforms and other structured mechanisms for sharing external data, while ensuring appropriate protection of confidentiality and intellectual property. More systematic feedback to data providers was viewed as a way to encourage participation and improve the relevance of future contributions.

Regulatory sandboxes and emerging technologies. Regulatory sandboxes emerged across several breakout rooms as a potential mechanism for improving preparedness for innovative technologies, particularly novel foods.

Participants suggested that such arrangements could facilitate early exchanges between innovators and regulatory authorities, helping to identify scientific questions, methodological gaps and evidence requirements before formal assessment processes begin.

The experience gained could also inform the development and updating of scientific guidance, supporting a more adaptable approach to emerging technologies while preserving appropriate regulatory safeguards.

Horizon scanning and regulatory science gaps. Participants highlighted the potential contribution of stakeholder networks to identifying emerging scientific developments, new technologies and future regulatory needs.

Proposals included more structured early-warning channels, targeted scientific exchanges, greater EFSA participation in external scientific events and shared mechanisms for identifying gaps in evidence, methodologies and guidance.

The importance of translating identified knowledge gaps into clearer research questions and regulatory priorities was emphasised. Participants also called for prioritisation based on scientific relevance, likely impact and available resources.

Artificial intelligence and specialised expertise. Artificial intelligence was recognised as a promising tool for processing information, identifying patterns and supporting scientific analysis. However, participants highlighted limitations in applying general-purpose AI to highly specialised scientific questions.

Contributions suggested greater consideration of science-specific AI tools, verification of AI-generated evidence and continued human oversight.

The importance of practical expertise was also highlighted, including the contribution of veterinarians and other sectoral professionals to interpreting scientific evidence within real-world biological, environmental and production contexts.

Overall, the activity highlighted that **accelerating scientific innovation requires the capacity to evaluate, validate and implement emerging methodologies and technologies in a timely, proportionate and scientifically robust manner**. Participants identified opportunities to strengthen regulatory preparedness, improve access to evidence and make greater use of stakeholders' knowledge to anticipate emerging scientific challenges.

4. Activity 3 – Keeping pace with science and innovation: Working Together

The third activity explored how EFSA and its stakeholder community could work differently towards 2034 to harness external scientific knowledge and capacity while safeguarding independence, transparency and trust.

Participants recognised the value of EFSA's existing consultation and engagement mechanisms while identifying opportunities to make cooperation earlier, more continuous and more technically focused.

Earlier and more meaningful scientific dialogue. A recurring concern was that stakeholder input is sometimes sought when scientific opinions or guidance documents are already at an advanced stage, limiting opportunities to influence the underlying scientific approach.

Participants proposed earlier engagement in defining scientific questions, developing methodologies and preparing guidance, particularly for emerging technologies and innovative products.

Suggestions included technical hearings, dedicated scientific meetings, thematic webinars and more accessible opportunities for direct scientific exchanges. Such mechanisms were seen as potentially valuable for identifying practical challenges, clarifying expectations and improving regulatory preparedness.

Participants also emphasised the importance of two-way communication, including clearer feedback on how stakeholder contributions and scientific evidence have been considered.

Structured engagement with external expertise. Contributions highlighted opportunities to involve external specialists more systematically in technical exchanges, methodology development and guidance preparation.

Industry scientists, researchers, practitioners, veterinary professionals, consumer organisations and other stakeholders were identified as potential sources of complementary expertise.

Some participants referred to models used by other EU agencies, particularly ECHA's Partner Expert Groups, as possible references for more structured scientific engagement.

At the same time, transparent selection criteria, balanced representation and consistent participation rules were considered important safeguards to ensure that no stakeholder group receives privileged access or influence.

Safeguarding scientific independence and transparency. Participants emphasised that stronger stakeholder engagement must preserve EFSA's responsibility for independent scientific assessments and conclusions.

A clear distinction between scientific risk assessment and risk management was considered fundamental. Proposals included transparent rules governing external participation, disclosure of interests, appropriate conflict-of-interest safeguards and clear documentation of technical exchanges and submitted evidence.
Some participants also highlighted the importance of allowing relevant new scientific evidence to be considered when unforeseen uncertainties emerge, while maintaining the integrity and independence of the assessment process.

More effective cooperation tools and feedback mechanisms. Participants identified opportunities to improve communication channels, digital platforms and procedures for submitting scientific information.

Suggestions included simpler web-based tools, more accessible technical exchange platforms, dedicated notifications on consultations and common data formats to support evidence sharing and reuse.

Contributions also called for stronger feedback mechanisms, allowing stakeholders to understand how their input has contributed to scientific work and where further information may be required.

Collaboration focused on practical innovation. Participants suggested building on existing cooperation structures while creating more targeted opportunities to address emerging scientific and regulatory challenges.

Earlier stakeholder involvement, technical expert groups and mechanisms such as regulatory sandboxes were viewed as potential ways to connect scientific innovation with practical implementation.

Greater cooperation across disciplines and stakeholder groups was also highlighted as relevant to One Health and One Welfare challenges.

Overall, the activity pointed towards **a more open, connected and innovation-ready model of stakeholder cooperation**, in which external scientific knowledge and practical experience can contribute more effectively to EFSA's regulatory science capabilities without compromising independence, transparency or trust.

5. EFSA's future organisational values

In the final Mentimeter exercise, participants selected the organisational values they considered most important for EFSA towards 2034.

The four most-selected values were:

Values	**Vote**
Cooperation	34
Excellence	25
Timeliness	20
Solutions oriented	20

Independence followed with 18 votes, Trustworthiness with 17, Openness and Innovative with 16 each, and Adaptability with 15.

Cooperation's leading position was consistent with the workshop's emphasis on joining forces and making better use of external scientific expertise and stakeholder partnerships.

The selection of Excellence, Timeliness and Solutions oriented also reflected recurring themes from the discussions, particularly the need to combine scientific rigour with more efficient processes and practical regulatory outcomes.

Although Innovative was not among the four most frequently selected values, the discussions highlighted its importance as an enabler of other organisational priorities. Scientific innovation was consistently linked to improving methodologies, supporting more timely assessments and delivering actionable scientific advice.

The results provide input to EFSA's wider consultation on organisational values rather than a final decision on the values to be adopted.

6. Cross-cutting reflections and conclusions

Six interconnected themes emerged across the workshop activities.

1. Translating scientific innovation into regulatory value: Participants recognised

the growing availability of new methodologies, technologies and scientific evidence but highlighted challenges in their validation and practical implementation. Innovation should contribute to better assessments, reduced uncertainty and more actionable regulatory advice, rather than simply increasing technical complexity or evidence requirements.

2. Timeliness, predictability and scientific rigour: The workshop highlighted the importance of combining faster scientific delivery with clearer regulatory expectations, proportionate requirements and transparent communication. Earlier dialogue on scientific questions and evidence needs could support both innovation and more predictable assessment processes without compromising scientific quality.

3. Connecting external expertise, data and regulatory needs: Stakeholders were recognised as valuable sources of emerging scientific knowledge, real-world evidence and practical experience. Stronger connections between EFSA, research institutions, industry, SMEs and other scientific networks could improve data quality, support preparedness and help identify emerging regulatory-science gaps.

4. Earlier and more structured cooperation: Participants valued existing consultation mechanisms but identified opportunities for earlier technical exchanges, targeted expert groups and more continuous dialogue. A recurring consideration was how to translate stakeholder engagement into practical improvements in scientific methodologies, guidance and regulatory preparedness.

5. Proportionate and accessible approaches to innovation: Administrative complexity, demanding data requirements and differences in stakeholder capacity were identified as potential barriers to participation and innovation. Simplified submission procedures, more adaptable methodologies and mechanisms such as regulatory sandboxes were proposed as opportunities to support emerging technologies, particularly for SMEs.

6. Collaborative innovation and scientific independence: Participants identified opportunities to draw more effectively on external scientific expertise while maintaining EFSA's independence, transparency and accountability. Clear participation rules, conflict-of-interest safeguards and the separation between risk assessment and risk management were considered essential. This balance was also reflected in the values exercise, where Cooperation and Excellence received the most votes, with Independence and Trustworthiness also attracting considerable support.

7. Key messages for EFSA's Strategy development

The workshop provided several considerations for the next stages of Strategy development:

- **Clarify the practical meaning of timely and actionable scientific advice**, ensuring that speed is accompanied by predictability, proportionate evidence requirements and effective communication throughout assessment processes.

- **Strengthen the visibility of scientific innovation and preparedness** in the Strategic Objectives, including the regulatory uptake of emerging methodologies, responsible AI use and the capacity to respond to evolving technologies.

- **Accelerate the evaluation, validation and practical implementation of NAMs** and other innovative scientific approaches, ensuring their suitability for regulatory risk assessment.

- **Explore mechanisms to support emerging technologies**, including regulatory sandboxes, earlier scientific dialogue and more adaptive guidance, particularly in relation to novel foods.

- **Improve data sharing and accessibility**, making better use of real-world evidence, historical data and external scientific expertise while simplifying submission procedures and protecting confidentiality.

- **Strengthen horizon scanning and the identification of regulatory science gaps**, drawing on stakeholder networks to anticipate emerging developments and align scientific research with regulatory needs.

- **Build on existing stakeholder consultation mechanisms**, introducing earlier, more interactive and technically focused exchanges where they can contribute to scientific preparedness and methodological development.

- **Explore structured scientific exchanges and expert groups**, ensuring transparent participation criteria, balanced representation and appropriate conflict-of-interest safeguards.

- **Improve feedback mechanisms and communication tools**, clarifying how stakeholder contributions are considered and facilitating more efficient information exchange.

- **Maintain scientific independence, transparency and trust**, ensuring that greater cooperation and responsible innovation remain compatible with EFSA's mandate and scientific responsibilities.

8. Overall conclusion

The workshop highlighted the importance of strengthening EFSA's ability to keep pace with scientific innovation and translate emerging knowledge, methodologies and technologies into practical regulatory science. Participants recognised the value of existing scientific capabilities and stakeholder engagement mechanisms while identifying opportunities to improve predictability, facilitate earlier scientific dialogue and make better use of external knowledge and data.

The contributions reinforced that innovation should deliver tangible improvements in scientific assessments, regulatory preparedness and the timeliness and usability of scientific advice. Achieving these ambitions will require proportionate approaches, stronger cooperation across the scientific ecosystem and continued commitment to scientific independence, transparency and trust.

The findings provide input for refining EFSA's Strategy 2028–2034 and considering how the stakeholder community could support its implementation, translating **speed, innovation and joining forces** into practical improvements in regulatory science.