

ENGAGING POLICY WITH FOOD SAFETY SCIENCE IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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INTRODUCTION

Scientific advice and research are one of the essential pillars of the Food Safety policy. Consequently, several structures have been established in the Basque Country to base Food Safety decisions on the best scientific knowledge. To fulfil this objective, it has been essential to have a solid research framework, which provides data to identify hazards and carry effective risk assessment.

In addition, it is necessary to promote cooperation, coordination and integration between all stakeholders involved in Food Safety, including research, development and innovation agents (R&D&i). Furthermore, it becomes essential to give priority to the research aiming to solve problems and to cover needs of the food sector that have an impact on public health, animal and plant health and the environment, in line with the 'one health' concept and the European research agenda.

In this context, in 2011 the Basque Food Safety Research Plan was launched to strengthen research, to generate and transfer scientific knowledge, to promote collaboration and cooperation between R&D&i agents and to optimise the efficiency and resources assigned to Food Safety research.

METHODOLOGY

The Basque Food Safety Research Plan (2011-2021) covers the whole food chain from farm to fork and includes the following steps:

1. Creation of a research coordination team integrated by the policy responsible for the management and financing of the Food Safety research and the organisations carrying out the research. This team ensures the implementation of the plan and carries out the control and monitoring thereof.
2. Development of a public on-line platform to share and disseminate Food Safety research, where research groups are identified and on-going and finished projects' results are disseminated.
3. Participation in European cooperation networks to coordinate research agendas in Food Safety and sustainability: SAFEFOODERA (2004-2011), SUSFOOD (2011-2017), SUSAN (2015-2022).

4. Implementation of a communication plan to transfer the knowledge generated along the research projects.

Additionally, a procedure has been developed for the identification and prioritisation of the research needs by all the stakeholders, including the agri-food sector, research institutions, and policy managers working in all related fields.

RESULTS

The implementation of this plan has resulted in the identification of many research needs and the coordination of projects with high impact in the Basque food sector involving food chain operators. In this way, greater efficiency of research projects has been achieved and the resources assigned to Food Safety research have been optimised.

Currently, the Food Safety research platform displays the results of 184 research projects, designed to identify, control, and prevent risks that may enter the food chain and that, in consequence, can produce human, animal, plant or environmental health problems. Most of these projects have solved real problems and have covered needs identified by the Basque agri-food sector and have contributed to strengthening the science-policy interface in relation to Food Safety.

DISCUSSION

After ten years implementing the Food Safety research plan, the results have been evaluated and it has been necessary to develop a new plan. This new plan will integrate the objectives of the European Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategies and will create alliances and collaborative work between all the stakeholders.

This new plan will continue providing expert knowledge as base for managing political decisions on Food Safety, as well as supporting the Basque agri-food sector in the transition towards sustainable agri-food systems and extending Food Safety culture to all the stakeholders.