

Dear readers,

Close co-operation between EFSA and national food safety authorities is a top priority for us. This will help us deliver the best risk assessments for Europe. The network of newly-established National Focal Points in Member States, which met for the first time in March this year, marks a major step in our drive to further strengthen information sharing and collaboration across Europe. This will allow us to harness the best available scientific data and expertise. I am delighted to see the new system already up and running. I look forward to further building the network later this year, by having Focal Points in all Member States. I sincerely wish all our partners every success in working together to help risk managers ensure that Europe's food is safe.


Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle,
EFSA Executive Director

Feature

Focal Points - effective networking and pooling of scientific excellence throughout Europe

To promote closer co-operation between EFSA and national food safety agencies, EFSA began establishing Focal Points in 2007, in line with EFSA's 2006 strategy for co-operation and networking. They will support EFSA in its mission to deliver the best science at the right time by contributing to the effective pooling of scientific excellence across Europe.

Focal Points, established under agreement by individual Member States and EFSA, and represented by national institutions, form an important bridge between EFSA and national networks that include food safety authorities, risk managers, research institutes and national stakeholders.

Under Article 36 of its Founding Regulation, EFSA shall promote the European networking of organisations working in its field. Focal Points are an important instrument for this. For example, Focal Points will assist EFSA find support for specific scientific projects through the use of national organisations that have been nominated by Member States.

The Focal Points also have a key role to play in raising awareness about the existence of EFSA's Expert Database (see, p.3), and encouraging national experts to join it. This database will be utilised by EFSA to draw on the best available scientific expertise in Europe to assist it in its work.

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Events



▲ The first meeting took place on 5-6 March.

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They will also facilitate the essential exchange of information about national risk assessment activities between Member States and EFSA, and among Member States. This may include the early identification and analysis of emerging risks. Similarly the Focal Points will raise awareness of EFSA's work, helping to strengthen the coherence of risk communication in the EU, and will contribute to regaining and maintaining consumer confidence in the whole process of risk assessment.

The Focal Points will support their national Members of EFSA's Advisory Forum – the body of national food safety authority representatives that EFSA regularly collaborates with. They will help Advisory Forum Members become more aware of national risk assessment and scientific developments in their country.

It is foreseen that by summer 2008, Focal Points will have been established in all 27 Member States. Iceland, Norway and Switzerland are also invited to nominate Focal Points.

The Finnish Focal Point has launched its website. >

First meeting of Focal Points: A milestone for enhanced co-operation

Proof of the deepening co-operation between EFSA and EU Member States was the first meeting of the Focal Points in Parma, Italy, on 5–6 March 2008. This meeting, attended by representatives from 26 countries (EU Member States and EFTA countries) as well as from the European Commission, flags an important milestone in active regional networking. The representatives exchanged views and first experiences regarding the tasks of the Focal Points, and developed ideas to strengthen future co-operation. In the course of lively and constructive discussions, key recommendations were defined such as setting up a table of specific tasks to be carried out by Focal Points, creating a working group on the exchange of scientific information, and enhancing the network's communications.

The second meeting took place on 4-5 June where promoting EFSA's Expert Database, raising EFSA's scientific visibility and how to set up and manage a platform for information exchange were discussed. The third Focal Point meeting will take place in September 2008.



Interview



“Focal Points, the backbone of EFSA's Advisory Forum”

> **Leif Busk**, chief scientist National Food Administration, Sweden (Member of EFSA's Advisory Forum)

? Why is co-operation between the Advisory Forum and Focal Points so important?

> **Leif Busk** In the Advisory Forum Member State representatives from food safety authorities and EFSA discuss scientific issues, exchange scientific information, co-ordinate risk communications and work programmes, and address emerging risk issues. At the beginning of our work in the Advisory Forum, six years ago, we already recognised that fostering an active exchange of information was crucial to support EFSA's scientific work.

Focal Points will be the central relay point in each Member State, co-ordinating the information collection and exchange between EFSA and relevant bodies. Focal Points and associated networks support Advisory Forum Members. The Advisory Forum will thus obtain more detailed scientific input and data. We will be able to react more efficiently on emerging risks, since working together also ensures that a common understanding to a problem is developed from the very beginning.

? Are Focal Points involved in the strategic planning of EFSA's research?

> No, not directly. Instead, they provide information and support to Advisory Forum Members. Advisory Forum Members are involved in the strategic planning of future projects and in setting up working groups. EFSA's Scientific Co-operation (ESCO) working groups are a good example. Here, experts from the Scientific Committee, Member States and EFSA work closely together on specific topics such as the risks and benefits of fortifying food with folic acid, the safety assessment of botanicals, and the harmonisation of risk assessment approaches.

Finally, I would like to underline that the interaction between Focal Points and the Advisory Forum provides us all with a real “win-win” situation. By improving national and EU networks, and by fostering information exchange, EFSA and national food safety authorities can reach their full potential in working to ensure that food in Europe is safe.

Sign up to EFSA's online database of scientific experts

EFSA's database of scientific experts was officially launched on 5 June 2008. It will serve as a valuable tool to harness the wide scientific excellence that is available in the European Union, and beyond, and to further enhance EFSA's high quality scientific advice.

The database will become a 'pool' of expertise from which EFSA will select the best scientific experts to provide support to its Scientific Committee and Panels, corporate networks (e.g. Advisory Forum and Focal Points) and respective Working Groups. The expert database will also be available to all EU Member States who may use it to identify experts for their own scientific activities.

This expert database has been set up to further reinforce EFSA's capacity to deliver high-quality independent scientific advice and to assist the Authority with its growing workload. It will also contribute to reinforcing EFSA's responsiveness in providing risk assessment advice to Europe's decision-makers.

Sign up
as an Expert

Experts from Europe and worldwide, in a wide range of scientific and expert fields, such as food and feed safety, nutrition, toxicology, chemistry, animal health and welfare, are

invited to apply. The full list of the expertise being sought is indicated in the online application form.

This open invitation to scientific experts is being made within the context of EFSA's strengthened policy on transparency and independence for selecting experts to assist EFSA with its scientific work. ■

> FOR MORE, AND TO SIGN UP, SEE:

http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/AboutEfsa/WhoWeAre/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1178712806106.htm

Working together for a common understanding on what adults eat all across Europe

Exposure assessment is one of the key parts of risk assessment. To improve the consistency and reliability of exposure assessments, experts from across Europe joined forces to help EFSA pool food consumption data at European level. Such Europe-wide data is widely recognised as being essential.

Food consumption data from dietary surveys are available in most European countries, but data obtained nationally is often not directly comparable because of differences in how surveys are conducted, in how age groups are clustered and in how food is categorised.

To overcome this, EFSA developed the European Food Consumption Concise Database with 15 broad food categories and 21 subcategories. This database is intended to be used as a screening tool for preliminary exposure assessments by EFSA's Scientific Panels and by Member States.

The Concise Database currently contains adult food consumption data from 16 European countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The Concise Database has been created in collaboration with EFSA's Expert Group on Food Consumption Data. This group is composed of 31 members, each representing a European country and in charge of coordinating the collection, formatting, and transfer of the most recent and relevant national food consumption data to EFSA.



The Expert Group on Food Consumption Data has also started to look at harmonising methods used in food consumption surveys and on the feasibility of a pan-European food consumption survey. ■

> A SUMMARY OF THIS DATA IS AVAILABLE ONLINE:

http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/ScientificPanels/DATEX/efsa_locale-1178620753812_ConciseEuropeanConsumptionDatabase.htm

Future challenges to microbial food safety

Joint conference sponsored by EFSA and the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA)

9–12 June 2008 *Wolfheze, The Netherlands*

Although microbiological aspects of food safety have been intensively studied for many decades, new risks still emerge. These are mainly due to changes in the micro-organisms themselves, to alterations in production methods and to the broadening of global trade. The world therefore needs ways to contend with these risks.

This conference focused on these new challenges in food safety, so as to develop new strategies and methodologies. There were discussions on recent developments in mathematic modelling and the use of creative predictive tools.

Over 120 scientists from Europe, the US and Australia attended the conference.

EFSA's 11th Scientific Colloquium – Acrylamide carcinogenicity

New evidence in relation to dietary exposure

22–23 May 2008 *Parma, Italy*

Acrylamide is a contaminant that can be formed during the preparation of foods high in starch at high temperatures, particularly crisps, French fries and bread. It has the potential to cause genetic damage and cancer in laboratory animals. The FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) concluded that acrylamide in food is a human health concern and recommended that efforts should be made to reduce acrylamide levels in food. Subsequently, the European Commission requested EFSA to provide a statement in the light of the JECFA summary report. EFSA's Scientific Panel on Contaminants in the Food Chain agreed with JECFA, that there may be human health concerns and recommended a re-evaluation once new data on carcinogenicity or human biomarkers, for example, become available.

The colloquium therefore aimed to update these issues by discussing new scientific evidence published since 2005. There was a particular focus on: the evidence and uncertainties of epidemiological studies; the application of biomarkers for acrylamide exposure and how biomarkers work; the relation between dietary acrylamide and cancer risk; and how Europeans are exposed to acrylamide in their diets.

5-Year anniversary celebrations across Europe

In 2007 EFSA joined national authorities in their celebrations of their 5-Year anniversaries. These included the Spanish Food Safety Authority, the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, and the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority. The latest was the Hungarian Food Safety Office.

On 22 May, to mark its 5-Year Anniversary, the Hungarian Food Safety Office held a conference on "Food Safety Challenges in Europe", with representatives from EFSA, national authorities involved in risk assessment and risk management, and leading Hungarian universities. More than 120 participants attended the event in Budapest. It was a chance to share ideas and experiences in risk assessment and risk communications. The conference also increased awareness of EFSA amongst the Hungarian scientific community and helped strengthen relations with the Hungarian authorities.

Just before the event, on 21 May, a delegation from EFSA, including its Executive Director Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, visited the Hungarian Food Safety Office. She used the opportunity to discuss closer co-operation between EFSA and Hungary. Representatives of the Hungarian Food Safety Office presented their work and ideas on how to foster co-operation.

First Meeting of the EFSA Advisory Forum Representatives on Animal Health

27–28 May 2008 *Parma, Italy*

To foster the essential exchange of information and ideas between EFSA and Member States, and to strengthen animal health and welfare co-operation, the Animal Health Representatives of the Advisory Forum met for the first time in Parma in May.

It was an opportunity for EFSA to inform the representatives about past and current activities of its Animal Health and Welfare Scientific Panel. Participants discussed EFSA's role in risk assessment for animal health and welfare. The results of EFSA's questionnaire on the need for networking and information sharing on animal diseases and welfare topics, that was recently distributed to Member States, was also presented.

At the meeting, representatives could share their views and interests in this subject, and discuss risk assessment approaches and related procedures for efficient scientific collaboration and networking with Member States.



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The views or positions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent in legal terms the official position of the European Food Safety Authority

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News on EFSA's co-operation projects can also be found at the EFSA website at www.efsa.europa.eu. In particular at the following address:

http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/PartnersNetworks/efsa_locale-1178620753812_ScientificCooperation.htm
Core documents including scientific opinions, agendas and minutes of meetings can be found here.