



Include, shape, act!

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RISK ASSESSORS AND RISK MANAGERS: CURRENT AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

FoodSafety4EU multi-actor dialogue

BACKGROUND

The EU General Food Law (GFL) Regulation (EC) 178/2002 establishes the principles of risk analysis in relation to food safety and its three inter-related components: risk assessment, risk management, and risk communication. Reflecting on citizens' perception of the risk assessment process, the new Transparency Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/1381) introduced new provisions on risk communication, the public disclosure of scientific data and information supporting requests for authorisations or for approvals of regulated products as well as other requests for scientific output, and the possibility for the Commission to request EFSA to commission scientific studies with the objective of verifying evidence used in its risk assessment process.

The proposal for a legislative framework for sustainable food systems, foreseen to be published in September 2023, aims to mainstream sustainability in all present and future EU policies and legislation impacting the food system. It will establish sustainability objectives and principles that should be consistent with the provisions and objective of the GFL.

In a dialogue with high-level experts from science, policy and society with expertise in risk assessment, management and communication, the following question was discussed:

How will the relationship between risk assessors (RA) and risk managers (RM) evolve in view of new Food Safety scenarios in Europe?

LEADING CHALLENGES

A separation between risk assessors and risk managers in the EU remains essential to ensure the objectivity, scientific integrity, and credibility of the conclusions of the risk assessment process.

The transition towards a circular economy and sustainable food systems may bring changes in risk analysis approaches if sustainability criteria needs to be weighted in. Here, the risk manager might have a bigger role to play.

Moving towards a more holistic approach to sustainability, it is crucial to ensure balance and proportionality among the three pillars of sustainability including food safety and food security. Methods and approaches to integrate sustainability assessments will therefore be required.



On June 7, 2023, the FoodSafety4EU hosted a multi-actor dialogue between high level experts from risk assessment, industry, research and food law. They shared their views, also bringing into the discussion recent experiences from two Horizon EUROPE funded sister projects focusing on emerging risk assessment challenges (FoodSafeR and HoliFood).

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Current relationships between risk assessors and risk managers

In the EU, risk assessors (RA) and risk managers (RM) are institutionally separated. While **the dialogue between them is essential, the separation is essential too** since it is the basis for providing an objective and trustworthy risk assessment. The GFL emphasises the vital role of risk communication in explaining risk assessment findings as well as risk management decisions.

Equally important is the communication between RA and RM. RM formulates questions of potential food safety risks to be addressed by RA and it **is critical how the question is formulated** for the correct framing and interpretation of the question at stake.

A recent survey (held in the course of the ENCOMRAN project, funded by EFSA) confirmed that the involved actors do acknowledge the legal separation between risk assessment and risk management, which improves the overall quality of the risk analysis process, however, they both ask for **more frequent interaction and informed communication**.

Changes needed in the relationships between RA and RM to enable risk analysis of food safety issues in view of the EU Green Deal and sustainability initiatives

When looking at the sustainability of food systems and the challenges linked to the circularity of resources, emerging needs should be addressed with novel approaches. An interesting example comes from urban food systems: urban farming is a very promising aspect, but it might bring safety risks, e.g. (re)introduction of heavy metals in the food chain. Similarly, the increased resistance to azole fungicides might be correlated to increased environmental exposure to these substances.

As there is no single agency that can address the emerging complexity of our food systems, it is necessary **to boost interagency cooperation**. Addressing this trend, the recent ONE conference and the relevant debate organized by EFSA and sister agencies (ECHA, ECDC, EEA, EMA, EC-JRC) in 2022 called for a more holistic approach (**ONE Health**) to deal with human, animal, and environmental health.

Overall, **there is no urgent need to change the way RA and RM interact**. Food safety RA may need to take sustainability criteria into account when dealing with circular production systems. **A broader knowledge base may be needed for RM**, who will be required to weigh in other aspects proportionally: integrating the results of a food safety risk assessment into a wider sustainability analysis is expected to be a major challenge.

How to deal with the expected connection between the General Food Law and the New Sustainability Regulation

The General Food Law sets a coherent framework and shall be still considered the foundation of the food policies. The new Sustainable Food System Framework is expected to incorporate or refer to GFL principles, including the various aspects of risk analysis. Combining risk/benefit assessment could be a way to incorporate sustainability criteria.

When defining pathways for integration, it should be taken into account that for industries/food business operators as well as food safety authorities it would be challenging to address double regulation.

To achieve sustainable food systems, **it is crucial to ensure proportionality among sustainability aspects, including food safety**. Finding the right balance among the three sustainability pillars remains a priority. Novel approaches/methodologies to make this balance possible are needed.

While risk assessors will continue to provide science-based advice, risk managers are expected to face a challenge in balancing the impacts on different areas, ensuring coherence between EU food-related legislation and policies, and making sure that risk management measures are realistic without compromising consumer health.

