

Contents

Feature

- 1 Pesticide peer review, EFSA and the Member States

Highlights

- 2 Sharing scientific information Europe-wide
- 3 Join EFSA's Scientific Committee or Panels

Interview

- 3 Progress through Co-operation
Interview with Bernhard Berger, Head of EFSA's Scientific Co-operation Unit

Events

- 4 As EFSA reaches out across Europe

Publications

- 4 EFSA's new thematic newsletters provide targeted information

Feature

Pesticide peer review, EFSA and the Member States

With around 900 active substances used in plant protection products in the various Member States, but not necessarily authorised for use in all countries, Europe needed a harmonised approach to safeguard consumers, workers and the environment while providing consistency for industry. To ensure this, Europe's pesticide peer review programme was created.

Since 2003, EFSA has worked closely with Member States to scientifically assess the risks within the European Commission's Europe-wide peer review programme of active substances used in plant protection products. The Commission then uses these assessments when deciding whether to place active substances on the positive EU list or not.

Active substances in plant protection products are the chemicals or micro-organisms that enable the product to do its job. For example, herbicides destroy unwanted plants while insecticides protect the plant against insects which harm plants or reduce crop yields.



Peer review in practice

At EFSA a dedicated unit, the Pesticide Risk Assessment and Peer Review Unit (PRAPeR), has overall responsibility for managing the peer review process. But it first begins with Member States.

Under EU law active substances cannot be used in plant protection products unless they are on the EU list of approved substances. Before a substance can be placed on this list, industry has to prove that it can be used safely regarding human health, the environment and residues in the food chain. The applicant submits an extensive dossier to the agency in Member States responsible for pesticide risk assessments. A Member State then writes a draft assessment report.

Once complete, it is sent to EFSA and other Member States - the 'peers'- for comment. The industry applicant and experts at the Member State that drafted the report can respond to the comments. The comments and draft report are made publicly available for consultation.

EFSA and Member States then discuss the feedback before EFSA drafts the conclusion which is then submitted to the Member State for comment. EFSA then finalises the conclusion which is sent to the Commission and made publicly available online. It is up to the Commission to decide whether to include the active substance in the positive list or not. All told, the process takes at least three years.

> FOR MORE,

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

Today and tomorrow

In 2007, EFSA published conclusions on 20 different active substances. In 2008 that figure is expected to rise to 60. To help manage this increased workload, from 1 January 2009, a new Pesticide Steering Committee will begin work. Made up of national pesticide risk assessment experts as well as EFSA and European Commission representatives, it will help ensure the best possible use of resources, increase efficiency and further strengthen consumer protection.

By the end of 2009, the peer review programme, which began in 1993, will have reviewed all active substances that were on the EU market in 1993. Until then, some substances awaiting the decision to be on the EU list or not, may still be authorised for use in the EU nationally. Existing substances that were not on the list may no longer be used in the EU. New active substances, outside of the existing programme, are peer reviewed in the same way as existing active substances.

On issues that cannot be resolved by peer review, or when further scientific guidance is needed EFSA's Panel on Plant Protection Products and their Residues (PPR) steps in. Such topics include toxicology, the fate and behaviour of pesticides or the risks to birds and mammals of using pesticides. Alongside the PRAPeR unit, the PPR Panel helps ensure plant protection products in Europe provide the right level of protection to plants without harming humans or the environment. ■

Highlights

Sharing scientific information Europe-wide

On 8 September, EFSA launched its Information Exchange Platform. This new site facilitates the exchange of scientific information between EFSA and European Union (EU) Member States.

Scientific information shared through this new platform ranges from scientific articles and opinions to research results, guidance documents and work plans. Scientific events of interest can also be posted in a calendar and users can exchange comments on a specific topic in the discussion forum.

The objective is to have a tool which is beneficial and valuable for EFSA and Member States. During the six month pilot phase, access is given to Advisory Forum Members, Focal Points and EFSA staff members. EFSA, together with Member States, will then review it early 2009, and from the pilot phase experience, will revise and improve the platform where necessary.

The collection and exchange of scientific data and information was a priority of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking, developed by EFSA and Member States. Setting up the Information Exchange Platform is a major step forward in addressing this priority. ■



Join EFSA's Scientific Committee or Panels

- Make a difference to European food safety
- Deliver scientific advice to Europe's risk managers
- Be part of Europe's network of top food safety scientists



The role of EFSA

EFSA is the European Union's scientific risk assessment body on food and feed safety, nutrition, animal health and welfare, and plant health and protection, tackling issues all along the food chain. Its Scientific Committee and Panels consist of independent scientists from universities, research institutions and national food safety authorities. They deliver high-quality scientific advice for Europe's decision-makers to act on and protect consumers, animals and plants.

EFSA currently seeks independent experts for its Scientific Committee and Panels. Experts are sought for a 3 year term, renewable, starting in the summer of 2009.

EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels

- Experts sought to cover plant health and plant protection, GMOs, feedstuffs, animal health and welfare, toxicology, contaminants in the food chain, biological hazards including TSEs, dietetic products, allergies, novel foods and nutrition
- Selected through an open procedure based on proven scientific excellence and independence

Apply online from 23 October to 7 January to join other top scientists: www.efsa.europa.eu

Committed to ensuring that Europe's food is safe



Interview



Progress through co-operation

> **Bernhard Berger**, *Head of EFSA's Scientific Co-operation Unit*

? Why scientific co-operation?

> **Bernhard Berger** Experience has taught us that only by working together can we ensure that our food in Europe is safe. It is increasingly important that we continue to build our relationship between EFSA and Member States to address the collective challenges we are facing. By sharing information and expertise, we can make effective use of synergies, benefit from the available pool of European expertise, and avoid duplication of work.

? How does EFSA strengthen its co-operation with Member States?

> The Strategy for Co-operation and Networking provides the framework for activities in this area. It identifies four priority areas: exchanging and collecting scientific data and information; sharing risk assessment practices; contributing to the harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies; and promoting coherence in risk communication. It also proposes to establish Focal Points, to support EFSA's Advisory Forum Members in all 27 Member States.

With the establishment of EFSA's Scientific Co-operation Unit in late 2007, scientific co-operation with and between Member States has intensified, building on the notable work previously done by the Advisory Forum.

Various initiatives, such as the dissemination of EFSA's publications, also broadened EFSA's scientific outreach and made EFSA's scientific work more visible. And networking with competent organisations in Member States enables EFSA to respond more effectively and flexibly to its growing workload. These organisations undertake work for EFSA, such as collecting data and providing scientific and technical support, under Article 36 of its Founding Regulation. Scientific co-operation with Member State organisations also takes place via public procurement procedures and other specific agreements.

? How do Focal Points work?

> The role of Focal Points is to provide support to their Advisory Forum Member. During the first year, Focal Points prioritised the setting-up of national networks. They have played a pivotal role in helping EFSA to update and maintain the list of Article 36 organisations. By testing and helping to populate EFSA's Expert Database, Focal Points significantly supported its successful launch in June this year. In future, EFSA and Member States will benefit from a growing pool of highly qualified and specialised experts. EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels benefit from the exchange of scientific data and information collected by Focal Points.

As EFSA reaches out across Europe

It is crucial that EFSA reaches out to partners and stakeholders across Europe to help ensure, collectively, that they work even closer together to make food safe for all Europeans. Part of this involves visiting the relevant food safety agencies to better explain EFSA's work and role while also learning how each country manages and ensures food safety.

Examples of how this is being achieved by EFSA include:

- > In Oslo, the Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food Safety held a joint conference with EFSA on 12 June entitled 'Food Safety in Europe: Progress through Cooperation', to mark its nomination to become Norway's national Focal Point.
- > In Copenhagen, EFSA's Executive Director, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, visited the Danish National Food Institute on 20 June.
- > In Slovenia Ms Geslain-Lanéelle addressed the international conference 'Food safety, animal health and consumer protection' on 23 August. On the same day, EFSA and the Slovenian Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Mr Iztok Jarc, signed a Focal Point agreement.

> In Paris, EFSA and the French food safety agency (AFSSA) held the joint event 'Health risk assessment in the context of food animal and plant imports in the European Union', on 3 October 2008. The event examined, in particular, how EFSA and national risk assessment bodies contribute to European Union (EU) food safety, and their role in defining the appropriate level of protection in the EU, especially with regard to imports.

> In Helsinki, Ms Geslain-Lanéelle, and EFSA's Risk Assessment Director, Riitta Majjala, visited the Finnish food safety agency on 19 November.

> In Copenhagen, Danish food safety experts and EFSA met on 20 November to discuss EFSA's work and role in the European food safety system from a European and a Danish perspective.

EFSA will continue to visit countries throughout Europe to forge even stronger ties between itself, its national counterparts and stakeholders to improve cooperation, collaboration and information exchange.

Focal Points meet their national networks

Over 40 national scientific events and meetings have been organised by Focal Points in Member States. There participants learnt more about EFSA and how to get involved with EFSA. Participants were also informed about the role of Focal Points and their collaboration with EFSA. The target audiences included concerned risk assessment institutes and organisations, ministries, universities, experts and stakeholders from industry, retail, consumer organisations, environmental and other NGOs.

Publications

EFSA's new thematic newsletters provide targeted information

To better provide stakeholders with useful and thematic information, EFSA has launched a series of three easy-to-read electronic newsletters called 'EFSA in focus'.

Each newsletter brings together related topics to allow readers to choose the newsletter which is of most value to them, whether it is plants, animals or food.

Each issue showcases EFSA's most important recent work, reports on ongoing work, shares reports from meetings, announces future events and encourages closer collaboration with EFSA through informing readers about public consultations, calls, and contracts awarded. There is also a list of what EFSA is currently working on or has recently published.



To subscribe to one of these quarterly newsletters, simply email newsletter@efsa.europa.eu.

http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/NewsPressRoom/News/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1211902066324.htm



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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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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.