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Risk assessment methodologies in various sectors and how to respond to challenges ahead

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The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was set up in January 2002, following a series of food crises in the late 1990s, as an independent source of scientific advice and communication on risks associated with the food chain. In the European food safety system, risk assessment is done independently from risk management. As the risk assessor, EFSA produces scientific opinions and advice to provide a sound foundation for European policies and legislation and to support the European Commission, European Parliament and EU Member States in taking effective and timely risk management decisions.

EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels deliver scientific advice in the areas of food and feed safety, nutrition, animal health and welfare, plant protection and plant health. Within its remit, EFSA also assesses environmental safety. A growing part of the Authority's work relates to the safety assessment of regulated products, substances and claims submitted for authorisation in the EU, thereby supporting agrofood innovation.

The Scientific Committee and Panels are composed of highly qualified, independent scientific experts with a thorough knowledge of risk assessment. All members are appointed through an open selection procedure on the basis of proven scientific excellence. The Scientific Committee and the Scientific Panels are supported by EFSA staff from three scientific directorates.

The Authority monitors and analyses information and data on biological hazards, chemical contaminants, food consumption and emerging risks. These areas of work are carried out by EFSA's scientific units supported by working groups and networks. The Authority also supports the development of risk assessment approaches.

EFSA delivers its work through contributions from external experts to the work of the Scientific Committee and Panels and their working groups, and cooperates with risk assessment and research organisations in and outside Europe, with EU institutions and agencies (e.g. JRC, EC Scientific Committees, EMA, ECDC, ECHA), and with International organisations with a remit similar to EFSA such as FAO, WHO, OIE, OECD, IPPC and EPPO. The scientific cooperation activities are important to ensure access to relevant data for the scientific evaluations, to develop

and implement internationally harmonised risk assessment methodologies and approaches in the conduct of its work, and, a growing demand for many risk assessment agencies, to build risk assessment capacity across Europe and worldwide.

EFSA's operations are regularly reviewed in the form of independent evaluations, scientific expert and stakeholder consultations. EFSA is faced with the same global challenges as other risk assessment bodies with a similar remit to EFSA, such as limited risk assessment capacity and experience, budget constraints, scientific competence and independence issues. Furthermore, there is a growing demand for safety assessments in the area of regulated products, questions for the risk assessor are becoming more complex often accompanied with many knowledge gaps and uncertainties (e.g. novel foods, nanotechnology, use of 'omics' technologies to replace animal testing, animal cloning) and there are increased calls for responsiveness and more efficiency. Last but not least, there is an increased societal demand for openness and transparency about the risk assessment process.

During the presentation, examples will be given which may illustrate the trends, developments and challenges in today's risk assessment.