Dear Dr. Url,

Subject: Request for the provision of technical assistance in the field of risk communication

I would like to submit a formal request to EFSA for the provision of technical assistance in the field of risk communication.


The latter new provision empowers the Commission to adopt, by means of an implementing act, a general plan for risk communication in order to achieve the objectives and the general principles set out in the General Food Law Regulation, as amended by the Transparency Regulation.²

The general plan should establish an integrated, flexible, transparent, continuous and inclusive risk communication framework for all EU and national risk assessors and risk managers. Particular emphasis should be placed on explaining in an accurate, clear, comprehensive, coherent and timely manner risk assessment findings, how these are used

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² See new Articles 8a and 8b of the General Food Law Regulation respectively, as amended.
to help informing risk management decisions and how other legitimate factors, when considered, have been weighted up against each other.\(^3\) In particular, it should:\(^4\)

a) Identify the key factors to be taken into account when considering the type and level of communication activities needed;

b) Identify the different types and levels of communication activities and the appropriate tools and channels to be used for risk communication purposes;

c) Establish appropriate mechanisms of coordination and cooperation to strengthen coherence;

d) Ensure an open and participatory dialogue with all interested parties.

In preparing the general plan, the Commission is required, amongst others, to closely cooperate with EFSA and the Member States.

Through its expert Working Group on Social Research Methods and Advice, EFSA is able to provide technical input based on social science evidence and approaches on the principles and implementation of risk communication, as defined in the Transparency Regulation. In addition, given its experience in this context, EFSA can also provide technical assistance on how risk communication can improve public understanding of the difference between hazard and risk.\(^5\)

Therefore, in the context of Article 31 of the General Food Law Regulation, I would like to ask EFSA to provide the technical assistance to the Commission as detailed in the Annex to this letter.

My services remain at your disposal for further information. On this matter, you can contact [SANTE D1], who is the relevant contact point in the Unit in charge of the implementation of the Transparency Regulation.

Yours sincerely,

Sabine Jülicher

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\(^3\) Recital (5) of the Transparency Regulation.
\(^4\) New Article 8c of the GFL Regulation, as amended by the Transparency Regulation.
\(^5\) Recital (6) of the Transparency Regulation.
ANNEX

Commission Request addressed to EFSA for the provision of Technical Assistance in the field of risk communication


The latter new provision empowers the Commission to adopt, by means of an implementing act, a general plan for risk communication in order to achieve the objectives and the general principles set out in the General Food Law Regulation, as amended by the Transparency Regulation. The general plan should promote an integrated risk communication framework followed both by the risk assessors and the risk managers in a coherent and systematic manner both at Union and national level. It should:

a) Identify the key factors to be taken into account when considering the type and level of communication activities needed;

b) Identify the different types and levels of communication activities and the appropriate tools and channels to be used for risk communication purposes;

c) Establish appropriate mechanisms of coordination and cooperation to strengthen coherence;

d) Ensure an open and participatory dialogue with all interested parties.

In preparing the general plan for risk, the Commission is required, amongst others, to closely cooperate with EFSA and the Member States.

Through its expert Working Group on Social Research Methods and Advice, EFSA is able to provide technical input based on social science evidence and approaches on the principles and implementation of risk communication, as defined in the Transparency Regulation. In addition, given its experience in this context, EFSA can also provide technical assistance on how risk communication can improve public understanding of the difference between hazard and risk.

EFSA could provide technical assistance in the field of risk communication. Such assistance would relate to the results of scientific assessments used as a basis for risk management actions, while acknowledging that evidence from risk communication science may not always allow the complete separation of risk assessment and risk management considerations. However, this input should not deal with situations specifically covered by the general plan for crisis management, insofar as is possible to separate risk communication and crisis communication.

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6 See new Articles 8a and 8b of the General Food Law Regulation respectively, as amended.
7 Recital (6) of the Transparency Regulation.
8 See recital (9) of the Transparency Regulation.
In 2012, EFSA first published a best practice Risk Communication Handbook, titled 
"When Food Is Cooking Up a Storm – Proven Recipes for Risk Communications 2017," 
a practical tool for risk communicators working in EU food and feed safety. In 2019, 
EFSA further published guidance on the communication of scientific uncertainties. 
Continuing this trend as a source of best practice on risk communication and given the 
experience to date, EFSA could provide technical assistance in the field of risk 
communication.

Therefore, in the context of Article 31 of the General Food Regulation, EFSA is 
requested to provide technical assistance to the Commission based on the following 
Terms of Reference:

1. Describe the science behind the concepts of “awareness” and “understanding” as 
   referred to in the new Article 8a(a) of the General Food Law Regulation as 
amended, to provide guidance for risk communication aimed at “raising 
awareness and understanding” of the specific issues in risk analysis (of food and 
feed safety), including links between awareness/understanding and behaviour 
with respect to risks;

2. Provide guidance for risk communication that may “foster public understanding 
of the risk analysis, including of the respective tasks and responsibilities of risk 
assessors and risk managers to enhance confidence in its outcome,” as stated in 
Article 8a(e) of the General Food Law as amended, with a focus on public 
williness to understand both the nature of science and also the value of 
evidence-based regulatory science.

3. Define “appropriateness” as referred to in Article 8b(a) of the General Food Law 
as amended, with respect to target audience segmentation, to “ensure that accurate 
and all appropriate information is exchanged in an interactive and timely manner 
with all interested parties, based on the principles of transparency, openness, and 
responsiveness”;

4. Regarding identification of the relevant factors for risk communication activities, 
as referred to in Article 8c(2)(a) of the General Food Law as amended read in 
conjunction with recital (10) of the Transparency Regulation:

   a. Identify the “key factors” to take into account when considering the type 
      and level of risk communication activities needed, including factors that 
      influence how EU citizens assess whether a risk or a trade-off is 
      acceptable and the factors that influence this determination;

   b. Define “risk perception” as referred to in Article 8b(c) of the General 
      Food Law as amended, and factors influencing risk perception to provide 
      guidance for risk communication on how to “take into account risk 
      perceptions of all interested parties”;

   c. Identify social, cultural and psychological factors to explain “the 
      ambiguity in the public perception of the difference between hazard and 
      risk,” as stated in Recital (6) of the Transparency Regulation, to support

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*E.g. whether the risk stems from a new/novel source, whether it is the subject of diverging scientific 
opinions risk management decisions, or of public concern*
risk communication that can clarify and improve public understanding of
the difference between hazard and risk;

d. Provide guidance on how to take account of the identified ‘key factors’ in
defining the “types and levels of risk communication activities” and
“appropriate main tools and channels,” referred to in Article 8c(b) of the
General Food Law as amended;

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e. Based on these factors, explore the possibility to create ‘generic risk
profiles’ corresponding to the different work-flows of risk analysis
procedures, and especially for regulated products.

5. Regarding the identification of the different types and levels of communication
activities and the appropriate tools and channels to be used for risk
communication purposes, as referred to in Article 8c(2)(b) of the General Food
Law as amended:

a. Carry out a comprehensive mapping of all different types and levels of
engagement and communication activities and the appropriate tools and
channels depending on the different target audiences; this mapping should
provide an overview of advantages/disadvantages of the different tools
and channels taking into account the relevant risk factors and include ‘best
practices’ based on literature review and input from existing research,
where relevant;

b. Provide guidance for risk communication (including types and levels of
communication activities) that can “contribute to the fight against the
dissemination of false information and the sources thereof” as required by
Article 8a(i) of the General Food Law as amended, in relation to risk
analysis of food and feed safety; explore the effectiveness of the different
engagement and communication activities;

6. Regarding the establishment of appropriate mechanisms of coordination and
cooperation, as referred to in Article 8c(2)(c) of the General Food Law as
amended:

a. Carry out a comprehensive capacity and process mapping of existing
structures for risk communication at national and Union level in the
European Union, including both risk assessment and risk management
public authorities;

b. Identify and evaluate existing models for coordinated risk communication
at supranational/EU/national levels involving both
international/EU/national scientific advisory bodies and decision-makers
in the food safety area or other sectors.

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10 For background reference, these ‘generic risk profiles’ should aim at (a) providing a generic mapping
of the elements that would need to be assessed and/or considered both at risk assessment and risk
management level, on the basis of the above-mentioned factors, according to available knowledge and
past experiences; (b) provide preliminary assessments – based on existing knowledge, if any – of any
associated benefits associated with the relevant risks, e.g. actual or expected benefits, their magnitude
and importance, who benefits and how, who may be in disadvantage and how, potential trade-offs etc.;
and (c) identify overall sensitivity of the subject matter, taking into account concerns, expectations and
most importantly risk perceptions.

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