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EFSA's approach to identifying emerging risks in food and feed: taking stock and looking forward

Emerging risks, emerging issues, expert judgment

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› Abstract

The Emerging Risks Unit has the responsibility for coordinating EFSA's activities to establish a capacity for the identification of emerging risks. A process was trialled and further developed during a pilot period of 18 months from 2010-2012. This included the implementation of an operational procedure for emerging risks identification, the assessment of selected data sources, the testing of tools for collecting information, the consolidation of knowledge networks for sharing information and the development of a methodological framework. Specific issues were identified for follow-up activities using an expert judgment approach. These include a study on climate change and the emergence of aflatoxins in cereal crops in the European Union (EU), a European-wide survey on the consumption of energy drinks, a task force on human risk assessment of chemical mixtures, an internal task force on bee health, and a foresight study on the potential impact of omics technologies on food and feed safety risk assessment. These follow-up activities will contribute to the determination of whether the issues identified can indeed give rise to emerging risks. Overall, our experience shows that emerging risks identification requires a high level of expertise due to major data gaps and uncertainties in the evaluation process. Effective networking has proven to be essential for exchanging methods, data and evaluations of emerging risks. The system piloted has shown some potential for the identification of issues that may give rise to emerging risks. Useful knowledge has been gained in the area of gathering and filtering large amounts of information and building knowledge networks on emerging risks. Next steps include the establishment of a standing Working Group (WG) on Emerging Risks, the reinforcement of the engagement with Member States and Stakeholders, the fine tuning of the revised methodological framework, and the completion of the projects on the issues identified.

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