



Moving towards a more engaged and co-operative food safety system in Europe: the contribution of FoodSafety4EU

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INTRODUCTION

FoodSafety4EU (www.foodsafety4.eu) is a collaborative action to support the European Commission (EC) in shaping the Food Safety System (FSS) of the future. Launched in January 2021, the project will deliver solutions to support the EC in its endeavour to align research, policy and innovation with societal needs and perspectives, thereby improving the FSS in Europe.

The aim of the project is to design, develop and release a multi-stakeholder platform and to establish a long-term Science-Policy-Society interface that provides scientific advice and technical support in connection with future EU food safety (FS) policies. The platform will enable stakeholders to access resources and data efficiently, synchronise food safety research strategies, share and exchange scientific knowledge, and contribute to transparent communication.

METHODOLOGY

The platform will be built by means of a dynamic participatory process: a structured dialogue on policies, research strategies and communication initiatives relevant for the FSS.

This process is based on a multi-level approach to connection and interaction among the platform users. An important part of this co-creation process takes place in 4 social labs, called Food Safety Operational labs (FSOLabs), which aim to identify, select and establish pilot ideas and actions to be implemented and evaluated with respect to application and sustainability for further adoption by the FSS. FSOLabs are organised in learning cycles, with each learning cycle being associated with a multi-actor workshop. In cycle 1, participants perform a diagnosis of the topics and elaborate pilot actions. In cycle 2, the pilot actions outlined in cycle 1 are revised, shared with external stakeholders (including EFSA), adapted to obtain a consensus and applied by a pilot host. In cycle 3, pilot actions are evaluated and critically discussed in terms of achievements and impacts.

RESULTS

In cycle 1, experts identified four topics and pilots:

FSOLab1: roadmaps for harmonisation and integration through forecasting (focus on unregulated and emerging hazards). The pilot actions will focus on risk analysis of two circularity-related, partially regulated emerging issues: food contact materials & mycotoxins.

FSOLab2: research programmes and funding opportunities, including national and transnational perspectives. The pilot actions will look at more effective funding in FS research: develop a bottom-up approach for matching the needs of different FS actors in a country/region and develop recommendations based on a best practice analysis.

FSOLab3: Food Safety Strategic Research & Innovation Agenda (SRIA). A process for achieving a more coherent SRIA, focused on emerging risks and hazards, will be tested by piloting an Alliance on Food Systems RIA and a Fast-response RIA for emerging hazards.

FSOLab 4: Innovative approaches and models to inform the public about FS research and the risk assessment (RA) process. Pilot action to increase awareness about the RA process will be implemented by three groups involving and specifically addressing FS authorities, industries and consumers.

DISCUSSION

The concept of the 'Social lab' has been adapted and implemented in FoodSafety4EU. The method involving selected actors of the EU Food Safety System is designed to bring experts together, strengthen relationships and stimulate active engagement to advance innovative ideas. Starting from a detailed diagnosis of the current situation for the specific food safety topic, the actors involved will develop solutions to the challenges identified and will test them in real-life environments.

Experts and institutions hosting the pilots have been recruited from within the FoodSafety4EU community platform, the current pool for which includes 23 partners and approximately 50 supporting partners from the EU and associated countries.

Engaging in a structured dialogue, FoodSafety4EU aims to support a better understanding of the scientific evidence in connection with the basis for risk management decisions, thus boosting its confidence in the EU food safety system.