

FAQ

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Together for safe food in Europe - The role of the EFSA Focal Point

The free movement of goods within the European Union (EU) enables a wide range of food products. In order to strengthen food safety across Europe, cooperation between the EU Member States and the EU institutions is fundamental. In this way, the knowledge of national and European Food Safety Authorities about possible risks in the food chain can be pooled, thereby increasing the protection of consumers.

The EFSA Focal Points play a central role here. They are the contact points between the national authorities in the Member States and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

The German EFSA Focal Point is based at the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). Its structure, objectives and tasks are explained below.

Who is the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)?

EFSA is the central authority at European level for the assessment and communication of risks throughout the food chain. Established in 2002, EFSA's legal basis is the founding regulation (Regulation (EC) No 178/2002) of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. EFSA is an independent agency from the EU institutions and the Member States. Its task is to advise the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States as political decision-makers at European level on the basis of scientific findings on health risks in the food and feed sector.

Close cooperation with national food safety authorities and institutions is central to EFSA's scientific work.

The EFSA Advisory Forum, which includes EFSA and representatives of the food safety authorities of all EU Member States as well as Iceland and Norway, meets at regular intervals and discusses issues relating to closer cooperation. This cooperation is particularly important in the EFSA panels and working groups, which are made up of experts from the Member States. Through their scientific assessments, they create the basis for measures to protect consumers in Europe.

With what aim were the EFSA Focal Points established?

The EFSA Focal Points were established with the aim of coordinating scientific cooperation between EFSA and the Member States. Through mutual exchange, experts from the Member States can share information on complex issues, pool their knowledge and thus, among other things, avoid duplication of work.

The EFSA Focal Points were therefore established in 2008. These are central contact points between the European authority and the national organisations, institutions and authorities for food and feed safety in the Member States.

There is a focal point in each Member State as well as Iceland and Norway. These are usually located at the national health risk assessment institutions for food safety. Observers from Switzerland and the EU candidate countries are also represented in the Focal Point network.

How do EFSA Focal Points support EFSA?

At national level, the Focal Points support the EFSA Advisory Forum, which is responsible for networking, in the planning and implementation of cooperation activities. In this way, the Focal Points play an important role in the expansion of cross-border cooperation in the context of health risk assessment in the area of food and feed.

What are the main tasks of the Focal Points?

The tasks of the Focal points are diverse and can be divided into the following areas:

- Knowledge and information management and support to scientific production
- Engagement, collaboration and partnerships
- Capacity building
- Data
- Risk communication

The Focal Points promote EFSA's networking activities. They support the EFSA Advisory Forum in the planning and implementation of activities aimed at improving co-operation between experts, institutions and authorities in the Member States. For example, the Focal Points help to organise and conduct health risk assessment training in the area of food and feed. They also liaise with all national stakeholders involved in the food safety process. In this way, they help EFSA to maintain an overview of its partners in the Member States. Information about upcoming events can also be sent directly to interested national experts or interest groups.

EFSA regularly awards grants to projects and activities that help it fulfil its mission. Only the so-called Article 36 organisations can apply for these grants. The Focal Points at national level inform the relevant organisations about upcoming calls for proposals.

In addition to networking and the exchange of information, the Focal Points primarily promote the visibility of EFSA and its role as the European Union's risk assessment authority for food and feed.

Who is part of the EFSA Focal Point network?

The EFSA Focal Point network consists of the national contact points of the 27 EU Member States, the Focal Points from Iceland and Norway, observers from Switzerland and the EU candidate countries. The network usually meets with EFSA four times a year, reports on its activities and exchanges information with each other.

What does the German Focal Point at the BfR actually do?

The national Focal Point in Germany is located at the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). The Focal Point team at the BfR helps to coordinate the flow of information between EFSA and the German Article 36 organisations (see next question for explanation). The Focal Point also supports German experts in making their expertise available to EFSA. In this way, it contributes to the transfer of scientific expertise from Germany in the field of food safety.

The Focal Point writes and sends out regular newsletters to interested organisations on the topics of funding opportunities, scientific networking and cooperation as well as scientific events. The BfR World Food Safety Almanac is another tool used to disseminate information from the food safety sector. This online handbook summarises the structures of the food and feed safety authorities of many European countries and third countries and thus creates a knowledge base on the administrative structures of different countries. In addition, the Focal Point supports the EU-FORA Fellowship Programme, which coordinates the exchange between young scientists and aims to expand a network between European experts in the field of risk assessment in the food chain and to strengthen competencies.

What are the Article 36 organisations?

The Article 36 organisations are named after Article 36 of EFSA's founding regulation. This requires the networking of organisations working in EFSA's thematic areas. The Article 36 organisations, also known as competent organisations, are therefore national bodies, universities, authorities or institutes of the EU Member States that are active in EFSA's remit and support EFSA in fulfilling its mission.

There are currently over 300 of these organisations across Europe. They support EFSA's work by providing scientific opinions and technical and scientific support for the implementation of risk assessment activities, among other things. They also help to collect data and identify emerging risks.

Who are the Article 36 organisations in Germany?

Eight institutions are currently Article 36 organisations in Germany, including risk assessment institutions in the food and feed sector such as the BfR, which also acts as a national focal point, and the risk management authority Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL). In addition, the following institutions are also active as Article 36 organisations:

- Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut (Animal Health)
- Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute (Rural Areas, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)
- Julius Kühn Institute (Cultivated Plants)
- Max Rubner Institute (Nutrition and Food)
- Federal Environment Agency (environmental protection)
- Bavarian State Office for Health and Food Safety (food safety, health, animal health, occupational health and safety and product safety)

How do you become an Article 36 organisation?

Article 36 organisations must meet certain eligibility criteria. For example, only organisations that are active in one of EFSA's areas of work and have been officially nominated by

one of the EU Member States or Iceland or Norway can become part of the list. Whether they are active at federal or state level is not decisive.

The Focal Points coordinate the designation of new Article 36 organisations and the updating of the list at national level. Interested organisations that meet the eligibility criteria can contact their national Focal Points.

Further information on the BfR website about the EFSA Focal Point

Annual report of the EFSA Focal Point

https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/publication/efsa_focal_point-310326.html

BfR guidelines for the assessment of health risks

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/364/guideline-for-the-assessment-of-health-risks.pdf>

Activities of the BfR as national EFSA Focal Point in Germany

https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/activities_of_bfr_as_national_efs_focal_point_in_germany-24975.html

The authorisation criteria are set out in Regulation (EC) No. 2230/2004) and can be viewed here: see <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32004R2230&from=PT>

About the BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) in Germany. The BfR advises the Federal Government and the States ('Laender') on questions of food, chemicals and product safety. The BfR conducts independent research on topics that are closely linked to its assessment tasks.

On the German EFSA Focal Point

The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is the EFSA Focal Point Germany and thus the national contact point between the German institutions and authorities for food and feed safety and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The aim of the German EFSA Focal Point is to promote cooperation and coordination of food risk assessment between the responsible stakeholders in the Member States and at European level in order to ensure food safety in Europe across the board.



This text version is a translation of the original German text which is the only legally binding version.

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