

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **ENHANCING RISK-BASED APPROACHES TO FOOD SAFETY WOULD BENEFIT CONSUMERS**

**Brussels, 3 December 2014 – Current EU legislation on food safety requires a mixed approach; based either on hazard alone or, alternatively, based on risk. In hazard-based approaches, policy decisions are made on the identification of potential adverse effects of an agent that may occur in foodstuffs. However, since the presence of these agents is often inevitable, it is often more appropriate to establish acceptable levels of exposure to such substances through risk-based assessment. This second approach would benefit public health by avoiding eliminating non-harmful foods and the unnecessary costs of reducing hazards where the benefit is minimal, whilst protecting the consumer by ensuring high standards of food safety. ILSI Europe’s experts discussed hazard- and risk-based approaches through case studies during a workshop in Brussels on 2 December 2014.**

Even if ‘hazard’ and ‘risk’ are often used as synonyms in common language, they have quite different meanings in chemical, microbiological and allergen safety assessment of foods. While hazard-based approaches simply identify the presence (or potentially harmful effects) of an agent at any detectable level, methodology based on risk establishes acceptable levels of exposure to an agent using information on both the hazard (nature of effect and dose-response) and exposure (extent and duration). Decisions based on hazardous properties alone, are simpler to make and the necessary data are less costly to obtain. However, a sensible balance between minimising risks to human health and the environment while enabling health and nutritional benefits to society to be realised is needed.

Certain categories of chemicals such as pesticides play an essential role in food production, but traces of them may remain in food as residues. A food safety assessment based on hazard only could exclude from production foodstuff containing a residue even though it is present at levels such that it would not be harmful to humans. *Campylobacter* in broiler meat provides another example. As the prevalence of this pathogen is high, a hazard-based control is not realistic. The example of food allergens was particularly informative. Risk management of the unintended presence of common allergens (“may contain”), such as peanuts, is based on defining a societally acceptable level of risk. A hazard-based approach would markedly limit food choice amongst those with such an allergy and even increase risk to them because of reduced observance of “may contain” labelling. Furthermore, it may even have deleterious consequences on nutritional balance. *“Hazard based regulation risks the unnecessary loss of valuable products to society. Even if regulatory action is not taken as a result of hazard labelling, such as CMR [carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic chemicals], the chemical is likely to be stigmatised and this may result in less suitable substitutes being introduced”*, commented Prof. em. Jim Bridges, one of the speakers at the ILSI Europe Workshop on ‘Hazard vs. Risk Based Approaches in Food Safety Assessment’.

The discussion of the workshop will be collated into a peer-reviewed publication on how risk-based approaches could be improved, and why they would often be superior to hazard-based approaches in terms of public benefit. More about this event [here](#).

### **About ILSI Europe**

Established in 1986, International Life Sciences Institute, Europe (ILSI Europe) fosters collaboration among the best scientists to provide evidence-based scientific consensus in the areas of nutrition, food safety, toxicology, risk assessment, and the environment. By facilitating their collaboration, ILSI Europe helps scientists from many sectors of society – public and private – to best address complex science and health issues by sharing their unique knowledge and perspectives.

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