

DA(18)5687:5 – JV/rs

Brussels, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018

**COPA AND COGECA'S POSITION ON THE  
COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL ON THE  
TRANSPARENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE EU  
RISK ASSESSMENT MODEL IN THE EU**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. More than fifteen years after the adoption of the principles laid down in the General Food Law (GFL), **EU farmers and their cooperatives would like to underline once again their support for and commitment to these principles.**
2. We believe that **the GFL is a fundamental piece of legislation** which lays the foundations for food and feed safety, in particular by ensuring a high level of protection for human health, by protecting consumers against misleading and fraudulent practices, and by guaranteeing the effective functioning of the internal market and an integrated approach from farm to fork.

## II. THE EU RISK ASSESSMENT MODEL AND THE ROLE OF EFSA

3. One of the essential principles laid down in the GFL was **the need to ensure that decisions relating to safety are supported by sound scientific evidence.** Indeed, the GFL established the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as the **independent EU risk assessment body for food and feed safety.**
4. For Copa and Cogeca, **EFSA has played and should continue to play a central role in providing sound scientific opinions that form the basis of risk management decisions in the EU and that inspire consumer confidence.** EFSA's opinions and evaluations clearly require professional judgment, which needs to be achieved by respecting the highest standards of scientific expertise and autonomy.
5. Opinions adopted by EFSA are the outcome of collective deliberations and it is important to consider and trust the expertise, the merit of the scientists and the quality of the research undertaken. It is essential that EFSA is supported by an institutional set-up that allows for the agency to be independent and for the best talent, new experts and multi-disciplinary expertise to be attracted into and remain in EFSA's work.
6. To continue to ensure the vital role of EFSA, it is also very important that the Agency is supported by appropriate funds.
7. Moreover, considering the global dimension of the sector, risk assessment bodies need to cooperate on key food and feed safety priorities at EU and international level. This would also mean to pay attention to international standards on science (e.g. OECD) and try to reach a common understanding of the scientific basis for the risk assessment.

## III. THE NEED TO CONTINUE TO BUILD A STRONG EU RISK ASSESSMENT MODEL THAT PROMOTES INNOVATION AND SCIENCE-BASED DECISIONS – TRANSPARENCY IS A TOOL BUT SHOULD NOT BE THE FINAL OBJECTIVE

8. **Copa and Cogeca welcome steps aimed at increasing transparency and improving communication and trust in the EU risk assessment model.** These efforts, however, should not compromise key elements required for a good functioning EU risk assessment model in which opinions and **decisions need to be based on science and the regulatory framework needs to promote and adapt to innovation. This is essential** in order for the EU agricultural sector to remain sustainable, innovative and competitive.
9. We believe that **transparency should not be the final goal but a tool to continue building a strong system.** Disclosing scientific studies prematurely can lead to scientific

decisions being politicised and data being taken out of context, misinterpreted or misused. Therefore, further transparency requirements should not discourage companies from submitting dossiers requesting the approval of new products in Europe nor influence the decision-making process which should continue to be driven by sound scientific basis \*.

10. **Innovation is essential for the European agricultural sector to remain competitive in a globalised market.** EU farmers and their cooperatives are confronted today by multiple challenges (e.g. adverse weather events, new pests and diseases, emerging risks, etc.) and we need to be equipped with the right toolbox that is developed hand in hand with the latest scientific progress. Moreover, EU legislation needs to provide certainty so that businesses can plan ahead. It also needs to support and encourage research and development so that EU farmers and their cooperatives continue to be sustainable and more competitive so as to create more jobs and increase growth in the EU.
11. **By way of reminder, the conclusions of the GFL<sup>1</sup> refit evaluation underline the lengthy authorisation procedures in some sectors** (e.g. feed additives, plant protection products, food improvement agents, etc.) including the long “stop-the-clock” procedures during the risk assessment phase and long deliberations before the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF) which slow down the decision-making process and as a result the market process.
12. **These long authorisation processes therefore affect our access to innovative solutions and to a proper farmers’ toolbox which help us to overcome the challenges we face and, as a result, boost our competitiveness.** This is why we are concerned about the possible impact of all the new requirements on the transparency of scientific studies. Indeed, we regret the fact that an impact assessment was not conducted to measure the various impacts that the new obligations would have before the proposal was published.
13. It is important to keep in mind that **EFSA draws up professional scientific conclusions which are not necessarily addressed to the general public but to risk managers.** It is likely that consulting the general public on submitted studies or even on planned studies in the event of renewed authorisations of substances will lead to certain scientific opinions being politicised before authorities take the risk management decision. This will probably delay the authorisation process even more without necessarily boosting the general public’s trust in the system.

#### IV. RISK COMMUNICATION

14. **Communication is highly complex today. The perception of risk is, in many cases, emotional and far from being rational or realistic.** This, among other things, is, linked to the fact that there are currently many new communication channels (including social media) that amplify this perception of risk. This irrationality is without a doubt a very sensitive matter for us because it can have a damaging impact on the trust placed in our food and feed safety system as well as on the acceptability of risk management decisions.
15. **It is therefore vital that risk assessments and scientific reports as a whole are communicated in a balanced, professional and pragmatic way. Science cannot be politicised, nor can it spread widely unfounded information or limited findings as this could unsettle the public opinion and create market disruptions.** It is therefore important to ensure that the various communication tools are

---

<sup>1</sup> Fitness check of General Food Law: [https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/general\\_food\\_law/fitness\\_check\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/general_food_law/fitness_check_en)

\* Reserve from Coldiretti

used properly to avoid situations where the number of likes on social media carries more weight than science.

16. Copa and Cogeca welcome the proposal to improve general communication. **It is important to define the objectives of risk communication and its principles.** Dialogue is essential and fostering public understanding will of course promote trust in our system. Nevertheless, given the complexity of scientific opinions, which are not addressed to average consumers, and the irrational way in which risks are perceived in many cases, **it is of utmost importance to avoid oversimplified communication messages that may lead to simplistic assumptions.**
17. As part of this exercise to tackle risk communication, we believe it is also important to address the precautionary principle and insist on its role in EU policymaking. Indeed, when there is a potential threat to the health of people, animals, plants or the environment, the cause of this threat should be restricted, even if scientific proof is uncertain. This is, of course, very important and we believe that the principle is well defined. It is now a matter of ensuring that it is applied appropriately and proportionally and that it is based on the best available scientific evidence. We believe that broadening the public's, stakeholders' and policymakers' understanding of the principle through communication would greatly help the risk to be considered and managed properly. It is also **vital to ensure that the internal market functions properly by using a suitable communication policy in the event of risks or during crises.**

## V. GOVERNING OF EFSA

18. Since the adoption of the GFL, the food and feed safety system in the EU has proven to be a success story. **Separating risk assessment and risk management indeed allowed Europe to make our politics more science-based and to limit the politicisation of our science.**
19. Risk assessments need to be carried out in an environment of transparency and independence, thereby ensuring that the outcomes remain unbiased. **The integrity of EFSA in delivering transparency and efficient deliverables, safeguarding food safety and consumer confidence, and supporting innovation is of the utmost importance for EU farmers and their cooperatives.**
20. **EFSA's independence is of the utmost importance and should not be questioned.** It is important to continue to strengthen the role of EFSA by ensuring greater consistency and cooperation between the different EU risk assessment bodies, attracting scientists, who are well respected within the scientific community as experts in their field, providing predictability and guaranteeing support from the different public authorities. Nevertheless, we believe that ensuring that every Member State is represented on the EFSA Management Board may lead to the authority becoming less independent. When selecting new independent candidates, discussions should focus on the risk assessment criteria rather than on the need to ensure a representative per Member State.
21. The same applies to scientific experts. We believe it is very important to continue to attract new talent into EFSA. Nevertheless, the obligation for Member States to nominate at least 12 scientific experts, together with the need to ensure the most widespread geographical distribution when appointing, may lead to some decisions being taken without necessarily achieving the highest level of scientific excellence.