EFSA engages in further dialogue with stakeholders on health claims

News Story
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Experts from EFSA's Panel on Dietetic products, nutrition and allergies (NDA) provided an update on their work on health claims to over 400 participants at a technical meeting organised in Parma. The purpose of the meeting was two-fold: 1) to share information on the current status of EFSA's scientific health claim evaluations and 2) to exchange views with experts from the food and beverage industry, Member States, and the European Commission.

Opening the meeting EFSA Executive Director, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, reiterated EFSA's commitment to building consumer confidence and supporting innovation through sound science: "Dialogue is key. By ensuring that there is a shared understanding of the scientific evidence required, the work we have delivered thus far will support the work of industry by helping to establish future directions for research and innovation."

Professor Albert Flynn, Chair of EFSA's NDA Panel said: "We are here today to provide additional guidance to those involved in the authorisation process of health claims. Our discussions with applicants and Member States on ways to improve our dialogue and further clarify both the type and the level of evidence required to substantiate claims will benefit the overall efficiency of EFSA's evaluation process."

EFSA will pursue its dialogue with stakeholders through on-line consultations and technical workshops to provide additional guidance to applicants in selected areas, such as gut and immune function, antioxidants, satiety, and mental function. EFSA will start with a workshop on gut and immune claims, which will take place before the end of 2010. EFSA will also further update its briefing document on claims for applicants in light of the meeting's discussions and taking into account all comments received. An updated briefing document will be published on EFSA's website in the coming months.

At the meeting held today, participants discussed various aspects of the process such as: how the Panel assesses and documents whether a claim is substantiated; what data requirements and relevant studies are considered pertinent; and what are considered beneficial physiological effects and risk factors for disease risk reduction claims. Participants also took stock of learning and progress made thus far in the implementation of the Regulation on nutrition and health claims.

Technical meeting with stakeholders on recent developments related to health claims

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Notes to Editors

Before the meeting, EFSA published a stakeholder briefing document on its website on the evaluation of health claim Articles 13.1, 13.5 and 14. Participants were asked to comment on the document ahead of the meeting. The document served as a basis for discussion and clarification during the meeting.

On-going dialogue with stakeholders

Today's meeting builds on previous consultations with stakeholders and Member States. In particular, in the light of the experience gained with its evaluation of health claims, EFSA provided further advice and organised two meetings with stakeholders and key partners in 2009. For health claim applications (Article 14 and 13.5 health claims), EFSA provided additional advice to applicants in the form of a frequently asked question document (FAQ). The draft FAQ was subject to public consultation and discussed at a meeting with applicants in June 2009 before its finalisation and publication in September 2009. In October 2009, EFSA held a meeting with Member States and the European Commission to update them on the Authority's evaluation of Article 13.1 health claims. To this end EFSA prepared a draft briefing document which was discussed at the meeting, and subsequently updated and published in December 2009.