Terms of Reference - Community on applications for food and feed products

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

MISSION

Following the recognition of the need to create an open forum for stakeholders to discuss applications-related matters, EFSA established the stakeholder community on applications for food and feed products (here in after the "community").

The community is a collaborative forum whose main objective is to empower its members to play an active role in shaping discussions and initiatives related to the application process. It will have strong emphasis on the active role of its members in sharing proposals, engaging, and bringing forward possible solutions to facilitate the end-to-end processing of applications.

The discussions within the community will focus on topics related to applications and their processes, structured in four main areas:

- Procedural aspects: discussions will focus on the practical aspects of the application procedures.
- Digital tools: this area will cover feedback and suggestions for improving the IT tools used in the application process (e.g., portals used for the application process and assessment calculation tools) and related user guides.
- Support initiatives for applicants: discussions will focus on gathering input from users on the effectiveness of EFSA's support initiatives during the application lifecycle and of initiatives targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with the aim of also exploring potential new initiatives.
- General aspects related to guidance documents: this area will cover general discussions on the creation, updates and accessibility of guidance documents used in the application process and on standard data formats.

Discussions and initiatives will focus on aspects within the existing regulatory frameworks, as changes to regulations fall outside the community's scope.

Furthermore, the activities of the community will not concern the development or updating of scientific guidance, nor specific risk assessments. Where applicable, stakeholder and public engagement on such initiatives will take place through other mechanisms established at EFSA, such as public consultations, calls for data/evidence, stakeholder events, etc.

Similarly, the community is not intended to replace other existing stakeholder groups or schemes at EFSA (see overview here), which will continue to operate according to their respective missions and remits. Potential synergies with the activities of other mechanisms may be established, depending on the specific needs of the community's ongoing work.

OBJECTIVES

The mission of the community translates into the following objectives:

- Create a regular discussion platform through a mix of meeting-based interactions and asynchronous exchanges via Teams with stakeholders and partners, specifically focused on application-related matters.

- Ensure an active role of members in setting the agenda of topics to be discussed, balancing between topics identified by EFSA and those proposed by members.

- Ensure that, where applicable, the outcomes of exchanges with the community inform EFSA's work in terms of enhancing support to applicants, improving tools and processes with a user-centred approach, and other relevant initiatives.

More specific objectives related to the topics to be addressed and the input/feedback to be gathered via community exchanges will be defined in consultation with community members through calls for topics and other participatory initiatives deemed necessary.

MEMBERSHIP

ROLES

EFSA'S UNITS INVOLVED

The community will be managed by the Front-Desk and Workforce Planning (FDP) Unit. All units of EFSA may be involved as relevant.

The community coordinator, a member of the FDP Unit, acts as contact point for the community, coordinating activities and ensuring that the community fulfils its scope. The community coordinator will be working alongside community moderators, who will be responsible for facilitating and moderating communication with and among members via the MS Teams platform and other necessary channels.

STAKEHOLDERS

The community is open to stakeholders who have an interest in application related matters, therefore there is no limit of members. It includes all categories of stakeholders with an interest in regulated product application topics, such as business operators, consultants, NGOs, laboratories and contract research organisations. Participation of multiple members from the same organisation is allowed. However, should it become necessary to ensure efficient exchange dynamics, EFSA reserves the right to limit participation from multiple members from a same organisation, particularly when they cover overlapping areas of work or interest. To be part of the community, EFSA launches a call for expression of interest on its website, clarifying the criteria for being considered eligible. The interest is screened by EFSA on the basis of the criteria indicated in the call and the information provided in the form for expressing the interest. The call for expression of interest for being part of the community will be periodically reopened to allow new members to join and contribute to the community.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

EFSA's relevant counterparts within the European Commission may nominate delegates to attend community initiatives and discussions.

MEMBER STATES

Member states delegates – either from national authorities or from competent organisations acting on behalf of national authorities – may be identified via call circulated via Advisory Forum and Focal points.

UPDATES IN MEMBERSHIP

CHANGE OF A MEMBER'S ORGANISATION/INSTITUTION

Since subscription to the community is on an individual basis, if a member changes their organisation or institution and their new role remains relevant to the community, they may continue their membership. Such changes must be promptly communicated to EFSA, so that the necessary verifications and administrative procedures can be carried out.

ALTERNATES AND AD HOC PARTICIPANTS

If the interests and expertise of standing members don't align with the specific themes addressed during a particular community meeting or initiative, it will be possible for a member to appoint an alternate from the same organisation or institution. EFSA must be informed in advance, so that the necessary administrative steps can be taken to include the alternate in the community's channels.

REPLACEMENTS

If an existing member is no longer able to participate in the activities of the community but wishes to nominate a colleague from the same organisation or institution to take over their role, this will be possible upon notification to EFSA. EFSA will carry out the necessary checks and administrative procedures to formalise the replacement.

DURATION OF THE MEMBERSHIP

Membership to the community and removal from the member list and related IT tools can be terminated at any time by members by requesting it from EFSA. Additionally, to ensure effective community interactions and efficient use of the IT tools, EFSA will periodically conduct checks with members - e.g., through surveys or reviews of their activity, properly communicated - and will remove from the community inactive members or members who do not express the desire to continue being part of the community.

OPERATING MODEL

The community will operate via a mix of meetings and asynchronous exchanges among its members. The following tools and methods will be used and may be complemented by other tools as needed.

MEETINGS

Meetings will primarily be held online. However, physical meetings may be considered if necessary. The number and duration of meetings throughout the year will depend on the

topics that need to be addressed through this mode of interaction. At least one meeting per year is planned, to kick off the community in 2025 and to provide updates on the community's progress in the following years.

To ensure effective interaction given the community size, audience interaction tools such as Mentimeter and Slido may be used instead of or to prioritise verbal interaction.

TEAMS CHANNEL

The Teams channel will be the main channel used for communication from EFSA to community members and among community members. It will be used to share calls for topics, surveys, and notifications on meetings/relevant initiatives, as well as a platform to exchange on selected topics.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATIONS

The use of e-mail will be kept to a minimum for communications with and within the community. E-mail digests will be used to notify members about relevant activities in the Teams channel, encouraging them to access the respective posts to view the content and any follow-up interactions. Additionally, e-mail messages or calendar invitations may be used for meeting organisation purposes.

CALLS FOR TOPICS

Calls for topics will be the main tool for community members to submit the topics they would like to see addressed. They will be managed either via MS Forms or via threads on Teams, depending on the expected input from members. A first call will be launched when kicking off the community to set a programme balancing EFSA's and community members' interests and discussion needs. Calls for topics will be relaunched periodically, at least once per year.

EFSA will remain in charge of selecting and prioritising topics submitted by members for discussion and may consult members in prioritizing pre-identified topics if necessary.

LANGUAGE

The working language of the community is English.

CONTENT AND PROGRAMMING

Content and programming will be defined based on calls for topics and EFSA's prioritisation and programming. However, there will be flexibility to include additional topics if needed.

Once finalised, the programme for the coming months will be shared with members.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The community is expected to function as a centralised way to gather views and proposals from stakeholders and partners on application-related matters, ensuring that these are reviewed and

addressed in the context of initiatives to enhance support to applicants and current practice, initiatives and tools related to application procedures.

Specific outcomes related to the initiatives being undertaken by the community will be defined in the context of the programming.

PUBLICATION OF COMMUNITY-RELATED DOCUMENTS

To ensure transparency in the management of the community, documents related to its establishment and operations – such as meeting summaries and presentations – will be published on EFSA's website (thematic discussion group section). These documents may include references to the companies or organisations that community members represent, but, unless specific consent is requested and provided by the members, they will not feature any personal data, such as individual names, surnames, or email addresses.

TIMELINE

The terms of reference for the community can be updated by EFSA whenever deemed necessary – either by EFSA or by members who notify EFSA – and are valid until a decision of discontinuing the community is taken.