Risk identification in food safety: Strategy and outcomes of the EFSA emerging risks exchange network (EREN), 2010-2014

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) established an Emerging Risks Exchange Network (EREN) to exchange information between EFSA and the Member states (MSs) on possible emerging risks for food and feed safety in 2010. The Network is composed of delegates from MSs and Norway designated through the Advisory Forum of EFSA and observers from the European Commission, EU pre-accession countries, the Food and Drug Administration of the USA and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations. Through 2010 to 2014, the EREN met 12 times. The EREN discussed a total of 63 signals of potential emerging issues that were presented and assessed using a standard template developed by the Emerging Risks unit of EFSA (EMRISK). Out of these signals, 39 originated from EFSA, 24 from MSs. The issues discussed were mainly microbiological and chemical hazards, but also food safety issues as result of illegal activity, new consumer consumption trends, biotoxins, new technologies and processes, allergens, animal health, environmental pollution, new analytical methods, new food packaging technology and unknown hazards were on the agenda. Based on the available evidence, EREN recommended whether an issue should be considered emerging or not, and if it merited further consideration, such as generating data on the issue, starting a full risk assessment and/or consultation of other bodies. According to the emerging risks identification process set in place at EFSA, the issues discussed and found of relevance by EREN were sent to the EFSA's Scientific Committee Standing Working Group on Emerging Risks for final evaluation. With four case studies, i.e. the zoonotic potential of Usutu virus, risk of ciguatera fish poisoning in EU, zoonotic aspects of illegally imported wildlife products and benefits and risks of 3D food printing, the method developed to preliminary assess signals of potential emerging issues is presented and discussed.