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New ways of working together on food safety: BfR agrees on work plan with UK authorities

On 3 December 2024, a delegation from the UK food safety authorities – the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) – visited the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) in Berlin.

The meeting marks the start of collaboration following the recent signing of the joint cooperation agreement. The focus of the delegation's visit was to clarify a multi-year work plan to shape future collaboration, particularly in the areas of risk assessment, scientific exchange, and international standards.

The delegation meeting on 3 December 2024 followed the signing of a joint declaration of cooperation. Brexit has made international cooperation more important than ever. The FSA, FSS and BfR want to work together on regulatory and scientific challenges, including, for example, the harmonisation of food safety standards and the pursuit and implementation of joint scientific approaches with regard to new technologies, food fraud, and risk communication. A multi-year work plan was jointly finalised, which forms the cornerstone for future cooperation.

After the discussion rounds, the guests from the UK took part in guided tours of the historic BfR experimental farm and the reference laboratories.

The FSA and BfR have been working together successfully for several years. In November 2023, a delegation from the FSA visited the BfR to discuss, among other things, consumer risk perception in relation to new technologies. This was followed by several technical meetings to explore joint priorities for future cooperation. In addition to artificial intelligence and digitalisation in food safety, topics included authenticity and analytical methods for food and animal feed.

The FSA is an independent government agency whose main objective is to protect public health. It conducts scientific research, monitors animal feed, and advises the public and the government. The main topics include food fraud, food allergies, and research into contaminants and food-borne illnesses. Since Brexit, the FSA has issued recommendations

on authorisations for food and feed in the UK and works with the FSS on the risk assessment of regulated products.

FSS is responsible for food and feed safety and fresh meat inspections in Scotland. It is likewise non-governmental and provides advice to promote public health and consumer confidence.

Both organisations work together under the “Four-country working” approach to ensure coordinated policymaking between the four UK countries – England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. The aim of the cooperation with the BfR is to reorganise the risk assessment.

Further information on the cooperation with the FSA

Risk assessment and communication in focus: Scientific exchange on food safety between the FSA and the BfR

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/349/risk-assessment-and-communication-in-focus.pdf>

About the BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) in Germany. The BfR advises the Federal Government and the States ('Laender') on questions of food, chemicals and product safety. The BfR conducts independent research on topics that are closely linked to its assessment tasks.

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