

The Global Harmonization Initiative (GHI) Working Groups (WGs) provide the consensus-building forums in which individual scientists share their expertise and come to agreement on the scientific principles that will support informed and objective global regulatory and legislative decision-making with respect to food safety, security and nutrition issues.

GHI is committed to building a WG process that is accessible by food scientists worldwide to ensure that any consensus reached is broad-based and truly representative of current scientific agreement from every continent. GHI recognizes that language barriers, travel constraints and lack of publication opportunities can pose obstacles to qualified scientists who wish to participate in a WG forum. As such, attendance at WG workshops is not mandatory; rather individual members may participate in the development of a WG's consensus proposal by contributing to the collection of scientific evidence and providing comments by communicating with other members through email, post, and tele- or video-conferencing. All WG members will receive meeting minutes and updates through GHI's website.

Establishing a GHI Working Group

In principle, any stakeholder group may establish a WG within the GHI framework. Those interested in forming a WG should contact the WG Coordinator with a proposal that includes the following information:

- A statement describing the scientific issue and expected benefit(s) of achieving global consensus as it relates to harmonization of food safety regulations and law.
- A list identifying the potential WG chair, along with suggestions for group members and experts, including contact e-mails, if available. (Please note: Non-members of GHI may be recommended and will be asked to join the initiative as members.)

Duties of the WG Chair. Once a WG has been established and recorded as a standing WG by GHI's Executive Board, the Chair will receive information about potential meeting dates and/or other modes of communication, such as teleconferencing via Skype or through the GHI website (as these formats become available). Duties of a WG Chair include: identifying key international conferences at which to conduct WG meetings; working with the WG Coordinator to arrange WG meetings in conjunction with other GHI meetings or through various communications channels; identifying the critical issues in the area of interest and setting the agenda for discussion; and managing the collection and recording of scientific evidence and findings. With support from the WG Coordinator, the Chair is the primary contact for the group.

The Working Group Process: How Does it Work?

Individual members and expert contributors who participate in the GHI Working Group consensus-building process do so in the spirit of collaborative cooperation. The goal of each GHI Working Group is to develop a consensus statement that promotes globally harmonized, science-based food regulations in a specific focus area. In general, the structure of GHI's Working Group process involves the following steps:

- The Working Group Chair sets consensus-building workshop dates, assisted by the Honorary WG Coordinator, and notifies and sends WG members a preliminary agenda of discussion points.
- Each WG collects and evaluates available scientific evidence pertaining to the area of interest, and discusses and debates the data (or lack thereof), the existing laws and regulations, and the potential for harmonization of global laws and regulations consistent with the scientific findings with the goal of developing a consensus proposal.
- Typically, each WG will meet more than once during the consensus proposal development phase of data collection, evaluation and debate. WG workshops provide the in-person forums for this iterative process, and communications among members may also be conducted through other means, such as teleconferencing, email or post.

Working Toward Harmony (CONT'D)

- Once a scientifically founded consensus proposal has been drafted by a WG, it is submitted to the WG Coordinator, who forwards the draft to the GHI Executive Committee for review.
- The consensus document is then sent by GHI to qualified subject-matter experts, in as many countries as possible, for review and comments. These experts must first be recognized by peer consensus as experts in their fields and be sanctioned by the GHI Supervisory Board. The GHI Executive Committee collects the solicited expert comments and supporting scientific evidence and returns the consensus proposal to the originating WG.
- The WG reviews the expert comments, accepts or amends the consensus proposal based on the experts' input, and the iterative process resumes until such time as there is little or no difference of opinion among the WG and subject-matter experts.
- Once a WG has written the final draft of the proposal, the group forwards the document to the GHI Executive Committee, which circulates the findings among all GHI members worldwide for comments. All comments must be accompanied by supporting scientific evidence. These comments will be forwarded to the WG and the experts, who will consider the merits of the GHI membership's input.
- Following final agreement of the WG and the subject-matter experts, a final consensus document is produced and forwarded to all GHI members for approval.
- After the degree of consensus reached is determined, GHI issues an official scientific consensus statement via a white paper or similar document for global distribution to public health authorities, regulatory agencies, and legislative and policymaking bodies.

The final consensus statement is issued by GHI when sufficient scientific evidence and a clear majority indicate agreement in support of the findings, globally. GHI will also include any differing opinions in the final statement. In cases in which no significant consensus is reached, GHI will note the lack of evidence for the statement, identify knowledge gaps that are obstacles to achieving consensus on the issue, and will recommend further research, as appropriate.

Become a GHI Working Group Member

We invite you to join a GHI Working Group by following these three steps:

1. Only registered members of GHI are eligible to join a Working Group. If you are not yet enrolled, please visit our website at www.globalharmonization.net and complete the Individual Membership Enrollment form before proceeding to Step 2. There is no fee to join GHI.
2. Contact the GHI Working Group Coordinator at wg@globalharmonization.net, listing the WGs in which you'd like to participate or suggesting new WG topics related to global harmonization. Your request will be reviewed to ensure that your expertise is matched to the appropriate WG area of interest.
3. Once you have qualified as a participant in a WG, you will receive notification via email, along with information from the WG Coordinator and/or WG Chair regarding upcoming meetings, available minutes or relevant past WG meeting materials, and a list of current WG members.



For more information about the [Global Harmonization Initiative](http://www.globalharmonization.net) and its efforts to feed people and fuel innovation through harmonization of science-based global food safety regulations, please visit us online at www.globalharmonization.net.