

## The Global Harmonization Initiative

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Division members with interest in the subject have probably visited <http://www.globalharmonization.org>. From responses that the GHI Working Party received, it is clear that global harmonization of regulations is a wish, high on the agenda of many organizations, industries and regulators. Obvious, as harmonization would eliminate undue testing (including animal testing), avoid the destruction of food products for the wrong reasons, and facilitate the introduction of safe and healthy food products with higher concentrations of naturally present nutrients, by the introduction of novel processing methods.

Many, however, fear that GHI will just duplicate the efforts of other organizations that have been active for decennia and expect that GHI is a waste of time and energy. The members of the GHI Working Party, however, are all very busy with their day-to-day responsibilities and would not participate if GHI would be a waste. Actually, a number of GHI Working Party members are also active in these other organizations. GHI can make a difference as GHI intends to use a route different from the traditional ones. By doing so, GHI may make the efforts of the vested organizations actually more effective. What then is the difference?

Most organizations represent interest or pressure groups, e.g., because they are intergovernmental and hence represent governments, industrial with - sensibly - enhancing profit as their goal, or consumers, who wish to obtain what they want, but want that to be safe. Although GHI would carefully listen to these groups and carefully consider the issues they raise, GHI does not represent any of them. To the contrary, GHI will attempt to obtain scientific consensus between **individual** scientists from around the globe, on issues - that may be raised by any individual or group - that are relevant to the food supply chain. Once consensus has been reached, interest and pressure groups may use the result to try to amend or renew regulations.

Expert groups of GHI (to be composed of real experts, see later) will investigate existing evidence including in particular documents produced by organizations such as Codex Alimentarius, WHO, EFSA, ILSI, etc. After careful evaluation the conclusions of the GHI Experts will be circulated among food scientists to invite their comments or agreement. The conclusions may well be those reached by e.g., Codex or EFSA. GHI will, however, invite the opinions of individual scientists, not the opinions of their employers.

The most difficult but at the same time extremely important part of the process is to identify real experts. This has been the subject of many discussions and following the GHI Workshop in Hamburg, Germany in September, a draft scheme has been developed that will be placed on the website for comments shortly.

I like to recommend readers to look on the website (see above) for the article that Larry Keener and I recently wrote for Food Safety Europe, titled "Healthy Food for All -The Global Harmonization Initiative".