

The Global Harmonization Initiative (GHI) Working Groups (WG) provide the starting point for consensus-building forums in which individual scientists share their expertise and come to initial agreement on the scientific principles that may 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 to food scientists worldwide to ensure that any consensus reached is broad-based and truly representative of current scientific agreement globally. GHI recognizes that language barriers and lack of publication experience can present obstacles to qualified scientists who wish to initiate or participate in the consensus process. Therefore, individual members may be supported by their local GHI Ambassadors and upon request GHI may provide editorial support.

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 submit a proposal to the GHI General Secretary (GS). The proposal should include the following information:

- A statement describing the scientific issue and expected benefit(s) of achieving global scientific consensus as it relates to harmonization of food safety, food security or nutrition regulations and law.
- If possible, the name of a potential WG chair(s), their qualifications and email addresses if possible.
- Also, if possible, suggestions for group members and experts, including email addresses
- Note that non-members of GHI may also be recommended. If they qualify for GHI membership, they will be asked to join GHI. However, qualified non-members may serve if they wish, without joining GHI.

The GS will assure that the proposal is brought before the GHI Board and that a decision is made within 2 months, ensuring that the Board has the opportunity to discuss the proposal in at least one Board meeting. The GS will inform the proposer as soon as possible about the decision.

The Working Group Consensus Protocol

Individual members and expert contributors who participate in the GHI WG consensus-building process do so in the spirit of collaborative cooperation. The goal of each GHI WG is to develop a consensus statement that promotes globally harmonized, science-based food regulations in a specific focused area consistent with its constitution and the GHI Board approved proposal.

After approval by the GHI Board, the Chair of the WG should adhere to the following protocol that in total may take approximately one year, but it could take between 40 and 70 weeks, depending on the rate of progress.

Actions	Allotted time
1. The Chair writes a concise but clear document for the members of the WG,	As needed (estimate: 4 weeks)
I. explaining the objective of the project,	
II. reminding the members that they do not represent their employer,	
III. reminding the members that they must base their input on their own scientific conscience,	
IV. reminding the members that the protocol should be followed to avoid any opportunity for the process and the resulting document to be biased in any way.	As needed (estimate: 4-12 weeks)
2. The WG Chair writes, alone or together with a core team, consisting of a few of the WG members, a first draft of a document based on scientific evidence properly documented.	Approximately 4 weeks
3. The first draft will be sent to all the other WG members for comments and other input, always to be supported by scientific evidence. All members are free to discuss the draft with each other or with others they feel may contribute.	
4. The Chair considers the input from the WG members and produces a second draft .	Up to 3 x 4 weeks/iteration
5. The second draft is sent to all WG members for their approval or for new comments and other input (always supported by scientific evidence). This is an iterative process resulting in drafts (to be numbered sequentially) but should not go beyond a fourth draft. The Chair may call one or more meetings of the WG to discuss and possibly resolve differences of opinions. These meetings may be in the form of teleconferences or on-line discussions.	
6. The Chair considers all input and produces a draft WG consensus document version 1 . If there was no full agreement among the members of the WG, the Chair decides on the text of this draft, with a note about alternate opinions and the evidence to support it, if any.	4 weeks maximum
7. The draft WG consensus document version 1 is submitted to the GHI Board for approval of the draft to be sent out for further review. Such approval cannot be withheld without strong scientific arguments that then must be clearly explained to the WG and allow the WG to edit the text to meet valid arguments.	4 weeks maximum
8. The approved draft WG consensus document version 1 is then sent by the GHI General Secretary to all GHI Ambassadors to ask them to comment and give their own input, and, if needed, to invite local experts to participate in the process. In countries without GHI Ambassadors the document will be sent to members, who would be expected to be able and willing to use the same review as is expected from the GHI Ambassadors.	Approximately 4 weeks
9. The WG considers all comments received that are supported by scientific evidence and amends the draft consensus document as appropriate. This may involve communication with those who provided input or comments, and this step may result in a number of discussions about differences of opinions. The result should be a draft of WG consensus document version 2 .	6 weeks maximum
10. Draft WG consensus document version 2 will be sent to those mentioned under action 8 above with the same requests.	Approximately 4 weeks

<p>11. The WG again considers all comments that are supported by scientific evidence and produces a final draft of the GHI consensus document.</p>	<p>Approximately 4 weeks</p>
<p>12. The final draft GHI consensus document is submitted to the GHI Board for final approval. Approval can be withheld ONLY if there are ethical, moral or other very serious reasons to do so. Again, in such a case the Board must then explain the reason(s) to the WG and allow the WG to edit the text to meet any valid argument.</p>	<p>Approximately 2 weeks</p>
<p>13. Following approval by the Board, the final draft GHI consensus document is forwarded to all GHI members for approval.</p>	<p>Approximately 4 weeks</p>
<p>14. The final draft GHI consensus document will be sent to the Editor-in-Chief of the journal Trends in Food Science and Technology for any editorial comments that would not alter the meaning of the document in any way*.</p>	
<p>15. The Science Communication WG will be asked to prepare a draft Press Release about the document, to be completed after action 18 below is accomplished.</p>	
<p>16. After the degree of GHI membership consensus reached is determined and is <u>established to be 90% or more</u>, GHI issues the document as an official GHI Scientific Consensus Document, indicating the degree of consensus. If the consensus is below 90%, a GHI Discussion Document will be produced (see action 20 below).</p>	<p>Approximately 2 weeks</p>
<p>17. The GHI Scientific Consensus Document will be sent to public health authorities, regulatory agencies, and legislative and policymaking bodies all over the world.</p>	
<p>18. The Press Release (see action 15 above) is finalised, and is to be sent through the appropriate channels, including the GHI Ambassadors, to the press in all countries and to the editor of GHI Matters, the newsletter of GHI, for publication in the first forthcoming issue. The GHI Ambassadors are also encouraged to distribute the document to government officials within their country of responsibility, with the link to the consensus protocol on the GHI website. GHI members may suggest others to whom the document should be sent.</p>	
<p>19. The Scientific GHI Consensus Document will be published in the first upcoming issue of Trends in Food Science and Technology* or other appropriate scientific journal, and be made downloadable from the GHI Library webpage. On the 1st page of the document there will be a copyright statement: "This document is the proprietary work of GHI. Its purpose is to promote science-based food safety regulations. Therefore, the document may be used, reproduced and disseminated only in its entirety, without any modifications, deletions or additions" with proper reference to the source (journal, issue, date and pages).</p>	
<p>20. If no consensus is reached, the WG will be asked to write an article that discusses the differences of opinion and indicates the knowledge gaps that seem to be the obstacles to achieving consensus on the issue. The article should include recommendations for further research, to close these gaps.</p> <p>The article may be submitted to Trends in Food Science and Technology* or other scientific journal, as appropriate, to be subjected to the regular peer review process of the publisher.</p> <p>* The publishers Wiley, Wageningen Academic Publishers, Springer and Elsevier have been consulted and they all would consider this ONLY if they would have exclusivity. We are negotiating a contract with Elsevier to ensure that actions 18 and 20 will happen as described. Elsevier's "Trends in Food Science and Technology" seems to be the most wanted choice by GHI members (by informal polling).</p>	