EuropaBio®
The European Association for Bioindustries

MISSION POSSIBLE

REMOVING DOUBLE STANDARDS IN EU SAFETY ASSESSMENT

– THIS MESSAGE WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 5 SECS. –

Whether for **food**, **medicines** or **chemicals**, the EU's risk assessment agencies improve the lives of citizens across the EU by enabling access to innovative biotechnology products whilst ensuring the highest level of consumer safety.

Benefits for patients, farmers and consumers range from life-saving medicines to high yielding GM crops that can improve food security, environmental sustainability and nutrition. **But only efficient assessment can yield such benefits.**

1. MISSION BRIEF: ENSURE SAFETY AND DELIVER BENEFITS

THE AGENTS

CODENAME: ECHA

Organisation:
EUROPEAN CHEMICALS AGENCY

Mission: Help companies to comply with legislation on chemicals, advance their safe use, and provide relevant information to the public.

CODENAME: EMA

Organisation:
EUROPEAN MEDICINES AGENCY

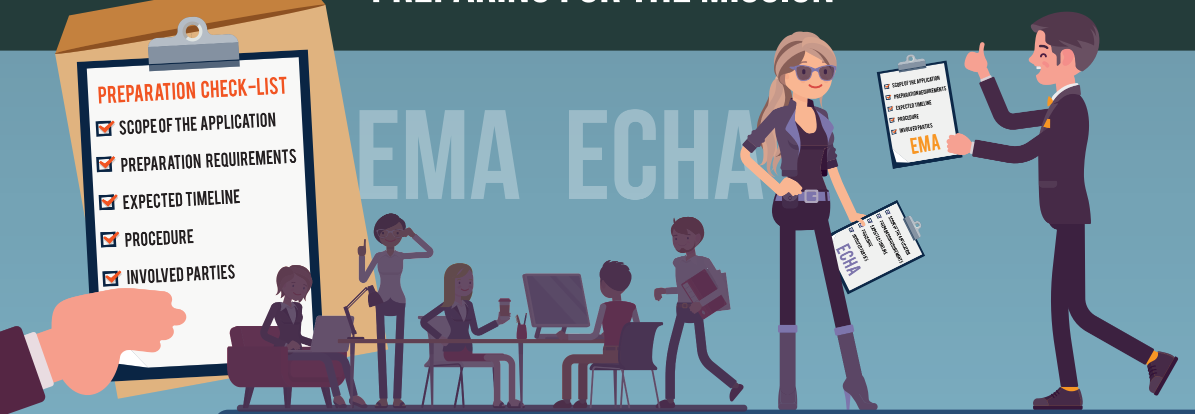
Mission: Evaluate and facilitate safe access to medicines, providing information to healthcare professionals and patients.

CODENAME: EFSA

Organisation:
EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Mission: Contribute to the safety of the EU food chain by providing scientific advice and communicating on risks to deliver a trusted food safety system.

PREPARING FOR THE MISSION



In the case of human medicines and biocides, **EMA** and **ECHA** both dedicate time and effort to pre-submission activities to inform applicants on important aspects, such as the scope and content of the application, preparation requirements, expected timelines and procedures, as well as involved parties.

These services make the rest of the assessment run smoothly.

EFSA lacks these pre-submission meetings for GMOs and its applicants are not as well informed. EFSA could learn from EMA and ECHA!

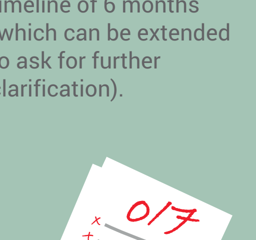
Furthermore, not all products are assessed efficiently, which prevents some of them and their benefits from reaching the market in a timely manner.

2. THE CLOCK IS TICKING: TIME TO DELIVER THOSE BENEFITS!

Each EU agency has different legal deadlines for risk assessment of products under their remit. Despite small differences in legally foreseen timelines, compliance with these deadlines differs greatly among agencies.

FREQUENT DELAYS

None of the 7 EFSA applications for GMO authorisations assessed in 2017 were finished within the foreseen legal timeline of 6 months (which can be extended to ask for further clarification).



A GROWING GAP

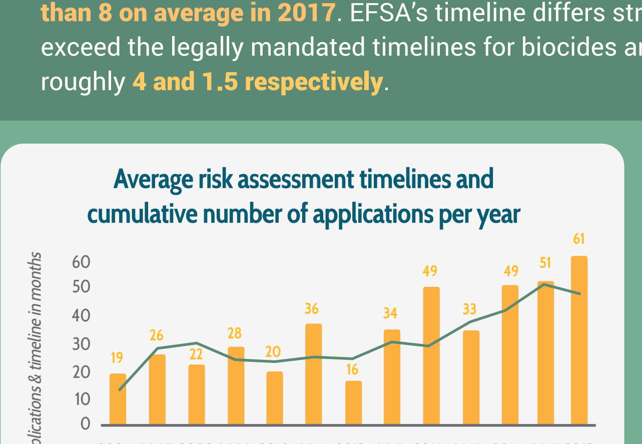
Timelines for risk assessment of GM import crops have more than doubled in the past decade, to reach over twice the time taken by other countries with equally high standards for risk assessment.

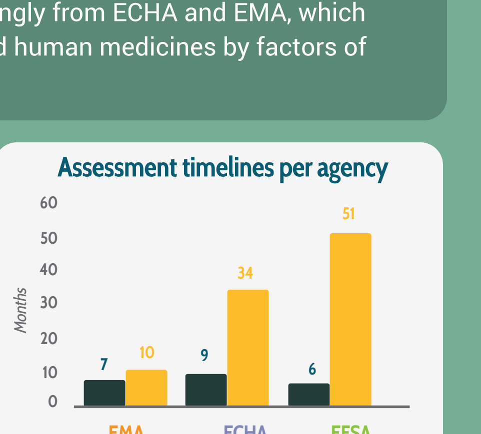
WORK IS PILING UP

In the face of decreasing efficiency and increasing number of applications for GMO authorisations, EFSA scientists find themselves covered under an ever-growing and costly pile of work.

MISSION COMPROMISED

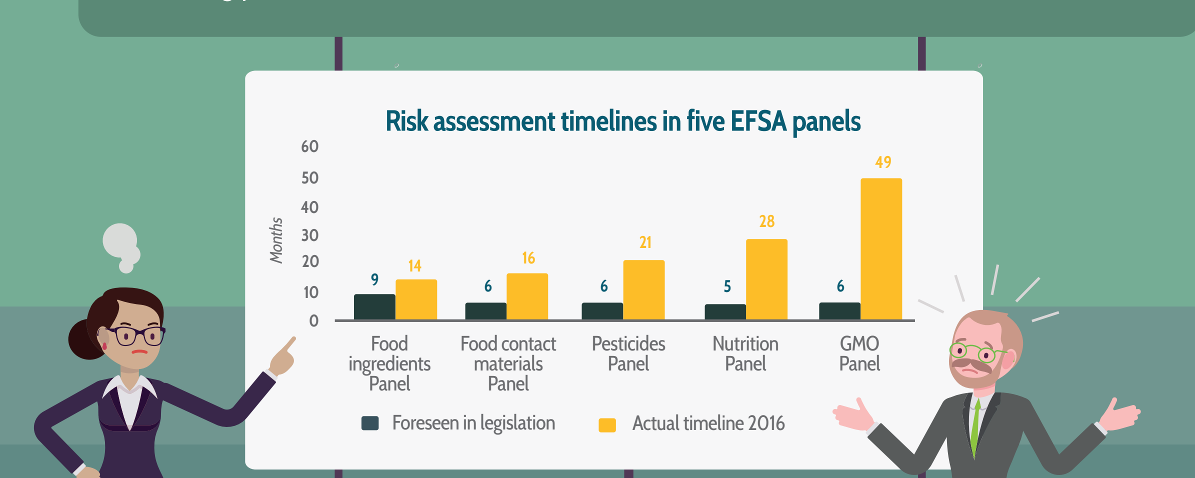
EFSA exceeded its legally mandated timeline for GMO authorisation by a factor of **more than 8 on average in 2017**. EFSA's timeline differs strongly from ECHA and EMA, which exceed the legally mandated timelines for biocides and human medicines by factors of roughly **4 and 1.5 respectively**.





SLOW ON GMOS, BUT WHAT ABOUT OTHER PRODUCTS?

Within EFSA, timelines for risk assessment also vary substantially among product groups and the dedicated panels that have been set up to assess them. Risk assessment efficiency for GMOs trails far behind compared to all other EFSA product groups, including pesticides.



3. PUTTING THE MISSION BACK ON TRACK! WILL EFSA DELIVER MORE BENEFITS?

The current EU risk assessment process appears disproportionate and costs taxpayers more than necessary. Treating GMOs as if they were dangerous does not reassure consumers about promising technologies that already contribute substantially to Europe's competitiveness and global sustainability.
But it's not too late to learn from past mistakes!

LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

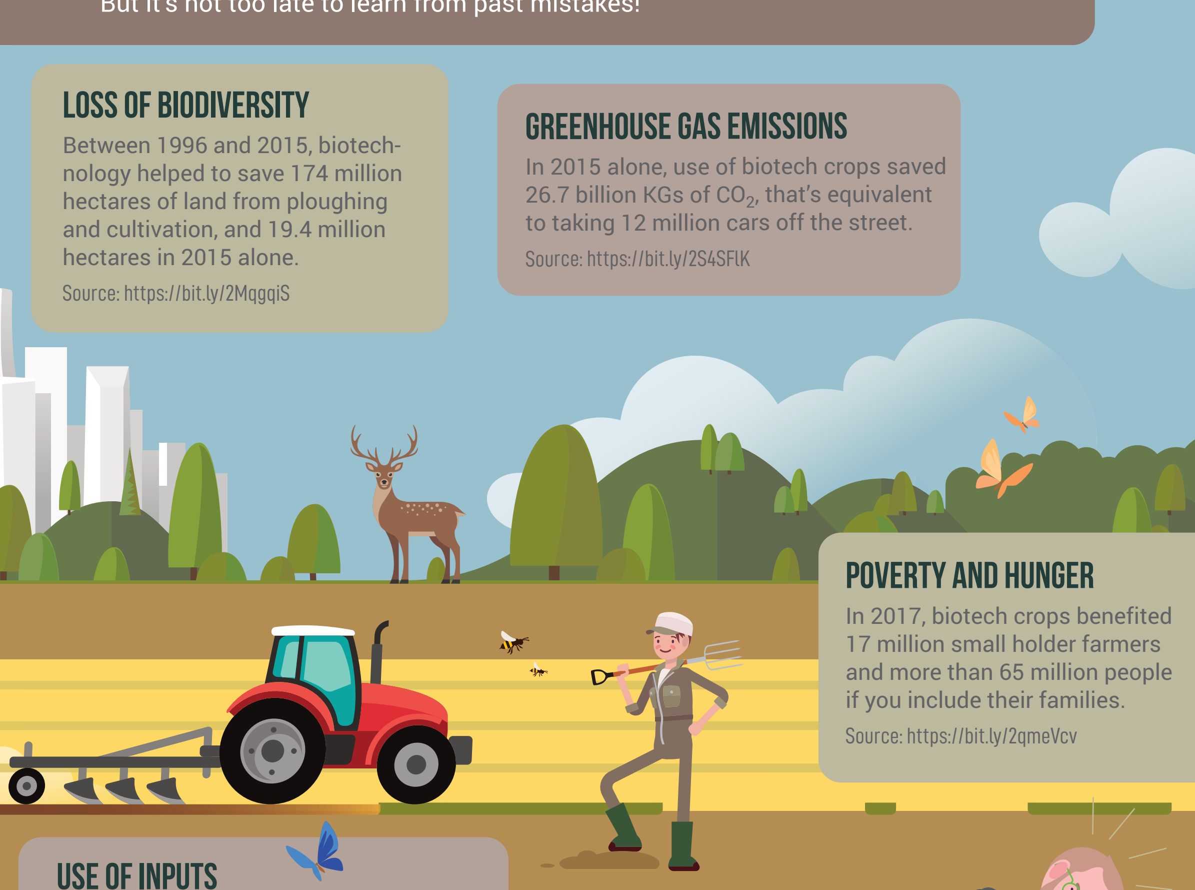
Between 1996 and 2015, biotechnology helped to save 174 million hectares of land from ploughing and cultivation, and 19.4 million hectares in 2015 alone.

Source: https://bit.ly/2MqgqiS

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

In 2015 alone, use of biotech crops saved 26.7 billion KGs of CO_2, that's equivalent to taking 12 million cars off the street.

Source: https://bit.ly/2S4SFlK



POVERTY AND HUNGER

In 2017, biotech crops benefited 17 million small holder farmers and more than 65 million people if you include their families.

Source: https://bit.ly/2qmeVcv

USE OF INPUTS

GM crops have been shown to reduce environmental impact from pesticide application and can help to reduce use of other inputs like water and fuel.

Source: https://bit.ly/2S4SFlK

WHY EFFICIENCY MATTERS

EFSA's scientific outputs are recognised globally, with over 99.9% of its 4.500 scientific opinions remaining uncontested. Nonetheless, in the field of GMOs, EFSA's comparatively inefficient risk assessment contributes to delays and creates uncertainty among the public and decision makers.

MOVING FORWARD: FOCUSING ON FACTS

FACT

There has **not been a single substantiated case of ill effect** from GM crops in over two decades of commercialization, in any part of the world.

Source: https://bit.ly/2RFiZDH

FACT

More than **280 scientific institutions** have confirmed the safety of GM crops.

Source: https://bit.ly/1KTwV1l

FACT

In fact, the EU itself has spent well over **€300 million** on over **50 complementary studies** on GMOs, consistently confirming the world-wide scientific consensus that all safety assessed **GM crops are at least as safe as conventionally bred crops**.

Source: https://bit.ly/1Ru09Xy

FACT

EU livestock farmers rely heavily on GM crop imports to meet their needs for quality feed.

Source: https://bit.ly/2CCujGt

PUTTING THE MISSION BACK ON TRACK

The EU and the global community would benefit from a more efficient risk assessment from EFSA

If other agencies in the EU and around the world can perform more efficiently, why can't EFSA?

Perhaps it is time for EFSA to learn from its peers, to enable agricultural innovation in the EU and to promote sustainability globally.

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