



Bern, January 2012

A New Vision for the TAFS Forum

Invitation to become a member

Where we came from

When the TAFS (TSE and food safety) forum was founded in 2002, the BSE crisis in Europe was at its height. The size of the epidemic, the novel characteristics of the disease, the uncertainty and panic amongst the general public, and the many scientific unknowns tested the system of crisis-management in animal health to its limits. The lack of functional inter-stakeholder communication-lines was identified as one of the factors compromising the effective management of the crisis. TAFS was established to provide a platform for open, trust-based communication between scientists, industry representatives, regulators and consumer organizations for the joint purpose of protecting the safety of food and finding a way out of the crisis.

Thanks to TAFS' meaningful contribution to resolving the BSE crisis, members decided in 2006 to broaden the remit and take up paratuberculosis and influenza as additional topics. At this point, TAFS was reinterpreted to stand for: 'Transmissible Animal Diseases and Food Safety'.

Where we are today

10 years after its establishment, the TAFS forum has 21 members in Europe, North America and Asia, of which eight are founding members. Besides being a well-established network of people with different interests in animal health and food safety, TAFS delivers tangible outputs such as position papers (assessments of known risks), risk management plans (feasible options for reducing such risks), radar screening (for emerging risks), and early response (rapid sharing and interpretation of news), often eliminating the need for member companies to have their own staff produce such output. The proprietary part of the TAFS website (www.tafsforum.org) gives members access to current news and other information on animal diseases and food safety, commented upon and explained by experts.

The scope of TAFS' activities has been broadened one more time and now entails all aspects of livestock rearing that are of relevance for food safety, public health, sustainability and food security. TAFS now stands for 'Trust in Animals and Food Safety'.

From its outset, TAFS has been fully financed through annual contributions of its affiliated corporations. TAFS' finances are sound, and the founding capital remains untouched.

Where we want to go

Encouraged by what we have achieved, we now see the possibility of taking the TAFS concept to an entirely new level.

To the best of our knowledge, no other organization brings together industry, science, consumers and regulators in the field of animal health and food safety to share knowledge, identify knowledge gaps, and – most importantly – jointly define possible solutions. Our approach has proved so successful over time that it can now be applied to the whole system of production of animal-based food. Instead of focusing on individual (zoonotic) animal diseases, we should look at ways that humans and animals can healthily co-exist, focusing on animals we keep for food; in doing so, we would automatically bring together the concepts of food safety, food security, animal welfare, sustainability, and the entire notion of 'One Health'.

It is our strong belief that meeting the increasing global demand for food in general and animal-based food in particular will not be possible unless production becomes much more efficient and losses as a result of diseases are minimized. At the same time, ways of enhancing productivity (eg, through recycling animal by-products as feed or the widespread use of antibiotics as a feed additive) have proved short-sighted and unsustainable and therefore need to be replaced by smarter approaches. As well, the perceived conflict between animal welfare and productivity must be resolved. Eg, high stocking densities may be regarded as a means of enhancing productivity, but they may also lead to increased problems in welfare and potentially high losses in case of disease outbreaks.

TAFS is the ideal platform for addressing complex problems as exemplified above. We need, however, to broaden our membership base to be able to deliver such output: we need to recruit suppliers of veterinary drugs and vaccines, feed producers, and representatives of the farming industry. Currently, most corporate members are closer to the consumer regarding their positioning on the food production value chain: they are food producers/manufacturers, retailers or restaurateurs.

As one step towards this goal, a Memorandum of Understanding between TAFS and the Global Food Safety Initiative is in preparation, to be signed later this year.

We shall continue to deliver the same type of end products as described under “Where we are today”, but on a larger remit. In particular, we will deliver – based on risk assessments that deliberately take known facts as well as uncertainties and ‘unknowns’ into account – risk management proposals that are scientifically sound, economically and operationally feasible, and acceptable from regulators’ and consumers’ point of view.

Endorsement and verification of such plans may be an additional future product of TAFS.

Funding

More activities and a broader scope require increased financial resources. So far, this increase has been achieved, with some success, by recruiting more companies and associations as additional members. To intensify this effort we are reducing the annual fee for new corporate members to 10'000 CHF from 2012 on, hoping to compensate the effect by the addition of many new members. To achieve a major increase in our budget, a different approach may be needed additionally. We are aiming for a funding model based on a capital stock that allows the financing of our activities from the interest generated, as is common practice for other foundations. As a first rough estimate, we are looking at a figure of 30-50 Mio Swiss Francs as capital stock if our entire future annual budget of 0.5-1.0 Mio Swiss Francs was to be financed from interest.

Corporate members will be offered the choice between annual fees of 10'000 CHF and a one-time down-payment of a major contribution (to be defined).

Are you interested in joining us?

The TAFS forum is seeking new members for each of our four stakeholder groups: corporate members, scientists, regulators, and consumer representatives. Membership at the TAFS forum brings many benefits, please see www.tafsforum.org/benefits-for-members.html for details. We expect every member to respect and support our goals and modus operandi and to make an active contribution to achieving these goals. Contributions may come either as financial support (mostly from our commercial members) or scientific support (mostly from our non-commercial members). If you are interested, please contact us.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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