



The General Food Law: Fitness Check

GFL at a glance

In 2002, EU food law was revamped following a series of food crisis in the late 1990s that shook consumers' trust in food, resulting in disruptions of trade and questioning the EU's ability to manage food risks. **The General Food Law (GFL) (Regulation (EC) No 178/2002) is the cornerstone of the EU regulatory framework since it covers the entire agri-food sector**, i.e. 'from farm to fork', and all stages of production, processing and distribution of food and feed.

It establishes:

- **Common definitions** (e.g. definition of 'food' and 'food/feed business operator'), **objectives**, and **general principles to underpin national and EU food law**:
 - > The most important general principle is the **risk analysis principle**: food law must be science-based.
 - > Other general principles include protection of consumers' interests, public consultation throughout the decision-making cycle, and the right of the

public to be informed where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a food or feed may present a risk to human or animal health.

- **General requirements** mainly addressed to food and feed business operators relating to own controls to check compliance with EU and national food law, food and feed safety, traceability and withdrawals/recalls of unsafe food and feed.
- The **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)** as an **independent body** entrusted with EU risk assessment.
- **The main tools and procedures for the prevention and management of food crises**, such as the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) – a network for the swift exchange of information relating to food and feed risks –, EU-wide or national emergency measures, as well as the establishment of a comprehensive plan for crisis management.

The Fitness Check: Launched in 2014, the Fitness Check assessed whether the GFL is '**fit for purpose**' for the **entire food/feed sector** and whether it still captures and reflects policy trends of today. It focuses on five evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value.

Main findings of the Fitness Check

- ✓ The GFL is **still relevant today** with respect to the current trends: growth and competitiveness and increased globalisation.
- ✓ Overall, **it has achieved its core objectives**, namely high protection of human health and consumers' interests

and the smooth functioning of the internal market.

- ✓ **No systemic failures** have been identified. Nevertheless, the GFL is less adequate to address new challenges like food sustainability in general, and more specifically, food waste.

Main improvements

-  **Better traceability** of food/feed in the entire agri-food chain.
-  **Clearer responsibilities of business operators** to place on the market safe food and feed and ensure compliance with requirements.
-  **Better transparency** of the EU decision-making cycle.
-  **The risk analysis principle has systematically been implemented** in the entire food chain. EFSA has delivered on increasing demands for scientific advice and strengthened the quality of the EU risk assessment.
-  **Information to consumers** as well as **nutrition aspects** better integrated in food law.
-  **The food and drink sector** not only maintained but strengthened its position as a **leading sector of the EU economy**.
-  Overall **safer food on the market** and **food crises better contained**.
-  It has contributed to the **international competitiveness** of the EU food and drink industry: it increased the EU industry's reputation for high quality products.
-  In the context of globalisation, the **Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF)** contributed to a rapid exchange of information for food and feed; 113 countries outside the EU and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) have access to RASFF notifications.



72%
increase
in value of
food & drink
sector in the
last decade.



**EU's external
trade grew by
6.3%**
since 2003

**Food consumed in the EU is now
LARGELY FREE OF RESIDUES**
or contains residues that fall
within the EU legal limits

Challenges ahead

- There are still differences in the implementation and enforcement of certain requirements of GFL at national level.
- Risk communication is not always effective enough and can have a negative impact on the acceptance of risk management decisions.
- Despite overall considerable progress, civil society sometimes perceives the risk assessment by EFSA as not fully transparent. EFSA has to base its risk assessment on industry studies in the area of authorisations but data and studies provided by the industry are not fully and always accessible to the public due to confidentiality and data protection rules.
- There are challenges on the capacity of EFSA to maintain its current level of expertise such as the decreasing number of experts from Member States applying for membership of EFSA Panels.

https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/general_food_law_en

<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/>

https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/rasff_en