December 2025

Affirming the importance of independent scientific expertise for and with society

By the Scientific Board of the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety - ANSES

The Scientific Board of ANSES affirms the importance of independent scientific expertise in the prevention, evaluation, and management of risks by public authorities. In environmental regulation, food safety, and public, occupational, animal and plant health, scientific advice is essential, but has become increasingly subject to public debate. These debates, whether about pesticides, GMOs, vaccines, or food additives, are not only about technical questions. Rather, they reflect deeper societal concerns about transparency, accountability, and the legitimacy of policymaking. They engage broad social choices, and therefore call for ways to better connect scientific expertise with public deliberations.

In this context, **expertise can only be robust if both independence in scientific judgment and openness to society's expectations are ensured**. Experts must be free from undue influence so that their assessments can be grounded on rigorous scientific evidence. Expertise also must address issues that are meaningful for society and cannot remain isolated from the concerns and experiences of citizens. This means adopting procedures that encourage public input, developing scientific assessments that incorporate attention to ethical, economic, and social consideration, and clarifying how evidence and uncertainties inform policymaking. Only by combining independent evidence-based analysis with responsiveness to public questions in a transparent way can expertise maintain both its credibility and its relevance in addressing today's complex challenges.

Meeting these expectations ultimately depends on the strength of the public institutions that support expertise. Such institutions must be robust, not only in upholding clear, transparent procedures that guarantee the integrity of assessments, but also in cultivating the capacity to identify emerging issues before they become public health crisis. This means organizing expertise in a way that integrates diverse disciplines, monitors early signals of risk, and addresses long term and systemic issues. Ultimately, expertise should not be merely reactive, issuing opinions under pressure, but proactive, setting agendas and taking part in public reflection over time.

ANSES demonstrates how such expertise can operate in practice. As France's national agency for health and safety in food, environment, and work environment, it assesses risks ranging from pesticide exposure and air pollution to food contaminants and occupational hazards. Acting independently, it informs policymaking, anticipates emerging threats, and ensures that assessments are transparent and interdisciplinary.

ANSES is a world leader in integrating socioeconomic and social science perspectives into risk assessment, while maintaining close engagement with stakeholders, civil society, and institutions. It has advanced systemic approaches such as One Health, which recognizes interdependence between human, animal, plant and environmental health, and the exposome**,** which accounts for the lifetime history of exposures that affect health.

All these initiatives make scientific expertise socially robust: they encompass not only the technical dimensions of risk but also their determinants, their implications for society, and the governance challenges they raise. As such, they offer resources to identify and address the deeper reasons for mistrust in scientific expertise.

The Scientific Board of ANSES stresses the importance of supporting institutions like ANSES around the world. Their work must be safeguarded from political or economic pressures through stable funding and protection from undue influence. At the same time, they need resources to ensure that dialogue with society informs the identification of relevant issues and enriches the production of knowledge in support of policymaking. These are conditions to identify meaningful topics for investigation, and help make sense of disagreements, including by acknowledging that some controversies engage social, economic and political choices and cannot be resolved by scientific evaluations alone.

ANSES shows the value of broadening scientific expertise to deliver robust, transparent, and trustworthy advice, illuminating the full implications of technical choices, anticipating crisis, and making science responsive to concerns and needs of society. **The proper functioning of such public institutions is essential for maintaining trust in democratic societies.**
