

Transversal Spotlight 'Sciensano 2025'¹
Transversal domain: Food
What are the (future) societal challenges in this scientific field to which Sciensano will be able to make a contribution?

A healthy diet is essential for a long and healthy life. However, there are many differences in lifestyle and socioeconomic factors that influence our diet. In addition, there is a changing context of globalisation, food hypes, climate and technological changes that bring new challenges for healthy eating and eating habits.

How will Sciensano's Scientific Directorates contribute? By setting which priorities?

Sciensano will be an independent partner for the government by supporting policy and control missions. It will do this by focusing on 2 important pillars, namely food safety and nutritional policy. Within the framework of food safety, Sciensano will continue to focus on microbiological and chemical food safety, where it will focus on emerging risks (EDC, mixture toxicity, nanomaterials, etc.) as well as ensuring continuity in existing tasks (such as AMR, food toxi-infections, NGOs, zoonoses, chemical contaminants and pesticides). In addition, health and consumption surveys will form the basis for extensive research into our nutritional and eating habits, linking food with (non-transmissible) diseases, risk/benefit of food, risk assessment using intake, biomonitoring and bioavailability studies.

What added value will this bring for our target groups? ²

Stakeholders will be able to make direct use of Sciensano's services for their tasks and very specifically the control tasks of the inspection services, as well as the support of the national reference laboratories. They will also be able to count on specific capacity in the event of possible health crises. In addition, they can use Sciensano's expertise to provide nutritional policy advice as risk advice in the context of food safety.

What crucial questions will be dealt with in these priorities?

In addition to the existing activities, the focus will also be on integrated and multidisciplinary research:

- Risk/benefit of food
- Risk assessments (cumulative exposure, bioavailability, bio-markers, etc.)
- Link between nutrition and (non-transmittable) diseases
- Epidemiological follow-up of the population (cohort, health survey, link nutrition-health, etc.)
- New and emerging risks (Chemical and microbiological risks, food fraud, nanomaterials, etc.)

Which current activities contribute to the question?

The current projects can be found in the attached Excel 'PMO tool Schijnwerpers'.

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Which strategy will be used to achieve this spotlight?

1/ Development of projects mentioned in Excel, as well as new projects to be started.

¹ This document is a working document of Sciensano, which is presented to our privileged partners for exchange

² Our target groups are: health professionals, policy, population

2/ Working with all internal experts in a more transversal manner and a more enhanced interaction with our stakeholders in order to be able to bring the research questions into focus and thus bring the advice and output more closely in line with their needs.

3/ Develop of new methodologies: analysis methods, new microbiological and toxicological tests, new techniques for risk assessment, consumption and epidemiological studies.

4/ Supplying scientific expertise to support the policy:

- Conduct analyses, risk assessments and provide scientific advice at the request of the policy or on its own initiative
- Strong reference laboratories and centres of excellence supported by an internal and external network, which collaborates with universities and other research centres in research projects to keep the expertise at the forefront.
- Rapid response to health crises and incidents

Summary³

A healthy diet is essential for a long and healthy life. Sciensano will contribute to this by focusing on both food safety and nutritional research, with a focus on an integrated and multidisciplinary approach in addition to existing activities.

³ Brief summary to open the discussion