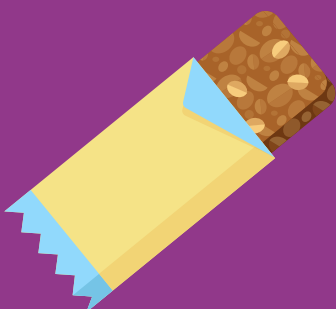
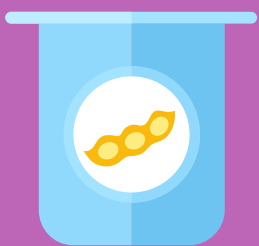
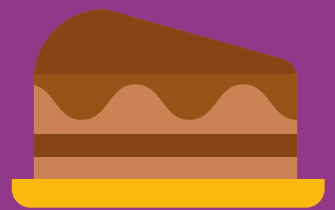




COMMUNICATION LAB

Communicating Emulsifiers Insights for Everyday Practice

AUGUST, 2026



EUFIC Communication Lab on Emulsifiers Report, August 2026

In May 2026, the European Food Information Council (EUFIC) held its Communication Lab #2 on emulsifiers. This closed, expert-led qualitative workshop aimed **to generate practical, applicable recommendations for all actors navigating the complex information landscape of food emulsifiers**:

- media professionals: journalists, editors, bloggers, influencers.
- as well as other communication actors: scientific institutions, learned societies, public authority, industry/sector associations or policymakers.

Unlike traditional panels, this session focused on co-creating actionable recommendations to **balance evolving scientific evidence with public health concerns**, avoiding as many potential stakeholder biases as possible, including deliberate science reductionism, media sensationalism or industry defensiveness.

The workshop built directly on insights from EUFIC's earlier [**Communication Lab #1 on Emulsifiers \(November 2025\)**](#), a webinar that combined consumer perception data with industrial and safety expertise. That initial event highlighted:

- deep public confusion around terms like “ultra-processed,”
- a trust gap regarding industry-funded safety data,
- and the difficulty journalists face in translating complex toxicology studies as well as epidemiological correlations into clear headlines.

For this second phase, EUFIC gathered a **select, multidisciplinary group of ten experts** from the EU Food Safety System (FSS). The cohort included EU representatives from academia, emulsifier manufacturers, user industries, independent research bodies, farmer advocates (AFRD), and science communicators.

Despite efforts to include them, no active journalists or patients attended. To address this gap and ensure the output remained grounded in real-world reception, the methodology integrated specific “persona cards” representing these missing voices, forcing the expert group to test their ideas against simulated media and patient realities.

The Communication Lab: a co-creation methodology

This workshop aimed to **bridge the gap between technical scientific data and responsible media reporting concerning food emulsifiers**. The co-creation process followed four distinct phases:

1 Collective reflection on prior learnings and new evidence

Participants began by reviewing **key findings from the November 2025 Communication Lab #1 on emulsifiers**, specifically:

- the persistent **consumer conflation of “processing” with “toxicity”**
- the **lack of trust in both industry and authorities’ sources** concerning toxicological information about emulsifiers
- the **relative lack of public knowledge about how scientific consensus is built** (including the “weight of evidence” process, the different types of health-related studies, etc.)
- and the **industrial challenges of reformulation** in case of emulsifier phase out.

These insights were immediately layered **with recent, high-profile scientific publications that had emerged since the last lab**. This included **new data** on:

- The **automatic classification of emulsifier-containing foods as NOVA 4**, and the policy risks this poses for “healthy” staple foods, like whole bread, plant-based substitutes and medical nutrition
- The distinction (and complementarity) between epidemiological correlations (often misinterpreted as causation) and proven biological mechanisms (via RCTs, toxicological exploratory models, etc.)
- Recent animal studies linking specific emulsifiers (e.g., CMC, Polysorbate 80, carrageenan) to **gut barrier dysfunction**
- Recent (limited) human Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) showing **potential benefits of emulsifiers reduction/avoidance for treating Crohn’s disease**



5 Prioritisation via consensus voting

The session concluded with a plenary synthesis where all obstacle/guideline pairs were reviewed for logical consistency.

Participants then used dot-voting to prioritise the pairs that they believed to be **the most efficient ones, in terms of potential target behavioral change** (i.e. improvement of communication practices, and in public understanding). This process filtered the extensive list down to a core set of high-impact recommendations **that address the most urgent gaps in current media coverage**, balancing the need for scientific accuracy with the realities of the modern news cycle.

Main communication barriers discussed

The discussions highlighted repeated, thematic challenges related to trust, scientific interpretation, accessibility and media reporting.

Informational trust gaps

Participants agreed that communication about emulsifiers takes place in a context of **widespread public scepticism towards both the food industry and scientific institutions**. This scepticism was viewed as extending beyond emulsifiers themselves, reflecting broader concerns around food processing, commercial interests and transparency in reporting. The group considered that **simply presenting additional scientific evidence is unlikely to rebuild trust unless accompanied by clear explanations of how evidence is generated, evaluated and translated into regulatory decisions**.

The workshop also recognised that **journalists often face difficulties identifying trusted or credible sources** within tight publication deadlines. Participants therefore highlighted the importance of **improving access to independent experts, transparent scientific resources and clearer explanations** of the food additive approval process.

NOVA-induced dilemmas and misconceptions

Participants identified the NOVA food classification system as a major source of public confusion. Although intended as a tool to categorise foods according to their degree of processing, NOVA was perceived as frequently being interpreted by consumers as a direct indicator of health risk.

Workshop discussions highlighted how this simplification may lead consumers to associate all foods classified as NOVA 4 with toxicity, regardless of nutritional quality, intended use or exposure levels. Examples discussed included wholegrain breads, plant-based alternatives and specialised medical nutrition products, where the presence of emulsifiers serves important or nutritional purposes.

Participants therefore emphasised **the need for communication that distinguishes between food processing, nutritional quality and food safety, while avoiding polarised messages that categorises foods as simply “good” or “bad”**.

Scientific literacy and the weight of evidence spectrum

One of the strongest areas of consensus concerned the need to communicate different types of scientific evidence more clearly. Participants noted **that media coverage frequently reports individual studies without adequately explaining their place within the wider body of evidence**.

Discussions focused particularly on the distinction between exploratory animal studies, epidemiological associations, mechanistic investigations and human clinical trials in specific population groups. Participants recognised that while each contributed valuable information, they answer different scientific questions and should therefore not be interpreted with the same level of certainty.

The workshop highlighted **that failure to communicate these distinctions can contribute to exaggerated headlines, misunderstanding among consumers and unrealistic expectations regarding emerging research findings**.

The communication challenges identified during the workshop were translated, finetuned then prioritised (through dot-voting) by participating experts into a series of **9 practical recommendations to communicate on emulsifiers studies and related dietary science**.

9 recommendations for those communicating about emulsifiers

1



Always communicate the weight of the new evidence

Clearly **identify the type of scientific evidence being discussed** and explain:

- what conclusions can be drawn from it.
- what conclusions cannot (and should not) be drawn from it.

Using existing, simple, standardised weight of evidence infographics and statements and concise explanations of different study models and designs could help “pre-bunk” extrapolations ([see the work from Young, 2026](#)) and improve consistency across media reporting.

Target audiences

Journalists, editors, science communicators.

2



Try and provide as much scientific context as possible

Whenever discussing potential health risks derived from the scientific knowledge created in specific studies on emulsifiers, as far as possible, given time constraints and the number of characters available, normalize explaining their **broader scientific context, including exposure levels and features, observed effects features, known biases of the experimental designs, statistical significance of results, etc.**

Target audiences

Journalists, science communicators.

3



Acknowledge converging evidence across different study designs

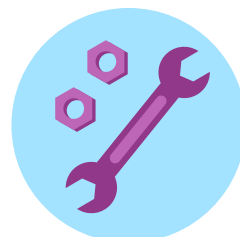
Acknowledge when evidence is progressively converging across different study types, models and experimental designs, while clearly communicating the results (statistical significance, severity of effects, etc.) **and limitations** (potential confounding variates, etc.)

Where evidence from multiple studies (RCT, animal models, cell models, epidemiology, etc.) points towards **potential harmful effects of specific emulsifiers (e.g., CMC, Polysorbate 80 and Carrageenan on gut health), communicate this progression transparently** while specifying the type of study, the experimental design (population, exposure levels, health contexts and variates, etc.).

Target audiences

Journalists, science communicators, public authorities, learned societies, industry/sector associations.

4



Commit to the building (or the maintaining) of trusted expert networks

Whenever possible, encourage **expert peer review of technical concepts, scientific terminology or study interpretation** and **facilitate collaboration between journalists and scientific experts before publication.**

Target audiences

Journalists, editors, media organisations, scientific institutions.

5



Play a role in improving access to reputable, reliable resources

Develop **shared, transparent, open resources** including **expert directories, myth-busting fact sheets, frequently asked questions, topical bibliographic databanks and trusted websites or trained AI agents** that can be consulted to verify data during the preparation of media stories. Make sure all resources clearly **cite their original sources.**

Target audiences

Media organisations, public authorities, regulators/policymakers, scientific institutions, learned societies, industry/sector associations.

6



Visually remind the EU regulatory process around emulsifiers

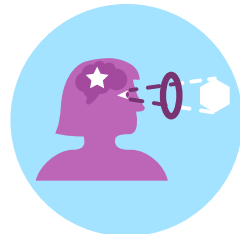
When communicating about the results of a scientific study on emulsifiers, **use visual analogies, illustrated metaphors and infographics** to:

- Describe the **variability in emulsifiers profiles, uses and functions.**
- Describe **where they usually come from and how they are produced (extraction, purification, chemical synthesis, etc.)** and how most emulsifiers have “chemical-sounding” names regardless of whether they originate from naturally occurring substances or not.
- Spend adequate time and effort reminding **how food additives are evaluated in the EU**, i.e. the amount and types of studies required for an authorisation file to be submitted, that risk assessments are regularly updated with up-to-date science and that all additives are re-evaluated every 10 years and so on.

Target audiences

Public authorities, science communicators, scientific institutions, learned societies.

7



Contextualize the NOVA classification and challenge the “naturalness” bias

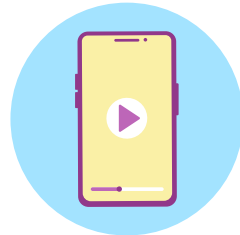
When discussing the results of a study based on the NOVA system:

- Explicitly **distinguish between the degree of processing (NOVA category) and both the nutritional and toxicological profiles of any food or ingredient**. Clarify that NOVA 4 is not a synonym for “unhealthy” or “unsafe.”
- Provide **concrete counter-examples to the “all NOVA 4 foods are bad” narrative**, specifically highlighting categories where **emulsifiers serve critical functions**: improving texture and preservation in wholegrain staple foods, enabling **plant-based meat/dairy alternatives** (reducing reliance on animal agriculture), ensuring the stability and palatability of **medical nutrition products** for vulnerable patients (e.g., Crohn’s, elderly, dysphagia), etc.
- Actively deconstruct the “naturalness” bias by **reminding that “natural” origin does not guarantee safety, nor does “chemical synthesis” or “industrial processing” imply toxicity**. When available, use evidence-based consensus to evaluate ingredients based on their specific safety and exposure features, not their perceived origin or processing degree.
- Avoid using **“harmful” as a shorthand for “ultra-processed”** without qualifying the statement with nutritional context and specific health outcomes.

Target audiences

Journalists, editors, science communicators, public authorities, consumer organizations, learned societies.

8



Always tailor your communication tools, content and tone to modern media environment

Develop **concise internal glossaries**, create insightful **infographics, illustrated graphs, visual analogies, interactive data visualisation tools** and other visual communication **resources that help journalists grasp and explain complex concepts or terminology** linked to emulsifiers science, without compromising scientific accuracy.

Target audiences

Science communicators, regulators/policymakers, industry/sector associations, media organisations.

9



Increase transparency across all stakeholders in the Food Safety System

Promote:

- **transparent declaration of interests (ideological/intellectual, financial, political, etc.)**
- public dialogue through **open Q&A platforms**,
- an editorial framework that **allows for expert input** while reducing perceptions of bias.
- clear **opportunities to respond to contested claims**

Target audiences

Industry/sector organisations, learned societies, scientific institutions, public authorities.

Conclusion

This Communication Lab #2 on emulsifiers provided a collaborative, cross-sectoral scene for generating practice-fit recommendations to support media professionals as well as other food science communication actors in navigating a complex, often polarised topic.

Participating experts brought forward insights informed by consumer concerns, industrial realities, regulatory knowledge and emerging gut health research. By grounding discussions in real-world constraints—from journalists’ deadline pressures to patients’ fears of medical product shortages—the workshop shed light on how tailored communication can bridge the gap between evolving scientific evidence and public perception.

The end result is a **set of 9 actionable recommendations** designed not only to improve the accuracy of media reporting on emulsifiers but also to empower communicators to deliver science-based, context-sensitive, and transparent messages that rebuild trust in the EU food safety system.

About EUFIC

The European Food Information Council (EUFIC) is an independent, consumer-oriented non-profit organisation that makes the science behind food, nutrition and health more accessible and easy to understand. We create evidence-based resources for everyone in Europe, helping people make informed decisions about their diets and lifestyles.

Our governance structure ensures independence from funding sources, upholding trust in our mission to provide accurate, impartial, science-based information. We work with a diversity of stakeholders to encourage dialogue and develop effective solutions for the benefit of people. Our content is developed through a structured, multi-step process designed to ensure accuracy, scientific integrity, and alignment with audience interests and needs.

Learn more about who we are and how we work [here](#).

Do you have questions or want us to illustrate these recommendations through examples?

Contact us!

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