EUROPE FOOD SAFETY AWARD

MADRID SPAIN
IAFP'S EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON FOOD SAFETY
6-8 MAY 2025

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS

MARCEL ZWIETERING
Wageningen, The Netherlands

Dr. Marcel Zwietering is the recipient of the 2025 Europe Food Safety Award. This award recognizes an active IAFP Member from Europe for dedicated and exceptional contributions to the profession of food safety in Europe.

Dr. Zwietering is a professor of Food Microbiology at Wageningen University, The Netherlands, with focuses on research and education in the domain of food safety management; risk analysis; fermentation; detection and hygiene; eco-physiology; and functional genomics. He teaches basic food microbiology B.Sc. courses along with advanced M.Sc. and Ph.D. courses. Additionally, he and the university's Toxicology Chair helped develop a Food Safety MOOC that has received a large international audience.

After completing his Ph.D. thesis on "Modeling of the Microbial Quality of Food" in 1993, Dr. Zwietering continued in the Food Process Engineering group as assistant and associate professor. His research focused on quantitative microbiology and risk assessment. In 1995, he joined the Unilever research lab in Colworth House, UK, during his sabbatical. From 1998–2002, he worked in the research lab of Danone in France, where he studied starter cultures, symbiosis, metabolic flux analysis, and quantitative risk assessment.

Dr. Zwietering joined IAFP in 2009 and is a member of the *Journal of Food Protection* Editorial Board. He received both the Elmer Marth Educator Award and the International Leadership Award in 2019 and the Frozen Food Foundation Freezing Research Award in 2024.

Dr. Zwietering is Co-Chair of the ILSI – Europe Microbiological Food Safety Task Force, and is regularly invited to participate in international expert consultations with FAO/WHO and other expert groups. He serves as Chair of the International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods. As a member, he contributed to various sampling plan workshops worldwide and to a series of YouTube knowledge clips.

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MAHA ROCKAYA
University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

Maha Rockaya is a Syrian junior researcher at the University of Debrecen in Debrecen, Hungary. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in Food Science, where her research focuses on predictive microbiology and data analysis, specifically in the context of the plant-based milk bio-composition and its influence on microbial growth.

Ms. Rockaya is also interested in categorizing sources of error within the field of predictive microbiology. In a recently published paper, she introduced the terms *"dry"* vs. *"wet"* sources of error to better classify these uncertainties.

Ms. Rockaya holds a B.Sc. in Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Chemistry from Tishreen University. Witnessing food insecurity during the Syrian conflict – particularly the shortage of infant formula and families resorting to unsafe alternatives – shaped her passion for food safety and security, leading her to pursue her M.Sc. in Food Control at the university. Upon completion, Ms. Rockaya received a Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship to pursue her Ph.D. at the Nutrition Institute at the University of Debrecen as a visiting researcher, working with the computational nutrition research team on building a human milk database called MilkyBase.

With her background in pharmacy, coupled with a passion for food science and mathematics, Ms. Rockaya brings a unique interdisciplinary perspective to her work. She aims to link between academia and industry, fostering collaboration between the scientists (*wet* science) and experts in quantitative field (*dry* science).

LEONARDOS STATHAS
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece

Leonardos Stathas is a Ph.D. candidate in Risk Assessment and Food Safety Management at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Thessaloniki, Greece, where he also obtained his M.Sc. in Food Science and Nutrition and an Integrated Masters in Food Science and Technology. His research focuses on microbial risk assessment, predictive microbiology, and data analysis using R and Python.

Mr. Stathas has been actively involved in European research initiatives, including DiTECT and AMBROSIA Projects (Horizon Europe), contributing to the digital transformation of food safety systems and the impact of climate change on food safety. His largest project involvement was with foodigIT (EU ERA Chair project, HORIZON – WIDERA), which aims to revolutionize food risk management through cutting-edge computational tools, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics. This project was under the guidance of József Baranyi, arguably the most influential scientist in the field as ERA Chair.

Mr. Stathas' research contributions span multiple peer-reviewed publications, including quantitative microbial risk assessments for *Salmonella* and *E. coli*, as well as stochastic modeling of microbial behavior. He has presented his findings at major international conferences including EFFoST, ICPMF, and at **IAFP's European Symposium on Food Safety.** His industry experience includes working as a Quality Assistant at the Greek food industry, where he was responsible for HACCP implementation, quality assurance, and R&D.

An active Student Member of IAFP and a member of the MikroBioKosmos scientific communities, Mr. Stathas is a certified reviewer for *Trends in Food Science & Technology* and for *Food Research International* science journals. His work underscores a strong commitment to advancing food safety through data-driven risk assessment and innovative methodologies.