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In memoriam: Kostas Koutsoumanis



One year has passed since the field of Food Microbiology lost one of its most influential leaders, Professor Konstantinos “Kostas” Koutsoumanis. His sudden death on Feb. 25, 2025, left all who knew him grappling with a profound sense of loss. We had hoped that time might soften the impact of his absence, allowing us to find the right words to honor his legacy. It has not. Instead, we endeavor to fulfill a more modest aim: to remember his exceptional life. Together, we have advanced Food Microbiology, pushing boundaries through creativity and courageous thought, teaching young scientists, and fostering rising stars—just as Kostas himself once was.

Kostas' remarkable career was fully dedicated to advancing our understanding of microbial behavior in food systems and translating this knowledge into practical food safety policies. He graduated from the Agricultural University of Athens in 1997, earned his PhD in Food Science in 2000, and continued his research at Colorado State University. At the age of 29, he was appointed Lecturer at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where he would go on to become Head of the Laboratory of Food Microbiology and Hygiene, and later Head of the Department of Food Science and Technology. He also served for many years on the Editorial Board of the International Journal for Food Safety.

He was a visionary and pioneering force in moving from data to decisions in Predictive Microbiology, integrating AI-assisted Risk

Negotiation in Microbial Risk Analysis, and embracing real-world microbial heterogeneity through Single Cell Microbiology. His work was characterized by intellectual rigor, clarity of purpose, and sustained commitment to scientific excellence. These qualities earned him the highest international recognition and the trust of regulators, industry, and peers worldwide, establishing him as a central figure in Food Microbiology.

Kostas has been a vigorous champion of Europe's food safety system while serving as an EFSA expert for 18 years. His pivotal role as Chair of the BIOHAZ Panel (2018–2024) and Vice Chair of the Scientific Committee (since 2024) has left a profound and lasting impact in shaping scientific opinions and cross-cutting risk assessment methodologies that contributed to enhancing European public health. With his strong support to the EFSA fellowship program, he supported the development of young food safety experts and the spread of a common European risk assessment culture. He was further contributing to raising food safety standards globally as expert list member of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA).

While Kostas' contributions to research, scientific discourse and policy have left an indelible mark, he was also an exceptional lecturer and mentor. Kostas was known for his boundless generosity in sharing knowledge, his unwavering support for young researchers, and his ability to inspire those around him. He held a deep conviction that sharing knowledge lies at the heart of scientific and societal progress and is not only a moral responsibility but a source of profound joy. He would not hide behind standard lectures but instead fostered a true meeting of bright minds - standing before a lecture hall, armed with only a piece of paper, discussing with his students the uncertainty of it falling to the ground - often weaving in reflections from Greek philosophers he admired. Kostas opened his lab to countless young scientists and visiting researchers, nurturing outstanding talent while humbly insisting many of them were “so much more brilliant than me, I simply cannot keep up.” Many of the students and scientists he trained now contribute to academia, government, and industry worldwide, often recalling how profoundly he shaped their careers and touched their lives.

Kostas was a unifying force for positive change, a revolutionary at heart whose keen mind burned with transformative ideas. He eagerly embraced new concepts and technologies, diving headfirst into them and marveling at their potential. Yet his boldness was matched by a gentle spirit and a generosity that welcomed others in and thrived in collaborations.

With astonishing ease and humility, he managed to create a space not only for scientific discourse, but for a meeting of the minds. His joie-de-vivre and his enthusiasm not only for Food Microbiology, but also for fine food, art, and literature was contagious and his quick wit and dry

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sense of humor made him delightful company. We will remember not only the brilliant expert, but the warm-hearted friend full of love for life and his family.

Kostas lives on in the young minds he trained and the colleagues he inspired. His example has set enduring standards – for unwavering ethos and integrity, critical assessment of ideas, for teaching and fostering talent, for inclusivity and embracing collaborations, for rethinking and overthrowing paradigms, and for translating science into something applicable and useful in real life. His legacy will remain an integral part

of the foundations that protect the safety of the global food supply.

Sophia Johler – IJFM Editor-in-Chief, colleague and friend, on behalf of the IJFM Editorial Board.

George-John Nychas – Agricultural University of Athens, scientific father and mentor.

Andreja Rajkovic – ICFMH President, colleague and friend, on behalf of the ICFMH board.

Pietro Stella – EFSA, colleague and friend, on behalf of EFSA staff and expert community.