

**Comprehensive Review of
The Office of Risk Assessment
and Cost-Benefit Analysis**

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Prepared by:

Society for Risk Analysis' Appointed Review Panel

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of the Office of Risk Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis

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Preface

In response to the May 6, 1998, request for proposal from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Society for Risk Analysis (SRA) submitted a proposal to conduct the three-year review of the USDA Office of Risk Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis (ORACBA). The scope of work was to conduct a review of the operation and activities of ORACBA since its inception and deliver a written report providing (1) a review of what ORACBA has accomplished since its inception; (2) an analysis of what ORACBA has done well; (3) an analysis of what ORACBA should improve and how to improve it; and (4) a discussion of any other information, conclusions, or suggested strategies to address pertinent issues. SRA's proposal was accepted by USDA and subsequently, a committee was appointed from the SRA membership to represent a broad array of backgrounds and special expertise in the technology of risk assessment and in the formulation and appreciation of policy in this field. On February 22, 1999, the Committee received clarification of its charter from ORACBA's director, Alwynelle Ahl.

In carrying out its charge, the Committee reviewed detailed materials provided by ORACBA. These materials included descriptions of its prior operations, limited information concerning risk assessments performed by USDA agencies, and relevant literature. The Committee also reviewed analogous models for risk assessment operations derived from other agencies.

In its review, the Committee specifically sought to understand the particular risk assessment challenges facing USDA and ORACBA. The Committee's deliberations automatically fell into three categories: policies and responsibilities; technical responsibilities; and resources, funding, and staffing. Ultimately, the Committee determined that a five-year strategic plan is needed to provide a course of action to ensure that the risk assessment process within USDA continues to grow. The recommended strategic plan is meant to guide ORACBA in defining its operations so that the Office can ensure the scientific competence of USDA's risk assessment programs. To assist ORACBA in drafting its strategic plan, the Committee developed a set of questions that must be answered before a strategic plan can be written. Further, the Committee formulated specific recommendations that provide solid guidance to ensure that the future operations of ORACBA fulfill its congressional mandate.

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