Specific Support Action

SELAMAT

European food safety goes global

Within the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6), the EU is putting consumers at the heart of the science of food production. The 'fork-to-farm' philosophy underlines the fact that the quality and safety of food for those who eat it is a major priority for the industry. European research is focused on making food as safe and clean as possible. However, these high standards may not be easy to meet in other parts of the world. There is a fear that food safety will become a trade barrier, preventing imports from countries which cannot offer absolute assurance that their produce is organic, not genetically modified, or is dioxin-free, for example. Asia is one of Europe's largest trade partners. There are moves afoot in Asia now to mirror the exacting standards of food quality to meet the demands of the European market. A Specific Support Action under FP6 is helping the process by creating a network for sharing food safety expertise between Europe and Asia.

Safety in Malay

The four-year project is called SELAMAT, a Malay word for safety. It was conceived by the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) partners, following a workshop in Malaysia on food safety in 2002. SELAMAT is bringing together scientists and regulators in Europe and Asia in a network to share methodology and policy developments related to food quality. It should lead to scientific partnerships involving Asian food industries in a concerted effort towards the assured, safer and more sustainable production systems that Europe is aiming to achieve.

The initial network comprises a small group of partners: three European food research institutes and a Chinese research institute specialising in pesticides. During the SELAMAT project, partners will introduce other organisations, so that up to 60 could be involved after four years, including core members of relevant large FP6 projects. The idea is that the progress made during FP6 is communicated to network members' counterparts in Asia so that they can incorporate the knowledge into their local industries.

Oriental assurance

The network has identified three research topics linked to ensuring liberal trade: the impact of food on health, the traceability of food along the whole food chain, and methods of detecting contaminants. If food products can be tested, certified and traced using common methods in both Europe and Asia, then European consumers and regulators will have very few problems with Asian food. A series of annual workshops will address each of the above-mentioned areas in turn. A final workshop, in year four, will consider the agenda for joint Asia-Europe research on food safety. At each three-day workshop, the participants will identify subjects for a training course to be held later in the same year.

Shared concerns

The project will set up a website and design a database for exchange of analytical methods between network partners, for example. How to test food for the presence of genetically modified components might be included in this. The team will also produce leaflets on new findings under FP6, to be distributed at conferences in Europe and Asia.

SELAMAT is the start of a global co-operation on food safety that is necessary for the success of international trade in an age when food production is becoming increasingly technological, and the health and safety of eating is a major item on the political agenda.

Full title: Safety enhancement of edible products, legislation, analysis and management with ASEM countries, by mutual training and research

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- Institute of Experimental and Technological Biology (Portugal)
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SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

Food Quality and Safety - Call FP6-2002-Food-1