



COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Challenges and strategies for the Better Training for Safer Food programme



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Executive summary

BETTER TRAINING FOR SAFER FOOD (BTSF) started in 2006 with the aim of training Member State and third country official staff involved in verifying compliance with EU food and feed law, animal health and welfare rules and plant health rules. Particular attention has been paid to developing country participants.

From its launch until 2009, approximately 13,500 participants have attended BTSF courses and seminars involving more than 120 countries.

BTSF is an initiative which is highly appreciated by all participants and competent authorities. However, after its pilot phase and following the results of an intermediate assessment launched during 2008, the time has come to think about how to better develop its potential in order to overcome some of the growing challenges.

These challenges mainly concern increasing demand for high quality training, a demand-driven approach, clearer identification of priorities and target audience and improved dissemination and evaluation.

This document focuses on each of these challenges and attempts to identify possible actions, in both the short-medium and long term, which could enable the initiative to respond to the identified challenges.

An ex-post evaluation will be carried out in 2011 that will embrace the entire period of the programme. It will form the basis of any future decision on the development of the programme.

Short-medium term (i.e. until 2013)

This section identifies those strategies that could be put into practice by end-2013 at latest, without any increase to either the budget available or the current staff. These can be summarised as follows:

- to launch a study aimed at obtaining an accurate estimation of the size of the demand for training under BTSF;
- to launch an e-learning pilot project study with the aim of setting up an e-learning tool for more basic-level training, to be implemented in the long term and able to reach a larger audience;
- to increase training output through closer cooperation of the Commission Services with Member State and third country authorities as well as international organisations and the private sector including the possible development of co-financed training in the long term;

- to improve identification of training priorities and the target audience through the preparation of a standard questionnaire to ascertain training needs and deeper cooperation with national authorities and all relevant stakeholders;
- to improve the level of homogeneity among participants through:
 - more accurate definition of the training goals and principal target audience;
 - the development of basic and advanced level courses across the full spectrum of subjects (in the long term);
 - more provision of interpretation;
 - maintaining the principle of regional-level training, particularly in third countries;
- to reinforce the train-the-trainers approach in the selection process;
- to launch a study on “best practice in training” to allow for an in-depth investigation of the ways to improve the quality of the training;
- to improve the dissemination through the provision of clear learning tools and documentation to all participants, verifying the possibilities offered by the e-learning platforms and improving coordination with all stakeholders for setting up dissemination plans;
- to carry out a general assessment of BTSF every two years.

Long term (from 2014 onwards)

All of the actions identified for launch in the short-medium term, but which cannot be completed within that timeframe, may have to be finalised in the long term. Further actions may be both initiated and concluded during this period. These can be summarised as follows:

- to implement the e-learning tool for basic-level training;
- to implement basic and advanced level courses;
- to develop co-financed training;
- to organise international expert meetings to further reflect on the prioritisation of needs;
- to establish a summer school to increase the availability of highly qualified tutors;
- to verify the possibility of creating a BTSF Post-Graduate Training Centre for normal participants;
- to organise an exchange programme of officials/trainers among national competent authorities in order to increase the number of potential tutors and to enable participants to exchange knowledge and experience;
- to improve the knowledge-sharing principle through an alumni network;
- to set up a network and database of tutors who could be called upon to carry out training activities;
- to obtain a formal commitment from Member States for dissemination as well as the development of dissemination plans by all countries and stakeholders;
- to verify instruments and sources facilitating quantification of the impact of training.

Introductions

1. Introduction

Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) trains Member State and third country official staff involved in verifying compliance with EU food and feed law, animal health and welfare rules and plant health rules. Particular attention is given to developing country participants.

Training programmes run on a range of subjects related to these fields. Some take place in Europe for participants from EU and associated countries as well as invited third countries. Others run in third countries specifically for developing country participants.

The training aims to make controls more efficient and harmonised and ensure that the food industry respects EU regulations safeguarding public, animal and plant health. This will contribute to providing safer food and feed and raising levels of consumer and animal protection.

Harmonised control systems provide economic benefits by creating a level playing field for food businesses and encouraging cross-border trade. Training for third countries helps them to access the EU and global markets for their products.

BTSF is also one of the various Commission programmes for training control staff in developing countries on issues related to EU food safety legislation, and complements wider cooperation programmes in the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) field. It protects the EU borders by helping to ensure that imports covered by SPS rules are safe. Many developing countries export agro-food products to the EU but they need to increase their technical capacity to ensure that their products comply with EU requirements. Appropriate training helps such countries to better understand EU rules. This improves regulatory cooperation which in turn may help create a better environment for actions improving private sector productive capacity and the quality infrastructure needed for certifying compliance of products and processes with standards. Over time, it is expected to bring about related benefits such as higher local food safety standards.

BTSF started in 2006 and it has been a successful initiative. After 4 years of pilot phase it is time now to think about how to better develop its potential in order to overcome the growing challenges with which it is confronted. These challenges mainly concern increasing demand for high quality training, a demand-driven approach, clearer identification of priorities and target audience and improved dissemination and evaluation.

This document will focus on each of these challenges and attempt to pinpoint ideas and methods, including the use of additional tools and new technology, which could enable the initiative to respond to the demands placed upon it.

1.1. Legal basis

Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law and animal health and welfare rules¹ was adopted in April 2004 and came into force in January 2006. Article 51 empowers the Commission to organise training for Member State staff verifying compliance with food and feed law, animal health, welfare and plant health rules and third, particularly developing country participants.

Article 66 (1) (b) of that same Regulation provides that the appropriations required for the training of control staff shall be authorised each year in the framework of the budgetary procedure.

The legal basis for training on plant health rules is Article 2(1)(i) of Council Directive 2000/29/EC on protective measures against the introduction into the EU of organisms harmful to plants or plant products and against their spread within the EU². This empowers the Commission to draw up EU programmes for further training of officials in an effort to increase the knowledge and experience they have acquired in the national context to a level necessary for the proper application of the Directive. The Commission is also empowered to contribute to the financing of such training from the EU budget.

Article 15(2)(b)(i) of Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation³ provides for a thematic programme on food security, which has been the basis for financing the "BTSF Africa" programme.

¹ OJ L 165, 30.4.2004 corrected by L 191, 28.5.2004.

² OJ L 169, 10.7.2000, p. 1

³ OJ L378, 27.12.2006, p. 41

Background and brief history

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Concrete training activities began in 2006. Training has since been organised through the periodical launch of public procurement processes aimed at concluding contracts for the implementation of training programmes. External contractors are responsible for the selection of participants, tutors, training locations and dates all of which are subject to Commission approval.

Communication COM (2006) 519 of September 2006 gave an overview of the evolution of the training activity in the short, medium and long term and analysed organisational and management options. It identified a medium-long term steady state of 6,000 participants and a budget of € 15million annually, to be reached around 2011-2012.

2.1. Training 2006 to present

In 2006 seven training programmes ran, attended by around 1,400 participants. This increased to twelve programmes for 3,000 participants in 2007. Fourteen programmes were launched in 2008 for over 4,000 participants.

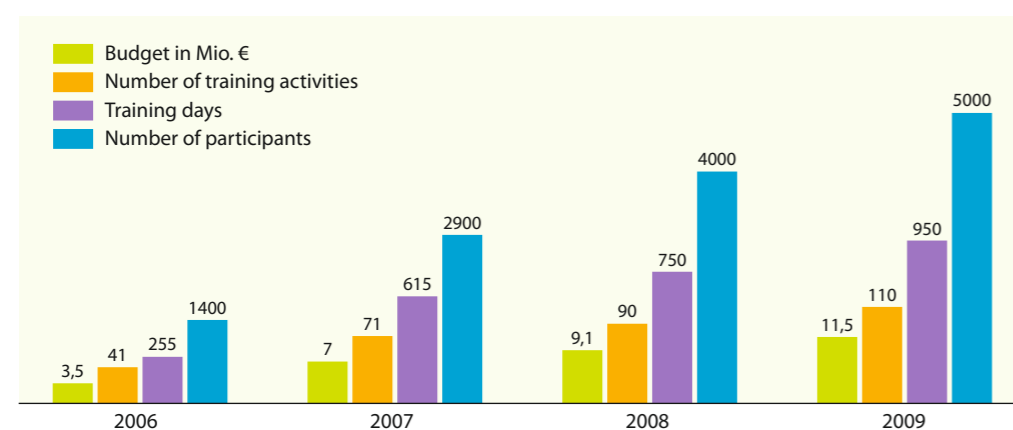
Fifteen programmes (some with multiple modules) were launched during 2009 most of which also cover 2010. They trained around 5,000 people for a budget of € 11.5 million.

Until now, roughly 2/3 of the training activities have taken place in EU and 1/3 in third countries. This does not include activities carried out under BTSF Africa, which are further detailed in the next chapter.

The average training cost per participant per day is approximately € 585 which includes all expenditures such as travel, accommodation, tutors, etc.

In the diagram and table below, more details are given on the global evolution of the programme (except its African component) since 2006 in terms of budget, number and types of training activities, number of training days and of participants.

Evolution of certain variables BTSF 2006 – 2009



Training programmes 2006/2009

			2009
		2008	EU based programmes
	EU based programmes	HACCP	
	2007	HACCP	Animal welfare
	EU based programmes	Animal by-products	BIPs Airport
	HACCP	Animal welfare	BIPs seaport/road/rail
	Animal by-products	BIPs Airport	Zoonoses/Microbiological criteria
	Animal welfare	BIPs seaport/road/rail	Food hygiene and Control
2006	BIPs Airport	Zoonoses/Microbiological criteria	Plant Protection Products
EU based programmes	BIPs seaport	Food hygiene and Control	Plant health Control
HACCP	Zoonoses	Plant Protection Products	Feed law
Animal by-products	Food contact materials	Plant health Control	Control on food of non animal origin
Animal welfare	Plant Protection Products	TSEs	Third country programmes
BIPs Airport	Third country programmes	Third country programmes	EU food imports standards
BIPs seaport	EU food imports standards	EU food imports standards	Avian Influenza
Third country programmes	Avian Influenza	Avian Influenza	RASFF and IT systems (TRACES)
EU food imports standards	RASFF and IT systems (TRACES)	RASFF and IT systems (TRACES)	Food testing
Avian Influenza	Food testing	Food testing	GMO

2.2. Better Training for Safer Food in Africa

The Lisbon Summit of December 2007 adopted a Joint EU–Africa Strategy requiring implementation of mechanisms to develop capacity in the areas of norms, standards and quality control at regional and pan-African level with reference to international SPS standards. A key action concerns training to strengthen SPS capacity of African countries.

In this context, Better Training for Safer Food in Africa (BTSF Africa) was launched, with a budget of € 10 million for three years financed under the Food Security Thematic Programme of the Development Cooperation Instrument. The programme is managed by the Commission in close consultation with the African Union Commission, and with involvement of Regional Economic Communities and specialised bodies within Africa.

BTSF Africa is aimed at strengthening national, regional and pan-African SPS capacity of competent authorities in areas such as control, surveillance, legislation, management and inspection. Activities within the programme began in 2009 and run throughout 2009-10. BTSF Africa focuses on international standards and good agricultural and manufacturing practices in relation to food safety, animal health, animal welfare and plant health.

Central, regional and local-level authorities responsible for food safety and SPS controls are involved. Other stakeholders are national agencies, academic and technical institutions, reference laboratories and producer, exporter and certification organisations.

Of the BTSF Africa's seven activities (see below), four are implemented by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and three by external contractors. In 2009, a total of 38 events were organised in this framework. They trained more than 1,100 participants with a budget of € 3.5 million.

The BTSF Africa work during 2009 was primarily focussed on launching the programme, mobilising support and implementing the first series of activities. For 2010, around 60 events are expected to be organised, which should gather almost 3,000 people for a budget of € 6.5 million.

BTSF Africa activities

OIE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the performance of veterinary services, with follow-up gap analysis of needs and priorities, accompaniment measures 2. Improve the national and/or regional legal framework in relation to animal health and food safety 3. Strengthen laboratory capacities (technicians) via twinning 4. Strengthen the capacity of all Chief Veterinary Officers and National Focal Points in relation to international sanitary standards
Other	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Specific "Train the trainers" regional workshops 6. Strengthen the capacity of SMEs via targeted and sustained missions and ad hoc assistance, to address the deficiencies identified by the EC's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) 7. Specific intensive trainings for the officials of the AU Commission, Regional Economic Communities and associated specialised bodies

BTSF Africa complements wider cooperation programmes in the SPS field in Africa at various levels (continental, regional and national) which are run under the European Development Fund (EDF). These programmes address important constraints lying with the regulatory frameworks, institutional set-up as well as the private sector capacity to comply with standards. Concerning the continent wide programmes, examples are the Pesticide Initiative Programme and its – just launched – second phase, as well as activities of the 9th EDF SPS programme recently started up, which finances ad hoc assistance missions to private sector. Other support, notably to Africa Veterinary Governance, is in a final stage of preparation.

2.3. Organisation

Each Member State, candidate and associated country has a designated national contact point (NCP). These NCPs make up the Member State Expert Group on BTSF. The training sector meets regularly with the Expert Group to coordinate activities with national authorities and define principal training needs. NCPs channel information related to BTSF between the Commission, the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers and the external contractors and national authorities.

NCPs have also been established in third countries, who work in close collaboration with EU Delegations and Commission services in identifying training needs and implementation of BTSF training in third countries.

2.4. Transfer to Executive Agency for Health and Consumers

In June 2007, a cost-benefit analysis was launched to assess the benefits of extending the mandate of the Public Health Executive Agency to include training activities and Consumer Policy Programmes. The analysis supported outsourcing administrative and financial tasks that could be managed more efficiently by the Executive Agency without undermining the Commission's policy role.

Following Commission Decision 2008/544/EC, PHEA became the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) and management of BTSF programme was outsourced to the Agency from January 2009.

Competences were transferred gradually during 2009 with the Commission keeping its guidance role in terms of policy and technical expertise. EAHC has taken over monitoring of contracts beginning in 2009 and preparation and launch of new calls for tender and the subsequent award of contracts. Three officials work full time within EAHC on BTSF matters.

Intermediate assessment

3

An intermediate assessment of the first two years of BTSF was launched in 2008. It had three main aims: to assess the impact of the training in terms of improvements to participants' work, to learn more about the implementation of training and its strengths and weaknesses and to obtain recommendations for future training. The assessment was carried out by external consultants through questionnaires, interviews and missions and involved around 3,000 people. The training was highly rated in terms of content, delivery, format, tutor performance, implementation and organisation. Challenges were identified and they are discussed in the next paragraph.

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Future challenges

The initiative has expanded each year in terms of participation levels and the scope of subjects on which training is offered. In addition, the encouraging feedback garnered from the results of the intermediate assessment is proof of both the level of appreciation of the training on the part of participants and of the continued high demand for EU-level training in the areas covered by BTSF.

The transfer of competences to EAHC marks the end of the pilot phase of the initiative which has been characterised by ad-hoc development of training, always following consultation with relevant Commission services and Member States. This transfer represents the first element in the construction of an organisational structure capable of responding to high levels of demand and providing high-quality training in the medium-long term. The coordination between EAHC and the Commission is now developing and in the process of being fine tuned.

The recommendations for the future arising from the intermediate assessment present a number of challenges to which the future training strategy must respond.

The main goals identified can be summarised as follows:

1. a level of training provision capable of responding to the huge and increasing demand;
2. clearer identification of training priorities and the target audience;
3. improvements in the quality of the training, particularly through focusing on advanced-level courses with a strong practical element;
4. increased dissemination and more effective implementation of the "train the trainers" approach;
5. establishment of a standard evaluation procedure both in terms of quality and impact of the training;
6. improvements to some organisational and procedural aspects such as the planning of training activities and provision of more interpretation.

The following paragraphs suggest some ideas for solutions which could enable the achievement of these goals. The strategy should focus on setting targets on the short-medium term (up to and including 2013 at latest) and on the long term (2014 afterwards).

Short-medium term strategic plan

5

This section aims to identify those strategies that could be put into practice by end-2013 at latest without any increase to either the budget available or the current staff⁴.

However, it should be also clarified that the current activity level is still below the steady state level foreseen in Communication COM (2006) 519 (6,000 participants with a annual budget of € 15 million to be reached by 2011/2012).

Where the volume of training activities under BTSF is expected to increase, it is not yet possible to provide an accurate estimate of the size of this demand⁵. A study should therefore be launched in the short term in order to obtain more precise information.

In the meantime effort should be made to improve certain aspects of BTSF.

5.1. Increased supply of training activities

5.1.1. E-learning

The development of an e-learning tool has been under consideration for some time as a means to reach a larger audience. Possible formats to be used for the delivery of e-learning are under consideration. An e-learning pilot project has now been launched to help to identify the most suitable model for the needs of BTSF. This should be adaptable to the specific needs of different training programmes. Experience gained with the World Bank is to be used.

The initial idea is to create an e-learning tool for more basic-level training and which could serve as a starting point for practical training. Firstly, offering basic level training through e-learning would increase outreach and the number of participants (as compared with current levels) both on basic-level courses and globally.

Secondly, by using e-learning it would be possible to focus more during workshops on advanced practical training (as has been repeatedly requested). This might reduce the need to increase the duration of workshops which is highlighted in the intermediate assessment as necessary to cover the full range of subjects. This could also contribute to saving resources.

Thirdly, applying e-learning to basic level courses for all training programmes could improve quality by clarifying the technical focus, facilitating identification of participants (for example, clearer indications could be given regarding the level of knowledge required to participate) and related selection procedures⁶.

⁴ See paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4.

⁵ From initial indications, it can be roughly estimated that the volume of training supplied should increase by at least 50% in relation to the evolution described in Impact Assessment SEC (2006) 1163 of Communication COM (2006) 519. In fact, if the duration of all workshops is extended to 5 days (currently most workshops are 3 days), as suggested in the interim assessment of Better Training, the number of training days will increase by approximately 50% without increasing either the number of participants or the number of training programmes (both of which are also requested by the assessment).

⁶ The division into basic and advanced courses has already been carried out within the HACCP and BIPS training programmes.

Finally, applying e-learning to basic as opposed to advanced course level will simplify the task of creating such a tool.

However, it should be considered that e-learning may be problematic in certain countries without sufficient access to high speed internet. It would also be necessary to develop an assessment tool to ensure that the basic level has been completed successfully.

This e-learning pilot project study, performed in the short term, could allow in the long term for the setting up of an e-learning tool for more basic-level training and which could serve as a starting point for practical training and also as a point of reference in the field.

5.1.2. Networking with Member States, third countries, international organisations and the private sector

An additional way to increase training output would be to develop closer cooperation with Member State and third country authorities as well as international organisations and the private sector. This can be reached by optimising information sharing such as with the Standards and Trade Development Facility and with WTO Members.

As Member State national authorities are obliged to provide training for their control staff, the development of a system could be envisaged whereby national authorities organise and host training which conveys an EU approach and is open to participants from other Member States. For this purpose, it would be useful for the Commission to receive regular updates from Member States on their annual national training plans.

Methods for developing co-financed training with Member States will be explored in the short term with the aim of putting this into practice in the long term. This should respect the train-the-trainers approach at all times. Possibilities for similar cooperation with third country authorities and international organisations within the framework of a co-organised and co-financed activity could also be explored⁷.

Training could be organised jointly with the private sector (such an initiative has been undertaken with a Syrian meat processing company) in order to meet specific demands. This approach should be investigated further as part of a drive towards more demand-driven training while keeping in mind the need to coordinate all activities with the public authorities. In any case, this should be restricted to dedicated actions strengthening competent authorities and should not be considered a priority, due to the small number of potential beneficiaries, especially in the short-medium term.

⁷ Activity of this kind has already been undertaken in the BTSF training programmes for third countries in the form of co-ownership (local experts involvement + South-South cooperation) since 2008 (e.g. India, China) as well as with the OIE within the Better Training for Safer Food in Africa programme.

As regards Africa, the joint deployment and coordination with EU Member States will be explored as some of them have substantial activities.

5.1.3. Others

Additional ways could be to develop and/or increase tailor-made courses on demand or in the framework of “ad hoc” training missions and “Webinars”⁸. Such “ad hoc” training missions have been carried out since 2008 for a total of 550 days approximately, all involving tailor-made trainings. “Webinars” would allow an enormous amount of subscribers to be reached both for basic or advanced level courses. A database on the Commission webpage with all the trainings and presentations would further improve dissemination.

5.2. Improve the identification of training priorities and target audience

Clearer identification of training priorities and the target audience is one of the most important factors in ensuring the effectiveness of the training.

5.2.1. Training priorities

Clearer identification of training priorities should be ensured through more effective coordination with Member State and third country authorities and other relevant institutions and international organisations.

In order to improve this process, which is not always sufficiently systematic, the preparation of a standard questionnaire to ascertain training needs should be considered.

This questionnaire should be developed in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and submitted to them regularly (at least once a year) in order to obtain updated feedback and monitor needs and impacts. This would supplement standard sources of input such as the Member State expert, FVO reports, EU Delegations, RASFF notifications and past training outcomes.

Deeper cooperation with national authorities and international bodies providing training is also necessary to better tailor BTSF training in order to maximise output and avoid overlapping.

As is the case for Member States, a worldwide network of BTSF contact points would be useful for identification of priorities and rapid response to urgent demand for training.

⁸ Webinar is a neologism to describe a specific type of web conference.

Consideration should be given, as has been done once before, to arranging training activities back-to-back with important events of bodies such as Codex, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) or International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) in order to focus in greater depth on more specific subjects.

Together with improved identification of needs, a classification system should be developed, especially for training in third countries, to rank training priorities on the basis of a range of factors to be defined. This classification is essential due to the need to respect budgetary constraints.

5.2.2. Target audience

The overall aim is to reach the highest level of homogeneity among the participants without losing sight of the need to have an international selection of participants at each activity. This is one of the basic principles of BTSF and it is vital for knowledge sharing and exchange of experience.

An immediate action could be to involve the tutors in evaluating the level of preparation of participants so as to better group them during the different sections of each training activity.

A further important point for audience selection is the need to successfully implement a train-the-trainers approach. Steps towards this should be taken in the short term and completed in the long term. BTSF aims to function in accordance with the train-the-trainers principle and the intermediate assessment demonstrates that this has been achieved to some extent. Participants should act as training disseminators, and their capacity to do this should also be taken into account when selecting the audience.

- (a) Public sector and participation of non-governmental trainees
Since the launch of BTSF, the target audience has been competent authority staff of EU Member States, candidate, associated and third, particularly developing countries involved in official controls in the areas covered by the initiative.

Given the high number of requests for training received by the Commission, more accurate definition of the goals and principal target audiences is essential in order to prioritise these requests more effectively.

In general, the audience definition should take into account the outcome of the training needs analysis. Training should be designed following a bottom-up approach linked to the expected outcomes. Once needs and expected outcomes are clearly identified it is easier to design the training programme and identify the audience. It should thus be ascertained to what extent training is necessary for specific profiles of competent authority staff.

The legal basis of BTSF only provides for training to be organised and funded by the EU budget for staff of the competent authorities, thus excluding participation of trainees from food businesses. Any participation of such trainees may not result in any expenditure from the EU budget. Member States can, in any event, encourage their national training agencies to develop appropriate training for such trainees. BTSF Africa is a special case, where a different legal basis also allows participation from private sector. Beyond training, there are also various development programmes in the SPS field focusing on capacity development of the private sector. Examples of continent wide programmes in Africa are given in Section 2.2.

(b) Basic and advanced courses

Knowledge levels are another important factor in the definition of a target audience.

Considerable differences in knowledge levels between participants have been noted.

This renders the training less effective given the impossibility of catering adequately for all participants' needs within the same event. Prerequisite participant knowledge levels should be defined more explicitly and communicated well in advance of training activities.

The intermediate assessment pinpoints the development of basic and advanced level courses as an appropriate response. This has already been implemented for certain programmes and should be considered as an option across the full spectrum of subjects in the long term. In the short term it may be implemented for selected programmes taking into account the budgetary constraints.

(c) Language

An additional element affecting the definition of the target audience, particularly given the international nature of the initiative, is the language issue.

This has represented a challenge from the outset and the future strategy should pay proper regard to the principle of multilingualism.

All possibilities for provision of interpretation should be explored. It is important that participants have a chance to receive training in their mother tongue. Until now the main languages used have been English, French and German. However, for third countries training, it has also been provided in Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. Requesting proficiency in a specific language, as has been done in much of the training so far, risks distorting the selection process.

(d) Third country training

As concerns third country training, the wide variety of national needs as compared with the EU as well as differing levels of development between countries require additional efforts to combine homogeneity and international participation.

Third country training has so far been mainly intended for countries exporting food and feedstuffs to the EU. The role of the training has primarily been to increase regulatory cooperation, which helps creating a better institutional and physical environment for compliance of products and processes with standards, and certification of the latter. This is expected to contribute to ensure the safety of the EU's imports and at the same time to strengthen the capacity of competent authorities. This will remain the main goal and actions with this aim will be targeted above all at the EU's principal trading partners.

The need to strengthen competent authorities is evidenced by the various SPS development cooperation programmes across the world, including BTSF Africa.

The principle of regional-level training should be respected as a fundamental feature of BTSF third-country activity.

Third country training has so far focused primarily on developing countries. However, attention should be paid to increasing the involvement of European Neighbourhood Policy countries, Mediterranean basin countries, Latin American countries, in particular those where comprehensive trade and Association Agreements are negotiated and developed third countries. Possibilities for limited increases in the involvement of the private sector should also be investigated especially given its fundamental role in ensuring food and feed safety in many developing countries.

5.3. Improve the quality of the training

Appropriate format and content are essential to ensure high quality training. In third countries very diverse formats have been used, from group activities encompassing theoretical workshops, to case studies involving site visits, simulation exercises, hands-on laboratory training in analytical techniques as well as 'ad hoc' training missions.

Beneficiaries include veterinary inspectors, other officials and private sector and laboratory personnel. Participants have been satisfied with the overall quality of training, whilst emphasising the need for practical exercises.

Four factors could contribute to improving quality:

- better tailoring training programmes and schedules to real needs as part of a demand-driven approach;
- greater audience homogeneity balanced with an international selection of participants;
- increased availability of high-quality tutors, capable of conveying a European dimension;
- more opportunity for knowledge sharing and networking.

The need for better definition of priorities and needs and ways to balance homogeneity with the requirement for international participant selection have been discussed at length in previous sections.

The development of basic and advanced level courses is viewed as an appropriate way to better define the focus of training actions and increase homogeneity. As outlined above, basic-level training could be provided by e-learning with workshops and sustained training missions focusing on advanced subject matter. However, the importance of basic-level training for a live audience should be kept in mind. The overall number of official inspectors is declining. This will require higher skill levels on the part of those that remain. E-learning could also allow potential participants to demonstrate the requisite levels of expertise to attend a workshop on a given topic. Practical activities would then provide high-level training for participants with substantial prior knowledge.

In addition, e-learning would reduce the need for theoretical presentations during workshops, thereby allowing for inclusion of a stronger practical element. This would be highly appreciated by participants, as was pointed out in the intermediate assessment.

In the short term a pilot e-learning project will be implemented for certain training programmes. In the long term this tool could be introduced into all programmes.

Another feature of efforts to achieve greater homogeneity could be more extensive checks to ascertain potential participants' technical and language knowledge.

Training activity should be adaptable to all situations and take into account huge differences between needs, countries, types of participant and technical content so as to achieve high standards. A study on "best practices in training" covering all training activities has been launched in late-2009 with the final report expected by mid-2010. This will allow for in depth investigation of these factors.

The availability of high quality tutors is fundamental to raising training standards in workshops, missions and proposed e-learning modules. Due to the need to convey an EU interpretation of the subject matter, the Commission should play a role in the provision of expert tutors. The idea of developing a summer school for tutors is discussed in the section on the long term strategy. An analysis to verify the feasibility of this idea will be conducted in the short-medium term.

BTSF has succeeded in gathering together participants from all over the world working in the same fields. The impact assessment shows that participants greatly appreciate the opportunity that this offers to share knowledge through social interaction. In some cases, staying in touch following training has contributed to solving professional problems. An alumni network could be set up for this purpose in the long term.

5.4. Increase dissemination

The overriding aim of BTSF is to spread knowledge of relevant EU legislation, norms and standards as widely as possible amongst the target audience. Effective dissemination plays a key role in this. Hence, the train-the-trainer concept needs to be developed further.

The assessment shows that participants have disseminated expertise acquired from training to quite an extent, backed up by a high multiplying factor. Nonetheless, factors have been identified in the assessment which could further increase dissemination:

- provision of simple and clear learning tools and documentation to all participants. For this, teaching guidelines taking into account the subject covered by the training and its target audience could be useful;
- the development of an e-learning platform for basic-level training and increased dissemination of expertise;
- the establishment of expert training networks through which sustainable relationships can be built to ensure follow-up and provide contact points for information;
- the creation of stable relationships with stakeholders in terms of recurrent training and follow-up;
- more coordination, possibly including a commitment with Member States for dissemination in the EU.

Three additional factors could improve dissemination.

The first of these could be inclusion in the selection process of a clear statement to the effect that all participants should be given the means with which to disseminate expertise following training.

The second is to ask all countries and stakeholders to develop dissemination plans.

The third is the possibility to check dissemination implementation from submission of reports by stakeholders.

A final general point concerns the full implementation of the train-the-trainers approach which requires that participants disseminate the expertise acquired from the training.

Not all of the above mentioned elements will be finalised in the short term. In particular the development of e-learning platforms, the conclusion of a possible formal commitment with Member States for dissemination, the development of dissemination plans by countries benefiting from BTSF training for their nationals and the possibility to check the implementation thereof could only be considered in the long term. The commitment for dissemination and other related actions could be considered as a possible eligibility criterion for future training. A possible role for the FVO in this process could be investigated.

6

Long term strategic plan

5.5. Setting up a standard evaluation procedure

Three principal factors should be subject to regular evaluation:

- the quality of the training;
- the impact of the training;
- the dissemination of expertise after training.

The quality of the training is usually evaluated by participants at the end of each activity. As this evaluation is carried out by the contractor implementing the activity, it could be subject to distortion. Setting up an electronic evaluation system managed by a different body could reduce this risk. Pre- and end-of-training test can help assessing acquired knowledge.

By way of a double check, general assessment could be carried out every two years by independent specialist bodies, as with the interim assessment of BTSF. This would evaluate the three factors listed above.

The development of benchmarks of good practice is vital to the establishment of criteria against which the training can be evaluated. To this end, a study on similar activities implemented by other national and international bodies has been undertaken. This study is expected to support BTSF in areas such as definition of priorities and audience and training quality.

It is still too early to quantify the overall impact of the training in terms of higher standards of food and feed safety, animal health and welfare and plant health. This could be done in the long term. In the medium-term changes in practices by control authorities could be assessed.

Nevertheless, a comprehensive ex-post evaluation will be carried out in 2011 that will embrace the entire period of the programme. It will form the basis of any future decision on the development of the programme.

All of the actions identified for launch in the short-medium term, but which cannot be completed within that timeframe, would have to be finalised in the long term.

Further actions might be both initiated and concluded during this period. All actions should take account of the conclusions of the studies carried out in the short term.

The implementation of these strategies could require increases in the available budget and staff level.

6.1. Increased supply of training activities

6.1.1. E-learning

Based on the results of the e-learning pilot project, an e-learning tool for basic-level training will be set up for all training programmes.

Ultimately, a specific interactive e-learning forum with developing countries will be considered for basic as well as more advanced courses. The idea would be to create, organise and run an e-learning tool to raise awareness and facilitate consensus building, dialogue, problem solving and exchange of expertise via an interactive discussion over EU SPS measures (guidance, legal framework and background documents, etc).

This would impart homogeneous understanding and strengthen knowledge and capacity to interpret the basic principles of EU SPS measures, facilitating the establishment and encouragement of networks and useful contacts between EU officials (tutors) in the Commission and Member States and Developing Countries services and representatives of the private sectors.

6.1.2. Networking with Member States, third countries, international organisations and the private sector

After having explored methods for developing co-financed training, this action should be put into practice in the long term.

Training could be co-financed by the EU budget and national authorities and would thus demonstrate the complementary nature of BTSF to Member State-level training. The co-operation should take into account additional aspects such as languages to be used, a EU approach and the need for an international selection of tutors.

In the long term the possibility of arranging training jointly with the private sector should be further exploited to make training more demand-driven without reducing coordination with public authorities.

In general, and in accordance with the train-the-trainers approach, if BTSF can provide more advanced training courses, this could also help EU Member States and other stakeholders to increase the availability of “in house” trainers for their own courses.

6.2. Improve the identification of training priorities and target audience

6.2.1. Training priorities

In the long term, together with all actions identified in the short term, consideration should be given to the possibility of organising international expert meetings on a regular basis, in order to reflect further on needs and priorities.

6.2.2. Target audience

(a) Public and participation of non-governmental trainees

Methods should be perfected to gauge the extent to which training is necessary for specific profiles of competent authority staff and groups such as industry, academia, NGOs, producer associations and other potential stakeholders.

(b) Basic and advanced courses

As stated above, the intermediate assessment pinpoints the need for basic and advanced level courses. This has already been implemented for certain programmes and should be considered as an option for all subjects in the long term.

(c) Language

The possibility for provision of interpretation in a wide range of languages will be developed. This is closely linked to the available budget and to factors such as levels of coordination and co-financing with stakeholders and the availability of tutors.

(d) Third country training

The implementation of the train-the-trainers approach will be completed and perfected in the long term. This should lead to more effective dissemination of the relevant expertise in third and particularly developing countries. It is important to find synergies with other training bodies and/or international organisations for developing countries in order to avoid duplication of efforts. Outsourcing of training to international standard-setting bodies could be envisaged. This will also enhance dissemination.

6.3. Improve the quality of the training

6.3.1. Summer school and exchange of officials

The establishment of a summer school could be a key element in increasing the availability of high quality tutors. This would represent a step towards the creation of a community of good practice and would ensure that the EU message is conveyed not only through EU training but also through other training involving summer school graduates.

An additional way to increase the number of potential tutors could be to organise an exchange programme of officials/trainers among National Competent Authorities of Member States and third countries. This would enable participants to exchange knowledge and experience on the implementation of EU legislation and to put it into practice and disseminate it within their services.

Greater cooperation with international organisations could increase the number of qualified experts in regular contact with BTSF.

6.3.2. BTSF Post-Graduate Training Centre

The summer school could lead to the development of a similar institution also open to normal participants.

This could take the form of a BTSF Post-Graduate Training Centre providing expert advanced-level tuition in the relevant fields. It should function as a kind of post-graduate university and provide certification for graduates.

The Training Centre should be established in close coordination with Member States and open to collaboration with all third countries, including developed countries, and international bodies.

The rationale behind the development of such a centre comes, on the one hand, from the possibility to achieve economies of scale and on the other to raise the skill levels of official inspectors. The latter point is particularly pressing given the decline in numbers of such inspectors in EU.

6.3.3. Alumni network

The possibility for knowledge sharing between participants offered by BTSF training could be sustained over time through an alumni network enabling participants to keep in touch with each other and the Commission. Further added value could come from this in the form of additional follow-up to training activities.

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Actions arising from the future strategies

6.3.4. Tutor network and database

An additional element could be the creation of a database and a network of selected key international experts in different fields of expertise who could be called upon to carry out training activities and also missions of the Food and Veterinary Office of DG 'Health and Consumers' (FVO). The Network should be representative of all stakeholders and include staff belonging to competent authorities, academic staff and experts from the private sector or consultants. This would allow for the provision of an appropriate balance between theory and practice.

6.4. Increase dissemination

Dissemination will be improved in the long term, through the development of e-learning platforms, the conclusion of a possible formal commitment with Member States for dissemination and the development of dissemination plans by all countries and stakeholders. During this period the possibility of setting up an appropriate process for checking dissemination implementation will be verified.

6.5. Setting up a standard evaluation procedure

In the long term the possibility to quantify the impact of the training through additional sources should be verified. An impact evaluation tool, including checklists and standard questions, could be created and distributed in order to gain a more accurate idea of the impact of the training on the ground. A possible role for FVO in this process could be considered.

Regular reports from all stakeholders could help to evaluate the extent of dissemination.

An action plan identifying concrete actions or to launch reflections on future long-term strategies that could be put into practice by end-2013 at latest (short-medium term) is annexed to this Staff Working Document. The proposed actions will not result in any increase to either the budget available or the current staff resources.

This table also summarises the steps that have already been taken in 2009 regarding some of the actions described above, such as a pilot e-learning project and the study on best training practices.

Further actions might be both initiated and concluded during this period. All actions should take account of the conclusions of the studies carried out in the short term.

The implementation of these strategies could require moving towards more concrete organisational structures and procedures and increases in the available budget and staff level.

7.1. Organisational and procedural aspects

The training which has been developed thus far has been mostly ad-hoc in nature. This has been sufficient for the participation levels during the first few years of BTSF. In order to respond to new challenges BTSF should move towards more concrete organisational structures and procedures. However this should remain as flexible as possible, as this is the key to success.

It is thus necessary to define the governance of the programme, taking account of:

- the role of EAHC in the management of BTSF;
- the development of standard operating procedures in order to better define training priorities in the future including a performance-based review process;
- the development of a structured approach to coordination with all stakeholders;

It should be borne in mind that although on one hand a more structured approach may be needed to overcome the challenges facing BTSF, on the other it could lead to a loss of flexibility and capacity to respond to urgent demand for training, which have hitherto been among the initiative's main advantages.

The main procedural aspects should be revised bi-annually in order to better adapt them to BTSF needs and reduce this risk.

7.2. Budget

This document has investigated options which could help respond to the increasing needs and which are not directly linked to a simple increase in budget. Such options may lead to the identification of a strategy for increasing productivity, quality and impact.

Other options (like the increase of the duration of the workshops) could imply an increase in the budget dedicated to BTSF above the € 15 million estimated in Communication COM (2006) 519. This possible increase of budget only refers to long term scenario (in any case after 2013). A prior Cost-Benefit Analysis will be carried out to estimate the possible increase in budget necessary to implement these long term strategies, their related impacts and the way in which they are financed.

8

Final considerations

The challenges mainly concern increasing need for high quality training, clearer identification of priorities, a wider and well defined target audience and improved dissemination and evaluation

Ideas for overcoming challenges faced by the development of BTSF have been discussed here. The overall aim is to increase the size, quality, impact and productivity of BTSF while generating economies of scale.

Reaching these goals requires a rethink of the current operating model. This is the main challenge the BTSF programme faces as it moves towards a more structured operating approach.

The overall aim is to increase the size, quality, impact and productivity of BTSF while generating economies of scale.

This aim must be achieved without compromising the flexibility which has been a hallmark of BTSF and enables it to respond quickly to specific and urgent training needs in EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards, especially through “ad-hoc” training missions. The current management structure allows the setting up of training at short notice.

BTSF has the potential to substantially contribute to raising Commission’s profile within the multilateral/international framework related to SPS issues.

Tackling the new challenges may require a rethink of the current operating model.

**Annex: Action plan new BTSF strategies (short-medium term – by 2013 at latest)
subject to the outcome of the ex-post evaluation**

No	Action	Objective	Timing
Global strategy (staff/budget)			
	General BTSF cost-benefit analysis	To estimate the impact of all new identified strategies in terms of potential impacts, budget and staff in the medium-long term	2012
Supply of activities			
	Study on size of demand	To better estimate the demand for training to adequately adjust the supply	2nd half 2010–1st half 2011
	E-learning: Feasibility study	To identify suitable e-learning tools and provide concrete examples of a functional e-learning system	October 2009–2010
	E-learning: First e-learning modules	To develop basic course modules for 5 training programmes	2011
	E-learning: First e-learning modules	To develop basic course modules for further 5–10 training programmes	2012
	Networking: Member States' national training plans	To collect national training plans to ensure full coordination and avoid duplication of training	2011–2012
	Networking: Co-financed training actions	To explore. Action to be potentially put in place in the medium long term	2011–2013
Training priorities identification			
	Questionnaire on training needs	To develop a questionnaire to ascertain training needs, to obtain updated feedback and to monitor needs and impact	2011
	Participant homogeneity	Better definition of the participant profile, languages and training contents.	2010–2011
	Train-the-trainers approach	To reinforce this pillar element through a closer collaboration with Competent Authorities	2010–2011
	Network of National Contact Points	To set up a worldwide network of National Contact Points	2010–2011
Quality of the training			
	Study on best practices in training	To identify and define best practices for sanitary and phytosanitary training	October 2009–2010
	Exchange of officials	To increase the number of potential tutors	2011–2012
	Database of international experts	To better manage the provision of high qualified tutors	2011–2012
	Alumni network	To improve networking and knowledge sharing	2011–2012
	Summer School for tutors	To be explored	2011–2013
	BTSF Post-Graduate Training Centre	To be explored	2011–2013
Dissemination			
	Provision of simple and clear learning tools	To help participants to become trainer at home	2011
	Statement by participants of commitment to disseminate	To improve commitment to disseminate	2011–2013
	More coordination, commitment by Member States and Third Countries to disseminate, dissemination plan and checking dissemination	To be explored	2011–2013
Evaluation			
	General assessment of BTSF	To verify its quality, impact and dissemination	2011
	General assessment of BTSF	To verify its quality, impact and dissemination	2013

