

Better Training for Safer Food

BTSF Newsletter is prepared by the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) and issued six times a year.

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In the December 2012 BTSF Newsletter you may find the interview with the Head of Unit G4 of DG SANCO, Mr Koen Van Dyck, and information about the newly published BTSF calls. In addition, the Newsletter reveals that BTSF is already a university subject, and includes more information about the upcoming training courses.

The EAHC BTSF Team wishes to all readers a peaceful Christmas and a lot of a success in 2013!

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KVD Interview - A testament to the good work done by EAHC



Koen Van Dyck is Head of the Unit in the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) which is responsible for, among other things, directing the policy to be followed by the Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) programme. In light of the recent decision to entrust the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) with new responsibilities related to BTSF, we spoke to him about this outsourcing and what he says about the working relationship between EAHC and DG SANCO.

BTSF: EAHC has just been entrusted with new responsibilities concerning the management of BTSF training activities. What do these responsibilities entail?

Koen Van Dyck: They are basically related to the management of two new training activities which are similar to those which already fall under EAHC's jurisdiction. Both of these new activities are to take place in non-EU countries. The first activity provides trade-related assistance, training and capacity building for third countries in order to enable them to participate more effectively in the meetings and work of international standard setting bodies (ISSB). The second essentially both replaces, continues and expands the two existing activities on EU food standards and control of highly pathogenic avian influenza and other animal diseases.

BTSF: Aside from the management of training programmes, are there any additional features of this outsourcing?

Koen Van Dyck: Another aspect of the outsourcing is the fact that EAHC can now, for the first time, use funding sources for management of BTSF activities other than those which are explicitly provided for by the legal basis of BTSF. For example, the programme on ISSB is funded by the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade under its "Aid for Trade" budget. Funding for the other BTSF activities in non-EU countries is provided by the Development Cooperation Instrument which comes under the Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation's Food Security Thematic Programme.

BTSF: Will this decision bring about significant changes to EAHC's work?

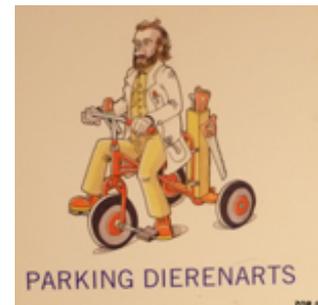
Koen Van Dyck: Not really, as the nature of the tasks which are now being outsourced is no different to those which EAHC has managed successfully over the past few years. Moreover, the existing BTSF team within EAHC will be able to take responsibility for all of this new work and so it will not affect the organisational structure of the Agency. Aside from the fact that EAHC will now be using two new budget lines covered by different legal bases from those used hitherto, the only other change will be a small amendment to the legislative decision which established EAHC.

BTSF training is first and foremost intended for EU participants so why has it been decided to launch these new activities for third countries?

Koen Van Dyck: It is quite true that BTSF training is mainly aimed at EU Member State control officials and has the aim of harmonising implementation of EU law on food and feed safety, animal health and welfare and plant health. However, from the start we have recognised the importance of providing training for non-EU countries so as to increase their knowledge and understanding of EU sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements. This helps them to comply with these requirements and consequently, to trade with the EU, and promotes global trade in safe food based on European and international norms. It also allows us to make more targeted and risk-based controls on imports at the EU's borders.

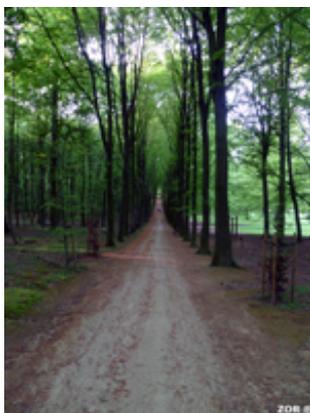
The original decision to outsource management tasks related to BTSF to EAHC was taken in 2008. How does this new decision reflect on the work done in this area since the 2008 outsourcing?

Koen Van Dyck: As you say, DG SANCO and EAHC have worked closely together on the BTSF programme since 2008. Prior to the outsourcing of tasks to EAHC, BTSF was managed in quite an ad-hoc manner. The outsourcing represented the first big step in the development of a long-term structure for the organisation of the initiative. At first, all of us were slightly unsure about how the arrangement would work out, but the last few years have seen considerable increases in both the quality and quantity of training. This would not have been possible with the efficient and flexible management by EAHC of aspects such as public procurement processes and their close and effective monitoring of the implementation of training contracts. Nor would BTSF have achieved its successes without the development of a positive and constructive working relationship between SANCO and EAHC.



Suffice it to say that we are now all convinced that we made the right decision in 2008 and the recent decision to extend the Agency's mandate to include the management of these two new programmes is a testament to the good work done by EAHC over the last four years.

New calls for tender arise from extension of EAHC's mandate



Following the decision to give EAHC the responsibility for execution of the programmes on ISSB and training for non-EU countries, the Agency will be soon launching calls for tender in order to award tenderers to implement these programmes. The calls are to be published shortly.

The call for tender for the ISSB programme will have a budget of EUR 500 000 and will run over two years (2013-14). It is aimed at delegates to the main global reference bodies for food safety and quality, animal health and plant health; the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) respectively.

For all three fields, the geographical regions targeted include the Commonwealth of Independent States and European Neighbourhood Policy countries in the Mediterranean region. In addition, for work on Codex Alimentarius issues, the Far East and Central and South America are priority regions.

Countries in these regions are characterised by low levels of activity and participation in meetings and work of the ISSBs in question. The training should help improve the technical capacity of national delegates to these bodies in terms of drafting of SPS standards and elaboration of scientific arguments.

This should, in turn, better prepare them to take part in meetings and make constructive contributions. International-level training of this kind should also facilitate formulation of national and regional positions on the various issues.

A total of seven workshops will take place within the programme. Of these, three are on food safety, while two will cover each of animal and plant health. Subjects to be covered include the history, aims, principles and procedures of the three ISSBs, particularly as concerns standard setting, as well as specific issues to be discussed within committees in the near future and formulation of national and regional positions.

Each workshop will aim at participants from a specific geographical region. They will cater for around 40 participants each, of which two each should come from each participating country and a further 15 from the hosting country. Hosting countries are to be selected strategically based on their role in the relevant body at the time when the workshops are to be held. The EU Member States holding the EU Presidency and overseeing EU coordination within the relevant bodies at the time of any given workshop will also be invited and other Member States can attend at their own expense.

Sustained training to benefit the poorest

The new programme for non-EU countries is to be implemented in accordance with the principles of the Food Security Thematic Programme in that it aims to benefit the poorest and least developed groups, including smallholder farmers in the developing world. The contract for organising the activities will be of EUR 8 million over three years (2013-15).

The programme will transfer SPS know-how to public and private sector bodies in beneficiary countries in order to address shortcomings in this area. It will also provide information on SPS legal frameworks for national and regional bodies and private sector organisations so as to foster development of networks supporting production of and trade in safe food.

This should help to increase availability of safe and nutritious food on national and international markets. Greater market access arising from safer food should have knock-on effects in terms of poverty reduction among smallholders and workers in the sector.

The project comprises five activities, with the main focus on sustained training missions. Up to 175 missions may take place to countries where SPS shortcomings have been identified. The missions will address these shortcomings and so prevent disruption of trade. Other missions will cover animal welfare, particularly welfare of animals at slaughter and of working animals.



Around 35 national and regional workshops on topics of interest to countries in a given region will be held, some of which may be used as follow-up to the training missions. The third activity involves provision of assistance in the establishment of regional SPS bodies and capacity building on SPS standard setting, and may involve the setting-up of regional risk assessment centres.

Laboratory workshops held in recipient countries with support from EU laboratories will train participants in state-of-the-art diagnostic techniques. The final activity will combine visibility actions such as conference, monitoring of project implementation and evaluation of the outcomes at the end of the project.

Further BTSF call for tender set for publication at the end of December 2012



This call for tender should help to increase availability of safe and nutritious food on national and international markets. Greater market access arising from safer food should have knock-on effects in terms of poverty reduction among smallholders and workers in the sector.

The project comprises of several activities, with the main focus on sustained training missions. Up to 200 days of missions may take place in countries where SPS shortcomings have been identified. The missions will address these shortcomings and so prevent disruption of trade.

Other missions will cover animal welfare, particularly welfare of animals at slaughter and of working animals.

BTSF as a subject at university

'Better Training for Safer Food' is not only the very successful Initiative of the European Union to train EU Member State officials but became also the study subject of graduates. At the University of Perugia - Agriculture Faculty, Alessandro Piccio wrote in 2012 his graduate thesis on "Better Training for Safer Food in Africa". His thesis describes the purpose and meaning of BTSF for the third world. The thesis was supervised by Prof. Luigi Montari of the University and Head of Consumers and Food Safety Unit of EAHC, Mr Salvatore Magazzù. Congratulations!

Upcoming Courses

For up-coming training sessions please check [BTSF calendar](#).