

Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn
Keynote speech to FoodDrinkEurope Innovation Day

"Delivering the Innovation Union"

Brussels, Wednesday, 23 November 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to close the Innovation Day of FoodDrinkEurope, with such a high-level gathering of food and drink industry representatives, scientists and policy makers from all around Europe.

The European food and drink industry is a major force in our economy, with a vital role to play and a tremendous responsibility in terms of people's health and well-being, and in the stewardship of our natural resources. Every European citizen is a customer of yours!

As the European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, I am very aware that your industry is constantly innovating - anticipating and reacting to changing tastes and lifestyles, and to health and environmental concerns.

And it is the role of innovation that I want to emphasise today – what it means for the European Union, what it means for the food and drink industry and what it means for each one of us as consumers.

It started with the Europe 2020 strategy agreed by Europe's heads of state and government in June last year. Europe 2020 emphasises the critical role that research and innovation must play in our economic recovery, and in tackling the other issues of greatest concern to people, including food security, energy, climate change and the impacts of ageing.

Yes, the challenges are great, but they also present huge opportunities and we need to join forces at European level to meet these challenges. Innovation Union - which I launched a little over a year ago - aims to improve the basic conditions that will allow entrepreneurs and European companies to flourish.

Innovation Union concentrates on creating the conditions that will smooth the path from excellent research to new products and services that people want to buy. We need, for example, faster standard-setting, cheaper and easier patenting, more public procurement of innovative products and services, and better access to venture capital.

For this, Innovation Union champions a distinctively European approach to innovation based on our strengths – our excellence in research; our internal market of 500 million people; a strong public sector with the potential to stimulate innovation via public procurement; and of course our immense cultural depth and diversity.

While it is clear that we need to go on investing in fundamental – or curiosity-driven – research, it seems to me that our major challenge is to get better at bringing our inventions to market. Too many of our bright ideas are commercialised elsewhere. I wanted to change that, and smooth the path from lab to market.

One of the centrepieces of Innovation Union is the proposal for a small number of targeted European Innovation Partnerships in areas where clear and measurable goals can be defined and with a direct link to a societal challenge. They will couple funding or supply-side measures with those on the demand side covering procurement, standards and regulations.

The pilot Innovation Partnership on '*Active and Healthy Aging*' aims to add two healthy years to the lives of older people by 2020.

The food and drink industry will of course have a key role to play in helping us reach this goal, and I am very pleased to see that the '*Food for Life*' European Technology Platform – which FoodDrinkEurope supports with its secretariat – has the similar aim of "adding life to years". This shows that the food and drink industry is also aiming to offer consumers safe and affordable food, and contribute to tackling societal burdens such as obesity.

Beyond your role in innovation, the food industry has corporate social responsibility towards people and the environment. Progress has already been made in certain areas, for example with the *EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health* and on reducing the industry's use of water; but even more can be done.

We also need to make food production more sustainable. The food industry can and should contribute to this by applying more sustainable food processing technologies and by adapting its packaging and distribution systems, for example through its active contribution to the *Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan* in the general context of resource efficiency.

These are just some of the ways that your industry supports all kinds of innovation. And having launched Innovation Union, the European Commission is proposing to ensure that there is sufficient European funding to support research and innovation.

We are proposing to increase investment in research and innovation in support of the EU's pro-jobs agenda. We have proposed a budget of 80 billion euro for the new Horizon 2020 programme that will run from 2014 to 2020.

While we are still finalising some of the details, I can already give you an idea of some of the likely features of the programme that the European Commission will propose next week.

Horizon 2020 will be structured around three distinct, but mutually reinforcing pillars, in line with Europe 2020 priorities.

Excellent research is the foundation upon which Innovation Union, our economic strategy for growth and jobs, is based. So, the first pillar, '*Excellence in the science base*', will strengthen the EU's excellence in science, through actions supporting frontier research (through the very successful European Research Council); future and emerging technologies; the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and priority research infrastructures.

The second pillar, '*Creating industrial leadership and competitive frameworks*,' will target business research and innovation. Actions will include support to increase investment in enabling and industrial technologies; to facilitate access to finance, and to provide EU-wide support for innovation in SMEs.

The third pillar, '*Tackling societal challenges*,' will respond directly to the challenges identified in Europe 2020. Its focus will be on the six challenges of health, demographic change and well-being; food security and the bio-based economy; secure, clean and efficient energy; smart, green and integrated transport; resource efficiency and climate action, including raw materials; and inclusive, innovative and secure societies.

The second pillar on creating industrial leadership is of course very relevant to your industry, but I would like to focus for a moment on the third pillar, where we find the challenge of food security.

The European food and drink industry plays a key role in promoting technological and social innovation that address this and other major societal challenges, responding to people's legitimate expectation of having safe and healthy food, while ensuring the sustainability of the ecosystems that provide our food.

Within this challenge, I expect researchers and the industry to cover the whole food chain and related services, from primary production right through to consumption. The overarching goals should be to achieve food security for all Europeans, and to reduce the burden of food and diet-related diseases through consumer education and innovations in the food industry.

At the same time, I expect research and innovation to reduce the consumption of water and energy in food processing, transport and distribution, and to reduce food waste.

Besides new products and processes, innovation in personalised foods and food services is also important.

This field still needs important work - from fundamental research on the human genome and physiology to the development of specific foods and services – catering not only for groups of people but also for individuals. We need real innovation in the food service sector, in the supermarket and in people's fridges.

In order to unlock the innovation potential of the bio-economy, while minimising potentially adverse socio-economic and environmental impacts, the European Commission proposes to put forward a "*European Strategy and Action Plan towards a sustainable bio-based economy by 2020*" early next year.

Its main objective will be to address the technological and societal challenges in building the bio-economy over the next ten years, with increased emphasis on the sustainable use of natural resources, competitiveness, and socio-economic and environmental issues.

A public consultation on this Strategy and Action Plan was carried out in spring 2011, asking for input on the state-of-play of the bio-economy in Europe, its potential development and on the need for new action at European and Member State levels.

FoodDrinkEurope gave substantial input to this public consultation, for which I would like to thank you. Overall, the results show that there is overwhelming support for the new European strategy and action plan to realise the full potential of the bio-based economy.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is what we have achieved so far, but what of the future?

Well, obviously a lot of my time will now be devoted to Horizon 2020. Our proposal will set out the overall architecture of the programme, plus the basic rules of participation. However, the more I work on it, the more I realise that, in many ways, what actually matters is the annual programming process. After all, this determines the actual research topics that will be funded.

FoodDrinkEurope has already made a very effective contribution to the annual programming process under the current 7th Framework Programme for Research.

Together with the '*Food for Life*' European Technology Platform, you have made many suggestions for research topics, and with great success: there is 90% alignment between your declared priorities and the research topics of the food area in the Knowledge-Based Bio Economy Programme of FP7.

The European Commission has of course consulted with many other stakeholders while defining these research topics, but I think I can fairly conclude from this alignment that you are a most effective contributor. And I trust that you will continue to contribute in a proactive and progressive way.

I am convinced that an innovative food and drink industry will play an active role in achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The European Commission will work very hard to shape the right policies and strategies – with your help. Your work will make a vital contribution to achieving a true Innovation Union.

I invite you to be part of the challenging but exciting work ahead of us. As I have already heard, you have had some excellent discussions at yesterday's Stakeholder Event and today's Innovation Day.

I look forward to your contribution to Innovation Union now, and in the coming years.

Keep on researching, keep on creating, and keep on innovating!

Thank you.