

Events held in Malta to mark five years of BTSF

The European Commission Better Training for Safer Food programme (BTSF) managed by the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) celebrates the fifth anniversary of its launch in 2011. Events to mark the occasion were held in Malta on 18 November. They were attended by European Commissioner for Health and Consumers, John Dalli.

BTSF trains national-level staff of EU Member States and third countries involved in checking compliance with EU food, feed, animal health and welfare and plant health rules. By increasing officials' awareness of relevant EU legislation, it contributes to making controls in these areas more effective and harmonised.

The anniversary event was linked to a BTSF workshop on EU plant health control standards. The workshop was attended by national-level control officials from around the Mediterranean region dealing with plant health issues.

As well as addressing the workshop, Commissioner Dalli visited a palm tree plantation to see how such controls are performed. The visit focused mainly on measures to combat the red palm weevil. This is an insect that attacks various types of palm. It entered the EU via palm imports and is present in all Mediterranean Member States.

Underlining the achievements of BTSF during its first five years, Commissioner Dalli said: "Facts and figures point to the success of BTSF. Over the first five years of its activity, about 29 000 people from roughly 180 countries have benefited directly from its training. Innumerable others benefit indirectly through the dissemination of expertise acquired by others during the training sessions and ultimately through the application of such expertise to the benefit of consumers."

Rapid increase

The rapid increase in BTSF activity since 2006 is another demonstration of its success. The subjects covered by the initiative have increased from seven in its first year to nearly 30 today.

Such an increase has necessitated changes to the ad-hoc nature of BTSF during its early stages. A key part in the formulation of a more structured approach was the transfer of financial and administrative tasks from the Commission to EAHC during 2009-10.

As Salvatore Magazzù, head of the EAHC unit responsible for management of BTSF, explained on the occasion of the anniversary celebrations: "EAHC gives the Commission all the necessary instruments and support to transpose political ideas into real life, taking care to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent in a transparent and efficient manner."

Further challenges lie ahead for BTSF over the coming five years and beyond and EAHC and the European Commission have begun taking steps to respond to them. The Commission's November 2010 Staff Working Document on BTSF sets out actions to increase training quality. For its part, EAHC is producing communication tools such as newsletters, thematic booklets and videos so as to disseminate information on the initiative as widely as possible.

By continuing their close and effective cooperation, EAHC and the Commission will ensure that the progress made by BTSF during its first five years is sustained well into the future.