



Toms Confectionary Group

Working Group - Research and Innovation

R&D is one of the main engines of innovation, productivity growth and structural change and essential to ensure continued competitiveness in the agro-food sector. Nevertheless, compared with other leading industry branches, the food industry is generally not associated as being very innovative by consumers and recent surveys show that the European food industry spends less than 50 pct. of investment in R&D than in the non-EU food industry.

The Barcelona target of increasing general expenditure on R&D to 3% of GDP within the European Union is therefore one of the central tools in the process of making the European Union becoming "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world".

Challenges

The European agro-food industry is dominated by SMEs that produce highly diverse products and often lack resources and personnel to invest in research and innovation. Moreover the return on investment and margins of profit are generally low and companies find it difficult to patent food products. This means that there is a lack of incentive to commit to R&D projects.

In addition, many food research centres in Europe are not closely enough aligned with the needs of the food industry generally resulting in a lack of user-driven (applied) research. It also remains a challenge to properly disseminate research results to companies and ensure practical implementation and in turn improved products and processes.

Recommendations

- R&D and SME's: There is a need for making R&D projects (and funding) more easily accessible for SMEs for instance by looking at application procedures, reporting requirements, project "banks", technology transfer methods, new knowledge dissemination models ect.
- Food for Life: It is essential that the European research agenda builds on the work being executed by the European Technology Platform 'Food for Life'. The Platform has delivered a vision and pointed towards a number of strategic research areas with expected high returns among others the development of new processes, products and tools that improve health, well-being and longevity.
- A more conceptual and interdisciplinary approach to R&D: We should try to think R&D in more conceptual and interdisciplinary terms to bridge the knowledge gap

between areas such as food science, nutrition and health. For instance, research within biotechnology and process technology can deliver solution within a number of areas. (Biotech: nutrition, raw material utilization, climate solutions. Process technology and product management: sensory analysis, flexible processes, increased productivity).

- Innovation in the Rural Development Policy: In the Rural Development Policy 2007-2013, innovation, R&D and technology transfer is only marginally considered. There is a need for more resources devoted to axis 1 in the programme. Stronger focus - and increased funding - on these issues is needed to make the Rural Development Policy contribute to the competitiveness of the food and agro industry.