

## Better training for Safer Food

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## Interview - Thierry Chalus



*Thierry Chalus is head of the DG SANCO training sector with the overall guiding policy role for BTSF matters. We got his opinions on the impact of the structural changes following the outsourcing of training-related competences to EAHC, the next steps in the initiative's development and the overall impact of the training.*

### **BTSF: BTSF has seen a lot of changes over the last couple of years. Has the outsourcing of training-related execution tasks to EAHC made SANCO's work easier?**

Thierry Chalus: Without doubt. The outsourcing was done very effectively and is now complete. The division of tasks between SANCO and EAHC was clear from the outset and this helped a great deal. Having EAHC take over tasks such as launching public procurement processes, which can be time consuming, as well as monitoring of contract execution and related financial tasks has freed us up to focus on the policy side of things. It is now possible to consult more widely with all parties in order to ensure that all fields in which EU-level training can provide added value are covered. Allowing the Commission to maintain a clear focus on overall policy is also vital in order to enable BTSF to surmount the challenges ahead.

### **BTSF: Speaking of future challenges, could you give us examples of new developments planned for the years to come?**

Thierry Chalus: The direction for the next couple of years is set out in the Staff Working Document on BTSF, adopted in 2010. One feature which will play a big role in the years to come is the e-learning platform which we are in the process of getting up and running. Work is under way on modules on food contact materials and animal welfare. Three more, on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point principles, BSE and related diseases and the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, are earmarked for development in 2012. We hope to have ten in place by mid-2013 before going further thereafter. The training offer is also constantly expanding, with new subjects introduced in 2012 including food additives, veterinary medicinal products, food

safety risk assessment, emerging animal diseases and contingency planning. The current BTSF funding arrangement ends at the end of 2013. Once the new arrangements are firmly in place from 2014, we will have a much clearer long-term picture. An idea for the longer term which we are keen to explore further is the development of a post-graduate training centre to provide advanced-level tuition in the areas covered by BTSF. This could have a highly significant role to play in raising skill levels among official control staff in the EU and beyond.

### **BTSF: And what about dissemination? Is this a big challenge for the years ahead?**

Thierry Chalus: Effective dissemination remains essential to the success of BTSF. Since we began in 2006, we have trained around 30 000 people. However, the target audience for the content of our training is much larger and time and budgetary constraints mean that we cannot train all of them. We knew this from the outset and so sought to implement a train-the-trainer principle as effectively as possible. This means that participation at BTSF training events is intended primarily for people in a position to disseminate the knowledge they acquire from training as widely as possible among their colleagues on their return to work. To support this, we try to ensure that training materials distributed at workshops are adapted for these purposes and that other dissemination supports are available. Unfortunately, various sources indicate that dissemination at Member State level is not always carried out as extensively as it might be. The interim evaluation of the first two years of BTSF identified this as a challenge. Various barriers to dissemination exist, such as time constraints on participants and the risk that they may change jobs after participation. It may also be that in some cases, the most appropriate people have not been identified to implement the train-the-trainer approach. This has implications for our participant selection process. We must thus strengthen our existing dissemination methods and identify new means of dissemination. A second interim evaluation of BTSF was launched in 2011 and should be concluded during 2012. We are very hopeful that this will enable us to pinpoint new areas to explore in order to ensure that BTSF has the widest and deepest impact possible.

### **BTSF: You spoke of increasing the impact of BTSF. How is this currently measured?**

Thierry Chalus: The first, and perhaps most basic way in which the impact is measured is through participant evaluations both during and immediately after workshops. Participants have the chance to provide feedback on each day of the events which they are attending. This feedback covers aspects such as training content and its relevance to their everyday work, the performance of tutors and logistical issues. They also complete questionnaires on the standard of the training at the end of the events. All of this enables us to extrapolate an overall participant satisfaction index for each programme. We also make extensive use of the feedback given by Commission colleagues who are able to participate in the workshops to ensure the relevance of the different programmes. The second way comes at the end of each programme through comments received from the Member States, which we analyse together with EAHC and relevant services in the Commission. Finally, the general interim evaluations of BTSF which are now planned to be held every two years are a key element in assessing the impact of the initiative and training quality in greater depth. Consultation of participants from previous years is an essential part of these evaluations, as getting their views some time after their attendance at training allows us to obtain a clearer picture of the real impact of BTSF on their own day-to-day work and that of their services as a whole. Our network of national contact points are also consulted as part of the interim evaluations as they are well placed to give us feedback on the impact of the training on their own respective national control authorities as a whole, as well as the extent of the dissemination which has taken place.

## **BTSF-Initiative - Point of view of the German National Contact Point**



**Martine PUESTER**

"Excellent!", "Great", "The most interesting course I've ever been on!" These are some of the comments from German participants after they have been on BTSF trainings. Places on these courses are in great demand amongst German experts and the national contact point could have sent many more than the approximately 180 participants who took part in the programme in 2011/2012.

Over the years the BTSF initiative by the European Commission has grown into a recognised programme. The courses cover a large spectrum of aspects in food safety control and are now offered to different levels and addressees.

In order to continue to fulfil the high demands towards tutors, participants and organisers in the future, it is important not to lose track of the simple but extremely successful fundamental idea of the programme while diversifying the programme according to the needs of control personnel. To ensure a constant high quality of courses in the future, uniform standards should be established for the contents, material, and the organisation of the courses. It is not just the content - the interpretation and application of EU legislation - but also the many little pieces of practical information from experienced tutors, and personal contacts to colleagues from other Member States which make the programme so valuable.

The positive feedback from participants is both rewarding and an incentive for us at the national contact point. We do our utmost to find competent participants for the course places allocated to Germany. In this regard, we work closely with our colleagues in the 16 federal states responsible for food control in Germany. On the one hand, all the states have to be taken into equal consideration when free course places are distributed; on the other hand they often have very different training needs due to their size and location as well as the types of businesses and control points. In order to accommodate these needs, we communicate in a network of BTSF contact points at L nder level which maintain direct contact to regional bodies and to over 400 local authorities where German experts fulfil control tasks. The distribution of free places among the federal states and the selection of participants are done by heads of cross-federal working groups for their specific field of expertise.

Although there is a fair amount of coordination work and it can be hectic at times, for example when registration deadlines are approaching or when places have to be filled at short notice, working for the BTSF Programme gives us the possibility to contribute to improving food safety in Germany and the EU.

## Upcoming Courses

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