

## Better Training for Safer Food

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### BTSF Conference on Food Fraud held in Rome

## Conference on Food Fraud

*A joint effort to ensure the safety and integrity of our food*

23-24 October 2014, Rome, Italy



A conference on food fraud organised by BTSF, in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Health and within the framework of the Italian Presidency of the EU, took place in Rome on 23-24 October 2014. The event's title was 'a joint effort to ensure the safety and integrity of our food' and it was aimed at raising awareness of the size of the challenge presented by economically-motivated violations of food law. It also aimed to identify measures for interdisciplinary collaboration by providing a communication platform for parties fighting such violations.

Some 240 participants attended from national and regional authorities in areas such as health, food, agriculture, veterinary issues, law enforcement, customs and finance. Consumer stakeholders and academic and research institutions were also represented.

Violations of food law are lucrative, occur all along the food chain and pose major health and economic threats. They are hard to detect and penalties are not always stringent, increasing their attractiveness to criminals. Concerted effort is needed to fight this and the event followed on from the first BTSF food crime conference held in Brussels in February 2012.

The event was opened by Italian Minister for Health, Beatrice Lorenzin. Opening remarks were also supplied by Eric Poudelet, Director of the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers Safety of the Food Chain Directorate.

#### *A wide range of perspectives*

The conference began with an overview of food fraud from EU and national perspectives. It looked at the concept of fraud, laws and regulations, and the extent of the problem, and outlined major incidents of fraud, current threats to brands and consumers and their financial implications. Details were also given of European Commission policy initiatives.

A session on industry and consumer perspectives followed. This included information on and experiences of food fraud from the Global Food Safety Initiative, a business-led initiative for improving food safety management, and the European Consumer Organisation's expectations and views.

The second day started by examining needs and options for a collaborative approach. Five national case studies from Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and France were used to look at food fraud challenges and explore new ways of broadening collaboration between experts.

The final session covered ways of improving methodologies, including increased cooperation between laboratories and validation of techniques. Speakers also discussed vulnerability assessment, different approaches to food fraud prevention and the EU Food Integrity project. This aims to harness research and technology to give assurance about the safety, authenticity and quality of European food.

Constructive discussion took place, with each session including time for debate with speakers, and questions and answers. At the end of the conference, conclusions of the discussions were summed up by the Italian EU Presidency.

### Joint Italian Presidency / European Commission food fraud conference: A first-class job

Health and Consumer (EC SANCO), in charge of safety of the food chain. He provided opening remarks and moderated the session on industry and consumer perspectives at the Conference on Food Fraud in Rome on 23-24 October 2014. We spoke to him about his impressions of the conference and general issues of food fraud.

**BTSF: Firstly, how do you feel the conference went?**

Eric Poudelet: Everyone involved in the organisation did a good job for which I congratulate them. As with the 2012 EU Conference on Food Crime, the event gave participants the chance to meet people working in a range of fields related to food fraud such as food, veterinary and consumer issues, law enforcement, customs and finance, to engage in constructive discussion and hopefully to build long-lasting professional relationships which should help to fight food fraud. The presentations were very interesting in terms of both their subject and content and were delivered by knowledgeable experts in this field. This is not just my view, but that of everyone I spoke to at the conference.

**BTSF: Which subjects were covered?**

Eric Poudelet: We began by examining the subject of food fraud from EU and national perspectives, followed by a session on industry and consumer aspects. Another session looked at needs and options for a collaborative approach, based on national case studies from five EU Member States, and we finished by discussing ways of improving methodologies for preventing food fraud.

**BTSF: More generally, could you explain what food fraud is?**

Eric Poudelet: Food fraud is basically production, processing, distribution or marketing of food which is not in line with food law, with the intention to mislead the consumer and make a profit. It covers a variety of aspects such as safety and quality, use of prohibited ingredients, inaccurate labelling, fraudulent claims or infringement of intellectual property rights.

**BTSF: So it covers the entire food chain.**

Eric Poudelet: Yes, although typical fraudulent practices differ between stages. For instance, during production, raw materials containing substances such as pesticide or veterinary drug residues, animal feed, or protected or prohibited species might be used. Fraud during processing could be related to use of prohibited materials, deception concerning product composition or infringement of storage or transport rules. During distribution, labelling and sanitary rules could be violated or intellectual property rights disregarded. With this conference, we aimed to raise awareness of the size and extent of the challenge we face.

**BTSF: Why is food fraud so attractive to criminals?**

Eric Poudelet: Largely due to the sheer volume of global trade in food, which now runs to thousands of millions of tonnes of goods and an estimated turnover in excess of EUR 4 000 billion a year. Moreover, as the world's population increases, volumes of food trade are expected to do likewise, making an already lucrative field even more attractive. There are other reasons, particularly the difficulty of detecting infringements and, in many instances, the lack of stringent penalties.

**BTSF: So it's very highly organised?**

Eric Poudelet: In terms of overall infringements, it's not clear what proportion is deliberate and what is down to negligence. However, in cases where it is deliberate, there are three main scenarios; opportunistic infringements to meet specific needs, those resulting from a business strategy and those linked to organised crime. This last scenario is a relatively recent phenomenon but has developed considerably, although its full extent is hard to assess. Such activity generally peaks towards the end of the year in the run up to Christmas.

**BTSF: And more widely, what is the impact?**

Eric Poudelet: The impact covers the whole food chain, from production to consumption. It poses – or may pose - considerable risks to health as sub-standard food is often at the root of public health crises and counterfeit food is not subject to quality control and is transported and stored without regard for hygiene. It is an economic threat due to the problems it causes for legitimate food production through unfair competition which can destroy sections of the market and lead to job losses and loss of consumer confidence. Use of products such as unauthorised pesticides can also harm the environment.

**BTSF: What are the main barriers to tackling food fraud?**

Eric Poudelet: Barriers include free movement of goods, the extent of Internet trade, the complex structure of criminal networks which makes them hard to penetrate, diversity and complexity of national legislation and a lack of awareness of EU legislation in some Member States. There is also a lack of coordination and information sharing between national authorities and an absence of police and judicial structures specialising in food fraud in many countries. The conference was aimed at overcoming these last two obstacles in particular.

**BTSF: What is the EU doing to solve the problem?**

Eric Poudelet: The EU is working to ensure proper control of the food chain so as to detect fraud, seize and destroy counterfeit and harmful products, and identify those responsible. This relates to aspects such as traceability and raising awareness among food producers and consumers of the dangers of counterfeit and substandard food. As this conference shows, we are also strengthening cooperation between law-enforcement, judicial and control agencies, both in the EU and elsewhere, and developing partnerships with the private sector.

**BTSF: What conclusions did the conference reach?**

Eric Poudelet: It was decided that a clear and harmonised legal definition of food fraud must be elaborated and suitable training in investigative techniques provided for control officials, as is already being done under BTSF. Official controls should be supplemented by specific anti-fraud checks along the food chain and administrative cooperation at national and cross-border levels should be strengthened, including through rapid data and information exchange. In this sense, EU initiatives aimed at the development of rapid information exchange networks and related data collection and management systems should be promoted and supported. Further cooperation and partnerships should be encouraged between stakeholders such as business operators in order to use their know-how to better spot fraudulent practices, and systems for sharing information on fraud between operators and police should be set up. Finally, sanctions for fraud must constitute a real deterrent.

**BTSF: Are further conferences on food fraud likely to take place?**

Eric Poudelet: I very much hope so, and the general consensus at the conference was that events of this type are needed. One of the main aims of the conference was to provide a forum for communication between everyone working in the fight against food fraud as part of the development of a collaborative approach. For any such forum to foster successful communication and cooperation, regular meetings are vital.

**BTSF 2014 calls for tender: three calls complete, two to come**

BTSF public procurement processes for 2014 are in full flow, with the deadline for submission of tenders for the first three calls of the year having passed on 3 October, and two further calls scheduled for publication by Chafea in November. The first three calls concern training on plant health controls, inspection and calibration of pesticide application equipment (PAE), and food testing, while the other two are for programmes on zoonoses and anti-microbial resistance, and food contact materials.

Tenders received for the first three calls are being evaluated by specialist panels of officials from Chafea and the European Commission and the outcomes will be published in due course. The contracts to be concluded are envisaged to be implemented over two phases of two years each.

Plant health controls training has long been an important part of BTSF, having been introduced in 2008. The new programme on this comprises three course types on: the EU plant quarantine regime for imports; the EU plant quarantine regime for wood packaging material (WPM); and plant health surveillance and harmful organism outbreak control. This last course is split into two sub-courses on agriculture and horticulture, and forestry and the general environment, including urban areas.

A total of 14 workshops are planned, of which four three-day sessions cover imports, two four-day sessions are on WPM, and eight five-day sessions cover surveillance and outbreak control. Of these, four are on each of agriculture and horticulture, and forestry and the general environment. Each workshop is expected to train between 25 and 30 import control officials or officials from competent authorities or other official bodies in charge of harmful



organism outbreak controls and surveys of harmful organisms. Participants will come from EU Member States, Candidate and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries.

#### *New training subject*

In contrast to plant health controls, inspection and calibration of PAE is a new subject for BTSF. It has previously been covered in the plant protection products programme, but this is the first time a programme has been specifically dedicated to it.

Six three-day sessions are planned for around 20 participants each who should be officials involved in designing inspection programmes of PAE and in inspections of PAE, and trainers of professional pesticide users. They will come from EU Member States and Candidate Countries, as well as potential candidate and EFTA countries.

Training subjects will include legislation on inspection of PAE, inspection bodies, certification systems, ISO and national standards for PAE inspection and mutual recognition. On a more practical level, the training will look at maintenance of PAE, preparing PAE for work, spraying techniques, types of sprayer and protective equipment.

BTSF has provided training on food testing since 2007. The new programme on the subject comprises three course types, of which one focuses on mycotoxins, particularly aflatoxins and ochratoxin A, one covers microbiology, and a third deals with residues, and is divided into two sub-modules on veterinary medicinal products and plant protection products.

All workshops run for 10 working days and take place in EU accredited laboratories. Two are on mycotoxins, one on microbiology and two on each residue type.

Around 15 laboratory technicians from non-EU countries are to attend each workshop. They will mainly come from European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Mediterranean basin countries, Africa, Central and South America and Asia. Provision may be made for other developing-country participants to attend.

Details of the new training programmes on zoonoses and anti-microbial resistance, and food contact materials will be published shortly at <http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/food/tenders.html>.

## National Contact Point meeting held in Brussels

The regular meeting between Chafea and DG SANCO representatives and BTSF National Contact Points (NCP) took place in Brussels on 3 October. Chafea and DG SANCO presentations covered various issues and NCPs had the chance to give feedback.

NCPs are national officials channelling information on BTSF between Chafea and national authorities. One of their key tasks is identification of participants. NCPs are now in place for all EU Member States, Candidate and EFTA countries, as well as some potential candidate and other non-EU countries.

Chafea began with some background to BTSF, including its legal basis, aims and expansion over time. This expansion necessitates adaptation and simplification, and Chafea outlined changes it has made. These include two-phase contracts over a longer timespan, reducing numbers of reports contractors must submit, fixing a single unit price per participant and grouping subjects into single contracts.

The Agency pointed to a market study commissioned to assess the current and future situation for training such as that provided by BTSF, before discussing BTSF's position in the market. This is strong, as evidenced by the positive view of BTSF among officials worldwide and the willingness of other international organisations to work with BTSF.

Information was given on how BTSF is managed by Chafea, including staff resources and tasks such as contract management, visits to events and guidance for contractors. The nature of Chafea's collaboration with DG SANCO was outlined, being based on standard operating procedures, information sharing, pro-activity and trust.

Chafea referred to the findings of the 2013 evaluation, which stressed BTSF's contribution to enhancing individual and institutional control capacity and set out possibilities for further improvement and ways of meeting demand while maintaining current resources. These include differentiation and expansion of the training offer, e-learning, embedding the train-the-trainer approach and better dissemination. In this vein, NCPs were shown a new BTSF video entitled 'Recipe for Safer Food' which explains the principles, aims, benefits and functioning of BTSF, as well as e-learning and the train-the-trainer principle.

E-learning aims were outlined, including creation of a space for professional exchange, improved knowledge sharing and greater use of training material, and a demonstration of a BTSF e-learning module was given.

#### *Recommendations and next steps*

DG SANCO also looked at findings of past evaluations. It detailed additional ways of better meeting demand, including videos, webinars, basic advanced-level training and blended learning.

Priorities could be better identified by communicating training plans online, annual needs assessments and systematic stakeholder feedback. Training quality could be increased through pre-course questionnaires, pedagogical reviews, ensuring highly-qualified tutors, an online knowledge-sharing platform and an alumni network.

Clearer learning tools and e-learning have already been developed to support dissemination. Other methods could include creation of a training centre and links with Member State centres, an expert database, formal dissemination commitments, checks on dissemination and inclusion of BTSF knowledge in national-level training.

Means of increasing participant homogeneity already deployed include basic-advanced courses, and regional-level training in non-EU countries. Other possibilities discussed were accurate definition of required knowledge levels, checks on applicants' skills, new selection criteria and holding training back-to-back with international events.

SANCO stressed the need for benchmarks to assess training impact on control practices and detailed upcoming steps, namely introduction of an electronic evaluation system and launch of a cost-benefit study in preparation for the next general BTSF assessment.

In terms of improvements, recent years have seen more information sharing with other European Commission services, financing of BTSF training by other services, and co-financed training with, and assistance missions to Member States. Longer-term actions include full development of e-learning and dissemination measures, a summer school for tutors and post-graduate training centre, further development of co-financing, the online platform, expert database and tutor and alumni networks.

SANCO gave an account of the state of play of the 2014 training and projections for 2015, including continuing and new programmes. Details were given of upcoming calls for tender and a series of five BTSF conferences at the Milan Expo, including the celebration of the 10th anniversary of BTSF. Finally, SANCO set out the process of defining the 2016 work programme, providing a list of continuing programmes and possible renewals and asking NCPs to submit suggestions for training needs by 14 November.

#### *Successful BTSF Info Day*

Mention should also be made of another successful event organised by Chafea during the autumn, namely the BTSF Info Day in Brussels on 9 September. It was attended by a large number of actual and potential contractors and others with an interest in BTSF.

Many of the areas covered at the NCP meeting were discussed and Chafea also gave details of open calls for tender, submission of offers and new tender



many of the areas covered at the NCP meeting were discussed and Chafrea also gave details of open calls for tender, submission of offers and new tender submission forms, payment procedures, participant unit costs and reporting by contractors. Evaluation of training by participants, Chafrea and DG SANCO was detailed, along with pedagogical reviews carried out by contractors.

Two question and answer sessions were held and gave rise to constructive discussion. After the event, participants were able to give feedback via a satisfaction survey at the Chafrea website.

- [More information](#)

## Second phase of 2012 BTSF contracts set to begin

A series of programmes for which calls for tender were launched and contracts concluded in 2012 are about to enter their second phase. The programmes were initially planned run over two phases of two years each, with launch of the second phase subject to budget availability, training need and positive analysis of the first phase. Approval of the launch of a second phase was confirmed in the BTSF 2014 Financial Decision.

Each contract is made up of one or more work packages, with a single contractor responsible for implementing all work packages under a given contract. One contract covers feed production and feed-related issues and comprises three work packages on animal by-products, feed law and controls of contaminants in feed and food respectively.



Another is related to training on movement of and import controls on feed, food and live animals and is made up of four packages. These cover controls at border inspection posts, import controls on food of non-animal origin, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) aspects of the EU's Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES) and control of movement of cats and dogs.

Microbiology and food-borne outbreak management are the subjects of a single contract divided into two packages on microbiological criteria in food and investigation of food-borne outbreaks. The contract on animal welfare, comprises a single package with activities focused on different aspects of welfare, such as welfare of poultry and pigs, at slaughter and killing for disease control and during transport.

The food consumption and information contract is also made up of a single package and focuses in particular on controls on food labelling requirements. The subject of the final contract set for its second phase is strengthening enforcement of the EU SPS legal framework. This comprises workshops and sustained training and assistance missions to EU Member States to support application of EU SPS law.

All of these programmes are mainly for participants from EU Member States, with places also open to participants from Candidate and EFTA countries. Some programmes also have places for ENP, Mediterranean basin and selected third countries.

- [More information](#)



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