



PETER makes traceability recommendations to EC

A series of strong recommendations to improve the implementation and effectiveness of traceability in the food supply chain has been made to the European Commission by the EU Framework 6 PETER project which held its final conference in Malaga in April.

PETER (Promoting European Traceability Excellence and Research) was charged with examining the outcomes of many of the traceability projects funded by the EU at a cost of more than €100 million. Its key objectives were:

1. Provide an international forum for focussing, disseminating and exploiting EU research on food and feed traceability
2. Improve collaboration between European projects
3. Reduce potential duplication among ongoing projects
4. Maximise the effectiveness of project activities with reference to shared objectives and results
5. Create added value by providing information about gaps, redundancies and research needs after comparing the project complementarities
6. Achieve a high level of dissemination and exploitation involving all 422 project partners, with targeted stakeholder dissemination activities including website, e-brochure, workshops, conferences and educational documents

The PETER conference ran in tandem with the TRACE annual conference and delegates gave their overwhelming endorsement to the project's proposals which include:

- The EC should examine how to trace novel foods and novel ingredients including nanotechnology-based products and cloned animals.
- It should determine analytical methods to address quality signs such as the history of products (e.g. halal/kosher slaughter) and processes such as organic farming
- Consumer concerns relating to transparency of social and ethical issues should be considered
- The EC should determine traceability verification methods to authenticate history of products; processes; environment and sustainability claims
- The needs and difficulties of SMEs in exporting countries who are willing to embrace traceability as a result of EU market demands should be addressed
- More robust and efficient systems of incident management should be developed
- The EC should encourage the use of a modular approach for controls of safety and quality issues
- There should be EC support for a forum for food traceability issues addressing scientific, stakeholder and consumer needs

- The EC should promote the development of methods, guidelines and cost benefit analysis stressing the short term ROI and long term added value of traceability
- That the EC should address the need for simple traceability information directed to the consumer

In addition the PETER project strongly recommends the development and demonstration of a free of charge international global numbering system for food traceability.

Other areas in which the project partners feel further research should be directed include the impact upon SMEs of implementing internal traceability and new solutions for minimizing the food safety risks associated with infinite batches.

Delegates in Malaga also agreed that there was a need for much improved communication between stakeholders if a greater understanding of the need for traceability and its speedier implementation were to be achieved.

By its conclusion the PETER partners had addressed more than 80 conferences, extending its network of contributors and collaborators world-wide. They had also communicated intensively with approaching 8,000 operators from every stage of the food and feed supply chains – from growers to consumer groups. SMEs were a particular target for the project's communications programme since it was they who were perceived potentially to have most difficulty in assimilating traceability into their operations.