

INTERVIEW



Bernard Van Goethem is Director of the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers' (DG SANCO) Directorate for Veterinary and International Affairs. This Directorate includes the sector responsible for policy guidance on the Better Training for Safer Food programme (BTSF). We spoke to him in order to get his views on such issues as how BTSF fits into DG SANCO's overall mission.

BTSF: How does BTSF fit into the broader mandate of DG SANCO?

Bernard Van Goethem: DG SANCO's stated mission is to make European citizens safer, healthier and more confident and it is our view that BTSF goes to the very heart of this mission. Member State control personnel are on the front line in ensuring that food and feed which is placed on the market is both safe and healthy. Moreover, when citizens see that the European Commission takes such controls so seriously as to organise extensive training for national-level personnel, this helps to engender a widespread sense of confidence in the products on the EU market. I would add that the sheer range of subjects now covered by BTSF means that it is integrated into the work of the DG right across the board as it connects to almost every field in which we are involved in one way or another.

BTSF: Would it also be true to say that BTSF makes a considerable contribution to lending a European dimension to control activities?

Bernard Van Goethem: Of course. BTSF aims not only to make controls more efficient but also more harmonised. This was the reason why it was set in the first place and why it continues to work to convey a common understanding of European rules and standards throughout the EU and even beyond. Harmonisation is essential to the well-being of Europe. On a purely economic level, it helps to ensure that everyone is competing on a level playing field and makes intra-EU trade much easier. But going beyond that, ensuring that people across the EU are working under the same conditions and following the same sets of standards effectively helps to foster a sense of holding common values and a feeling of belonging to Europe.



This newsletter provides information on activities organised within the Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) initiative. You'll find the latest news and views about BTSF training and issues related to the initiative as well as upcoming dates for your diary.

BTSF: How does the training respond effectively to changes both of a legislative nature and as concerns disease outbreaks?

Bernard Van Goethem: EU legislation is constantly being updated to respond to new challenges and legislation is at the very centre of BTSF. Our training sector consults with a broad range of colleagues within our DG and throughout the European Commission, as well as in the wider world. This is necessary in order to ensure that our training content is up to speed with new legislative developments. During the first few years of the initiative, new legislation has been introduced on various subjects covered by BTSF, such as animal by-products, plant protection products and food and feed of non-animal origin. This has necessitated a degree of adaptation to the content of our courses. In terms of diseases, new outbreaks can occur anywhere in the world, at any moment and viruses can mutate almost without warning. In order to respond quickly and effectively to such issues, flexibility has always been a hallmark of BTSF, particularly through our organisation of sustained training and assistance missions to third countries and we must ensure this is maintained in the future.

BTSF: In terms of SANCO's current work, in which areas could new initiatives impact on the content of BTSF training in the near future?

Bernard Van Goethem: Animal welfare is an issue which has been the focus of much activity at Commission level recently, particularly with the launch of the new EU Animal Welfare Strategy for the period 2012-15. This strategy is based on an extensive evaluation of EU animal welfare policy which took place during 2009-10. It aims to produce a proposal for a comprehensive animal welfare law, while ensuring more effective enforcement of current provisions. This is particularly pertinent to BTSF given that animal welfare is a subject which has been an integral part of the initiative since its inception in 2006. At first the focus was solely on welfare at slaughter and killing for disease control. This has expanded over the years to include aspects such as welfare during transport and on farms. The content of individual workshops has also been modified so that many of them now focus on welfare issues related to specific species such as pigs, laying hens and broiler chickens. Aside from the standard animal welfare training taking place in the EU, workshops for developing country participants have been organised within the framework of the third country training programme on EU standards so as to promote EU and international welfare standards. A high-level meeting on animal welfare jointly organised and attended by the EU and Canadian authorities also took place in late 2010 as part of BTSF with a view to exchanging experience on implementation of welfare standards. Given the all-encompassing nature of the new animal welfare strategy, it could be envisaged that BTSF animal welfare activities may expand further in the coming years to cover such areas as experimental animals, pets and wild animals in captivity.

Kick-off meetings get 2012 programmes underway



The Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) is now in the process of holding kick-off meetings with representatives of the organisations who were awarded contracts for the organisation of BTSF programmes beginning in 2012. These meetings will enable a range of relevant aspects for the training programmes to be determined such as dates and locations of workshops, as well as various other logistical and content-related issues.

Kick-off meetings form an important part of the Agency's work during the early months of each year. They are vital in order to ensure that everything is in place for the successful implementation of the training which follows. In this sense, they form a bridge between the end of the public procurement process and the beginning of the concrete activity. Once the relevant details are agreed upon between the Agency and the contractors, it is hoped that much of the training should be well underway by the spring.

During 2011, calls for tender were launched for the conclusion of contracts for the management of 13 different training programmes to run in 2012-13. Of these, 11 are EU-based programmes, of which five appear in the BTSF offer for the first time in 2012, while two are for third countries, one of which is on a new subject.

Five new subjects

The five new EU programmes cover: legislation, evaluation and registration of food additives and control of their proper use and marketing; control of residues of veterinary medicinal products in food of animal origin; contingency planning and animal disease control; prevention and control of emerging animal diseases; and principles and methods of food safety risk assessment.

Other subjects of EU programmes on which kick-off meetings are being held are: food contact materials; food hygiene and control of fishery, meat, dairy and baby food products; evaluation and registration of plant protection products and control of their use and marketing; HACCP principles and audit techniques; health of aquaculture animals; and health of bees and exotic zoo animals.

The two programmes aimed at third country participants cover sampling and analysis methods used in the context of official food and feed controls and EU feed rules and feed import requirements; the latter being new for this year.

The bodies who have been awarded the contracts for the organisation of these programmes and with whom EAHC are meeting during the early part of this year are: the AETS consortium; the France Vétérinaire International consortium; the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; Euro Consultants; JVL Consulting; Agriconsulting Europe; and Campden BRI Technology. All of these organisations have extensive experience in the organisation, management and implementation of training in the areas covered by BTSF and this should make for a highly successful year's training.

Upcoming Courses

Border Inspection Points (Airports, seaports and roads/rails)

08 - 11 May 2012, Hamburg, Germany - Seaport
11 - 15 June 2012, Terespol/Kukuryki, Poland - Rail/Road

Animal Welfare

13 - 16 March 2012, Italy - Farming and laying hens and broiler chickens
26 - 29 June 2012, Spain - Killing in disease control situation

Feed Law

26 - 30 March 2012, Rome, Italy - Workshop 7 on Feed Law
07 - 11 May 2012, Copenhagen, Denmark - Workshop 8 on Feed Law
18 - 22 June 2012, Budapest, Hungary - Workshop 9 on Feed Law

Best Practices on Increased Level of Official Controls on Certain Feed and Food of Non-Animal Origin

02 - 04 April 2012, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (indicative dates) - Workshop 7 on FNAO
23 - 25 May 2012, Valencia, Spain (indicative dates) - Workshop 8 on FNAO

BSE/TSE

26 - 30 March 2012, Cyprus - Workshop 6 on TSE
03 - 06 July 2012, United Kingdom - Workshop 7 on TSE

Quality Schemes

17 - 20 April 2012, Warsaw, Poland - Protected Designation Schemes
24 - 27 April 2012, Warsaw, Poland - Organic Farming
29 May - 01 June 2012, Paris, France - Protected Designation Schemes

Audit

06 - 09 March 2012, Bilbao, Spain - Conduct an audit
17 - 20 April 2012, Delft, The Netherlands - Implement an audit
22 - 25 May 2012, Dublin, Ireland - Conduct an audit

Support to Union Controls (FVO)

06 - 08 March 2012, Grange, Ireland - Residues Session 14
13 - 15 March 2012, Grange, Ireland - Meat and Milk Session 15

EU Food Standards

24 - 26 April 2012, Panama - Fishery and aquaculture products
15 - 17 May 2012, Peru - Fruits and vegetables + PPP

Microbiological criteria and control of zoonoses

20 - 23 March 2012, Lisbon, Portugal - Workshop 2 on Zoonoses
27 - 30 March 2012, Lisbon, Portugal - Workshop 2 on Microbiological criteria
24 - 27 April 2012, Dublin, Ireland - Workshop 3 on Microbiological criteria

TRACES in the Member States

April 2012, Slovenia - Course 1 - TRACES at import