



## INTERVIEW



Paolo de Castro, MEP, Chair of the EP's Agriculture Committee

**BTSF asked Paolo de Castro, chair of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, three questions on EU Food Safety policy and the Better Training for Safer Food initiative.**

**BTSF: What is your opinion about food safety policy in the EU?**

**Paolo de Castro:** The European Union has made consumers its top priority, the central concern that everything revolves around, and the ones who deserve the best of the best. EU food safety standards reflect just this. Since 2000, when a major overhaul of food safety law began with the White Paper on Food Safety, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission have worked together to create a comprehensive strategy based on the farm-to-fork approach that ensures a high level of protection of human health and consumers' interests, while exploiting the full potential of the internal market. The latest stage in this process is the EU regulation on food information to consumers. This important measure on transparency and food safety, approved at first reading by the European Parliament last June, will receive its second reading in Strasbourg now that a common position has been reached by the EU Health Council.

**BTSF: What is your opinion of the Commission initiative for Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF)?**

**Paolo de Castro:** Over the past decade, the EU has consistently developed its legislation to protect European consumers with the assurance that food reaching our plates is safe and produced in line with EU

**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.**

food safety standards – which are the reference point worldwide. This gives our agriculture a chance to develop and to withstand the turbulence of recent years. But legislation alone is not enough. Laws have to be executed and implemented in a way that matches what they were really meant to achieve when they were adopted. The European Parliament has been very clear on this subject: new legislation on its own will not resolve problems, as we have just witnessed in some member states. Implementation is crucial, and Better Training for Safer Food is a good example of a right step in the direction of achieving this. Training officials on how to implement adopted legislation is far more effective than constantly updating legislation. The laws are there, and if they are complied with they can bring safe and high quality products to our tables and plates.

**BTSF: Do you believe that EU food standards and EU food safety rules should be promoted worldwide?**

**Paolo de Castro:** BTSF complements wider cooperation programmes from other international organizations and individual EU member states. Many developing countries export agro-food products to the EU, so they need the technical capacity to ensure that their products comply with EU requirements. That makes EU imports safe, and eases the burden of control at EU border inspection posts.

What is needed is the guarantee of a more transparent market, geared towards reciprocal rules, that could generate greater international convergence around EU standards. One of the topics repeatedly discussed by the committee that I have the honour to chair is the importance of ensuring that European efforts on animal welfare, quality and environment are not nullified by a market incapable of recognising the social value of a product.

In this context, appropriate training through BTSF helps countries understand EU principles and rules, helping to promote EU food safety standards around the world. Understanding improves regulatory cooperation, which in turn helps create a better environment for productive capacity and the infrastructure needed for certifying quality of products and processes as compliant with EU standards. Over time, other benefits can be expected, such as raised food safety standards at local level and higher incomes for local producers and processors, and rural populations – thus improving the quality of life and health for local populations, and reducing dependence on international assistance. As is often said, it is better to teach a hungry man to catch a fish rather than merely giving him one. And that is what BTSF is doing – teaching people how to catch a fish in a safe and efficient manner, and how to survive. ■

## NEW COURSES FOR 2011

**BTSF will focus on quality schemes and audits over the coming months. On the basis of tenders last year, contracts are now being finalised for new training schemes in these areas.**

### Quality Schemes

The sessions on quality schemes are a new departure for BTSF, as they cover quality rather than safety. Another novelty is that they are closely linked to the European Commission's Agriculture Directorate General, in a new form of cooperation among Commission departments. The courses cover organic farming and geographical indications, and are mainly addressed to Member State staff in charge of controls of the schemes for organic and protected designations and to the staff of private control bodies to which this task has been delegated. The objective is to disseminate best practices for control procedures, improving knowledge and ensuring consistent and rigorous implementation of rules across the Union. There will be nine three-day training sessions on organic farming and nine three-day training sessions for protected designation schemes.



Vegetables produced under EU regulations

### Supporting EU Controls

One of the programmes on audit focuses on supporting EU controls in Member States and third countries. This too has a novel dimension in that it aims at close cooperation between the Food and Veterinary Office, the Commission and Member States. Its objectives are to increase awareness of FVO working methods and standards, to allow national officials with experience in national audits and control functions to bring their knowledge to the FVO's work, and to boost confidence in the results of audits and controls carried out in other Member States and in third countries. The training is aimed exclusively at Member State staff conducting official controls into compliance with EU feed and food law, animal health and welfare and plant health legislation. There will be 24 three-day training sessions, at the FVO premises in Ireland, each covering methods



FVO Headquarters, Grange, IRELAND

and standards on ethics and reporting systems, background on missions (objectives, legislation involved, history of previous missions, expectations, etc), and one specific area of expertise, ranging from red meat and milk to residue controls, and from food of non-animal origin to genetically modified organisms. ■

### Upcoming Courses

- **Food hygiene and controls**  
09–13 May, Fishery Products, Vigo, Spain  
16–20 May, Meat and Meat Products, Brussels, Belgium  
23–27 May, Milk, Budapest, Hungary
- **Plant health controls**  
24–27 May, Plant Health – Emergency Decisions for Harmful Organisms Typical for Non-Forestry Areas, Milan, Italy
- **Animal by-products**  
10–12 May, ABP6, Vilnius, Lithuania
- **Animal health – aquaculture**  
03–05 May, Fish Health, United Kingdom
- **Bees and exotic zoo animals**  
10–13 May, Prague, Czech Republic
- **SPS**  
02–13 May, Microbiology, Copenhagen, Denmark
- **HACCP**  
09–13 May, Porto, Portugal  
16–20 May, Stratford upon Avon, United Kingdom  
23–27 May, Gothenburg, Sweden  
23–27 May, Bonn, Germany