Supporting research of food and health in Europe (EuroDISH)

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Funded by the European Commission, EuroDISH is assessing the current needs for food and health research infrastructures in Europe. EU-wide research collaborations are essential to improve the efficiency of research resources, and will provide competitive advantage at a global level.

Background

Europe is facing major challenges in promoting health and reducing the disease burden of non-communicable diseases, related to lifestyle, food and nutrition, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.¹

High quality research is essential for policy making to face these challenges - to improve the health of ageing populations and to secure sustainable supplies of safe and high quality foods. Research infrastructures consist of the facilities, resources and services needed by the scientific community to conduct top-level research. These infrastructures are needed to strengthen high quality research and to provide sound knowledge for public health nutrition strategies across Europe.

What is EuroDISH?

The EuroDISH research project aims to provide recommendations on the needs for food and health research infrastructures. It is a three-year project that started in September 2012, led by Wageningen UR (University and Research Centre). The EuroDISH consortium brings together 15 partners, covering a wide range of expertise, from seven countries in Europe.

The work of EuroDISH is organised around the ‘DISH’ model, which comprises four key building blocks of food and health research, as well as different stages of research infrastructure development:

- Determinants of dietary behaviour - finding out why we choose what we eat and drink
- Intake of foods and nutrients - measuring what we eat and drink, and the nutrients used by the body
- Status and functional markers of nutritional health - looking at indicators of nutrient body stores and health
- Health and disease related to foods and nutrients - assessing the links between nutrition and health (diseases, quality of life, ageing, fertility, physiological functions).

The activities in the project are divided into three phases:

1. Mapping existing research infrastructures and identifying gaps, needs and governance issues.
2. Integrating findings within and between DISH pillars (lifestyle behaviour, dietary intake, health status, and public health nutrition strategies), by defining larger entities of required infrastructures and identifying newly arising gaps and needs.

3. Developing a conceptual design with a roadmap for implementation. This will include options for successful governance structures. Two case studies will test pilot research infrastructures, to ensure the recommendations are technically feasible.

Engaging stakeholders

The outcomes of the project will inform the ‘European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures’, other stakeholders, and future EU-funding programmes (Horizon 2020). Ultimately the project will strengthen research on food, nutrition and health, assist policy makers, and increase exploitation of the scientific evidence base towards enhanced competitiveness of the EU food industry. EuroDISH will engage and encourage stakeholders to contribute to and promote the project for sustainable impact of the results.

The project is coming to the end of its first phase. The status quo of food and health research infrastructures has been mapped. The views of stakeholders were actively sought in a workshop. They identified the gaps and needs of current research infrastructures in tackling the aforementioned societal challenges, the key elements of success, and opportunities for new ones.

Further engagement sessions will be held throughout the project. Stakeholders can also contribute to the project online. All parties involved in food and health research are invited to join the discussion forum on the project website at www.eurodish.eu.

Further information
http://www.eurodish.eu

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References