

maintaining Europe's high standards



Consolidation in the food processing industry creates new challenges to food safety standards, but preserving Europe's reputation in this important international market is vital. The coordination of national research programmes in this area is necessary both to avoid duplication and waste, and to focus efforts on areas of the greatest common concern. In preparing the way for a full ERA-NET in Processing for Food Safety, PROFORSAFE will build on an existing network of national research programmes in the Nordic region. This will be extended to cover ten or more EU Member States, candidate and associated countries, and will establish the framework for future transnational and joint research activities.

This is a preparatory project. The consortium will use it to look for additional partners and to define the workplan for a full Coordination Action under the ERA-NET scheme.

Globalisation of the food market and of the industry that supplies it is having dramatic impacts on every link in the chain that stretches from farm and fjord to fork. In particular, the food processing sector and its regulators face major new challenges if they are to achieve and maintain the highest levels of food safety.

Europe as a whole, and the Nordic region in particular, have established valuable reputations for good food safety standards, but will need to work hard to justify and protect those reputations in the future. The European Union has identified food safety as one of its highest priorities, while the Nordic Council of Ministers already requires Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland to participate actively in efforts to ensure sustainable production of safe, high-quality food, and to solve specific problems.

The Nordic Industrial Fund (NI, to be renamed the Nordic Innovation Center from 2004), was established by the Nordic Council of Ministers to manage and finance

transnational research programmes and projects within the region and to create synergy between the national programmes of the Nordic region's five countries. In the area of food-related research, NI coordinates a regional programme in co-operation with five national programmes, each of which has an annual budget of between €2 million and €4 million. The 'NordFood' programme, which can be seen as a Nordic Research Area Network or NRA-NET, has operated with considerable success since 1994, providing a model that could be extended to other countries and sectors.

In the specific field of food processing safety, however, fragmentation still limits the effectiveness of Nordic research. Funding remains insufficient and is not always applied as efficiently as it might be. In June 2002, NI decided to launch a new, dedicated NRA-NET in Processing for Food Safety. NI provided short-term funding for a Nordic Ad hoc Group, and identified five research topics as targets for collaboration and joint activities.

Wider still and wider

However, food safety is a fundamentally international issue, presenting challenges which are too large to be tackled even by the Nordic region as a whole. Taking the Nordic Ad hoc Group both as a model and as a starting point, the NI has launched the ERA-NET Specific support action, PROFORSAFE, as a first step towards the establishment of a European research network in the area of food processing safety.



Specific support action



“ I look forward with pride to contributing to a long-lasting research network that covers all of Europe, which I hope will benefit consumers, the food industry, universities and food research institutes, as well as European and national food authorities. ”

Full title:

Processing for food safety –
Forming the sound basis for the
expansion of a Nordic Research
Area Net to a European Research
Area Net

Research field:

Food safety

Coordinator:

International: Nordic Industrial
Fund

Partners:

- Denmark: The Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
- Finland: TEKES
- Iceland: The Icelandic Centre for Research
- Norway: The Research Council of Norway
- Sweden: VINNOVA
- International: The Nordic Council of Ministers

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PROFORSAFE expects to identify at least five additional EU Member States or candidate countries with an active interest in coordinating the food safety components of their national or regional research programmes with the activities of the existing NRA-NET in Processing for Food Safety. It will extend the current Nordic Ad hoc Group to create a European Ad hoc Group (EAhG) made up of fund and programme managers from these ten or more countries, who will analyse their respective programmes and infrastructures in order to identify strategic research topics in areas of shared interest and complementary capacity. PROFORSAFE will also establish a European Expert Group (EUEG) which will assist the EAhG to define specific scientific and industrial goals within the selected topics, as well as to identify gaps and opportunities for synergy within the existing programmes.

In PROFORSAFE's final stage, the EAhG will develop detailed plans for the extension of the NRA-NET into a Europe-wide ERA-NET in Processing for Food Safety, in the form of a proposal for a full five-year follow-up project.

Voice of the consumer

In addition to its formal outputs, one of PROFORSAFE's most significant achievements will be to increase transparency and trust among national programme managers responsible for research on food safety in the food processing industry.

Direct, sustained and practical collaboration between funders and programme managers from at least ten countries will be required to identify best practice among existing programme management, evaluation, and stakeholder consultation procedures and structures. Building trust and mutual understanding in this way is expected to allow significant complementarities to be identified, and PROFORSAFE hopes to take the first small-scale steps towards the kind of joint and transnational activities envisaged for the subsequent ERA-NET.

Ultimately, the aim of all those involved is to create an 'internal market' for food safety research, to facilitate consumer influence on the development and application of process technology, and to enhance the confidence of international markets in Europe's food processing industry.