

MoniQa

A common approach to food integrity?

A world wide network improves methods to assure that food is safe and provides reliable information to consumers and policy makers

Developing world wide protocols to validate methods of analysis and testing the food quality and safety and so doing guaranteeing at the final consumers that a product on the supermarket shelves is safe. This is one of the major achievements of the European research project MoniQa supported under the Sixth Research Framework Programme by 12.3 million euro and to be completed in 2012 and including partners from all over the world.

How to be sure that a food product is safe? Ensuring that foods we can buy in shops and supermarkets are of a high quality and safe to eat when they reach the consumer requires reliable food analysis techniques. Recent food scares such as BSE, Salmonella and E. Coli outbreaks, Listeria monocytogenes, Acrylamide, Avian influenza, Sudan red, melamine, Ochratoxin, and others have emphasized the importance of protective legislation and powerful analytical test systems to ensure safety of foods.

The MoniQa Network aims to make the food chain safer by contributing to the development and validation of reliable test methods and by harmonising safety and quality testing schemes on a global basis. The achievements of MoniQa will help prevent future food scares and will ascertain safe foods for all of us.

In recent years the market already developed fast and easy test systems to verify for example the presence of allergenic compounds or mycotoxins produced by moulds, in a product: simple test strips or pens generating a few blue lines, such as the ones used to check for pregnancy, are commercially available and within few minutes they can detect the presence of possible dangerous substances in foods or drinks. However who can be sure that consumers can trust the test and that the results are reliable? This is the role of the MoniQa international network. The project developed strategies, guidelines and protocols to make sure that foods right from the farm to the fork are safe in all aspects and meet the desired quality requirements.

One of the strengths of this network is to have a strong international dimension allowing setting food safety and quality standards to be used world wide and so doing harmonizing the rules and the procedures globally. The next steps is to have these standards accepted and adopted by global organisations such as ISO, CEN and Codex Alimentarius in order to validate them for implementation in European and national laws elsewhere in order to enhance the food safety at the same level all over the world.

Finally the project is open to provide information to industry and consumers on food safety and quality. For example, companies can have access for free to the MoniQa data base and having information on methods for testing the safety of the products, or knowing the legal requirements. Consumers can check on the web site (www.moniga.org/factsheet) for reliable validated information on potential risks, prevention measures and other details on the major food related diseases and safety risks such as listeria, allergens or melamine.

Website: www.moniga.org

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