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## **RESEARCH TENDER CALL**

### **TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

**Project Reference No.: 08-2015**


**Project Title: "A needs assessment of food safety knowledge and skills within small or medium-sized food manufacturing enterprises on the island of Ireland"**

#### **1. Objective/Knowledge Gap**

- Identify the most critical gaps in food safety knowledge and skills within small or medium-sized food manufacturing enterprises (SMEs) on the island of Ireland.
- Identify the most practical and effective methods by which these skills needs can be addressed.
- How best can **safefood**'s food safety resources be made available (and in what areas) to augment food safety knowledge and skills across the broadest possible audience within these SMEs.

#### **2. Background**

The 2009 report published by Forfás, *Future Skills Requirements of the Food and Beverage Sector*, by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, acknowledged food safety as one of the issues of concern for RoI consumers with regard to their food and in the context of sustainability<sup>i</sup>. As part of the report methodology, agency representatives, industry and academic institutions were consulted to identify the skills required for the sector and the gaps that existed in the provision of education and training. The report found that the vast majority of the Food & Beverage related postgraduate programmes were food science and technology programmes providing


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students with a specialisation in a number of areas including food safety and food quality. Undergraduate food safety courses were deemed adequate and there were a number of graduate fast track training programmes in the area of food centred on in-company experience and complemented by formal, external modules on critical topics, including food safety. This was corroborated in Northern Ireland in a report on training and skills in the food and drink sector in 2011<sup>ii</sup>. These training programmes were led by Teagasc, FÁS, Enterprise Ireland and a number of other education and training providers. This was corroborated in Northern Ireland in a report on training and skills in the food and drink sector in 2011<sup>iii</sup>. Again both public and private sector training providers were used by the industry, including Further Education colleges such as the College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) at the Loughry campus and the Southern Regional College (SRC).

Despite the availability of education and training courses, the level of uptake by SMEs remains unclear. There may be any number of reasons for this; most probably it is due to time and financial constraints. Furthermore, there is a high level of staff flux throughout the food industry with many personnel not having a technical background resulting in potential deficits in food safety skills. The paradox is that it is now widely recognised that a failure to respond to consumer demands for robust food safety standards will result in commodity products of low quality, a loss in consumer confidence and a loss of market share. To guard against this, SMEs must regard food safety as an opportunity to create competitive advantage, rather than an onerous and costly burden. **safefood** continues to develop a number of resources that could be used to help SME staff increase their knowledge of, and skills in, food safety issues.

### 3. **Approach**

1. Identify where SME personnel on the island get training in food safety issues (1) prior to work, (2) on the job (what mechanisms for on-the-job training are used).
2. Identify and evaluate working models within SMEs to ensure staff are fully trained in food safety issues.

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3. Ascertain the uptake by SME personnel of food safety education and training programmes available from both public and private sources.
4. Identify and evaluate the elements that undermine/prevent food safety training within SMEs.
5. Ascertain the most acceptable and effective methods for imparting food safety information to SME personnel.
6. Ascertain how best **safefood** can utilise its food safety resources to address these needs and identify critical stakeholders (academia, food businesses, development agencies, etc.) with whom collaboration is essential/favourable to achieving this.
7. Ascertain the importance of providing accredited training for different personnel.

#### **4. Technical Specification**

- (a) Scope of research
- (b) Literature review
- (c) Qualitative and quantitative work
- (d) Analysis
- (e) Data handling and Reporting
- (f) Quality assurance

##### **(a) Scope of the research**

Focusing on food SMEs (defined by the EU as an enterprise with 50-249 employees plus an annual turnover  $\leq$  €50m OR an annual Balance Sheet total  $\leq$  €43m), and including 'Micro Enterprises' in the area of food production ( $< 10$  employees plus an annual turnover of  $< €2$ m OR an annual balance sheet total  $< €2$ m), this project will necessitate liaison with both public and private bodies who specifically provide food safety education or training courses for food SME personnel. It will also necessitate liaison with the personnel working in:

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1. SME production facilities to supply domestic, retail/export;
2. SME food retailers;
3. SME Catering establishments.

### **(b) Literature review**

The successful applicant will be expected to conduct a brief review of the broad literature (including published reports, peer-reviewed papers, grey literature, etc.) to ascertain what work, if any has been done with regard to assessing the general food safety knowledge and skills of personnel in SMEs on the island of Ireland. This will include an investigation of similar learnings from other countries in the EU.

### **(c) Qualitative and quantitative research**


In addition to the literature review, expert opinion and analysis will be obtained through in-depth interviews based on a standardised questionnaire (approved by **safefood**) with the different SME stakeholders as outlined in (a) Scope of the research. The successful applicant will be expected to provide full details of the methodology they intend to use.

### **(d) Analysis**

This research will ascertain the food safety training needs of SMEs and the barriers that prevent them from accessing the different education and training courses already available. It will highlight how best **safefood's** current food safety resources can be used and identify new potential resources:-

1. directly by SMEs;
2. incorporated into courses by SME trainers in both the public and private sectors;
3. and through which medium works best for disseminating food safety information to SME personnel.

This will necessitate a thorough familiarisation with **safefood's** food safety resources.

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### (e) Data Handling and Reporting

1. After five months, the contractor will submit to **safefood** an interim report detailing progress for each deliverable of the project.
2. The contractor is responsible for collating all outcomes and a final report will be submitted to **safefood** on completion of the study after 10 months. This will include recommendations for possible further developments including IoI-specific research gaps.
3. All forms, documentation and electronic files must be retained by the contractor until further notice from **safefood** in case of issues arising after the completion of the research.


### (f) Quality Assurance

1. The report must specify all sources of information, whether peer-reviewed publications, expert consultations and correspondence, official policy material, etc.
2. **safefood** will meet with the contractors during the course of the research to assess progress.

## 5. **Proposed Activities/Deliverables**

The key deliverable from this project will be a final report to **safefood**. This will detail:-

- i. a comprehensive review of the broad literature;
- ii. full details of all interviews conducted as part of the research;
- iii. a full analysis of the research theme concerning the food safety training needs of SMEs;
- iv. a full analysis of how **safefood**'s food safety resources could be best utilised and suggestions for new resources;
- v. value added and cost-effective recommendations for possible further developments including IoI-specific research gaps.

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## 6. ***Evaluation of Tenders***

Tender bids will be evaluated according to the quality of proposals and applicants using the following criteria:

### **Quality of the proposal:**

- ✓ Anticipated deliverables;
- ✓ Research method and facilities;
- ✓ Value for money;
- ✓ Potential for application;
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.

### **Quality of Applicants:**


- ✓ Experience in subject area;
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

## 7. ***Duration of Project***

10 months (factoring 1 month for literature review, 8 months for consultations and 1 month for report writing.)

## 8. ***Tender Application Forms and Guidelines***

The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from [www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu). They can also be obtained by emailing [research@safefood.eu](mailto:research@safefood.eu), quoting the project reference number **08-2015**. Alternatively please contact **safefood** as per the details below.

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## References

<sup>i</sup> Future Skills Requirements of the Food and Beverage Sector. Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Forfás. November 2009

<sup>ii</sup> Training and Skills in the Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Sector - Briefing document prepared for Policy and Economics Division, DARD. Agricultural & Food Economics Branch, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. October 2011