

## **Queen's University leads ?3 million food safety project**

EurekAlert

A ?3 million (Euro) research project to improve the safety of animal feeds and the entire European animal-based food chain, has been launched at Queen's University Belfast (Wednesday 23 March).

The global QSAFFE project (Quality and Safety of Feeds and Food for Europe) will deliver better ways to ensure the quality and safety of animal feeds in Europe. It is led by Queen's Centre for Assured, Safe and Traceable Food (ASSET) and involves 11 partners from six countries (UK, Belgium, Holland, Czech Republic, Germany and China).

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Danny Kennedy MLA, announced the project during an international conference at Queen's showcasing the latest developments in food safety and traceability.

Professor Chris Elliott, Director of ASSET at Queen's School of Biological Sciences and co-ordinator of the QSAFFE project said: "'You are what you eat' is a mantra that is often applied to human food consumption. As consumers become more concerned about where their food comes from, the same mantra should be applied to the livestock that produce much of our food.

"The safe production and handling of animal feed has a major impact on the health of our livestock, and ultimately on the quality of the meat, milk and other animal-based food products that we eat and drink.

"As feed, animals and food products often cross national borders, so must efforts to ensure their quality and safety. QSAFFE brings together scientists, academics and industrial companies from across Europe, dedicated to improving the quality of animal feed for the benefit of both livestock and consumers. We will work together to develop better ways to prevent food fraud, identify risks to the food chain, and develop new technology for use at ports, factories and in labs to detect contamination quickly and at low cost.

"The fact that the consortium led by Queen's was awarded this funding against competing bids from across Europe, is testament to the quality of the partnerships and world-class research at the University's ASSET centre."

Minister Danny Kennedy said: "This project is extremely pertinent given the two recent dioxin crises in Europe, both of which were linked to dioxin contamination of animal feed and the inability to detect such contaminations for weeks or even months after they occur.

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"I believe the research being carried out by ASSET and its partners is serving to improve both animal health and also the safety of meat and milk, while delivering new and innovative ways of ensuring produce traceability.

"The combined effect of all of these measures creates a tremendous opportunity for both the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland agri-food sectors to become firmly established as proponents of safe, nutritionally beneficial and ethical foods with a strong local branding and a hallmark of quality."

As one of the leading industrial partners in the project, Belfast-based animal feed producers John Thompson and Sons Ltd will work closely with scientists at Queen's and other QSAFFE partners. The company's Chief Executive Declan Billington said: "Agri-food has long been, and will continue to be, one of the cornerstone industries of Northern Ireland. For too long, the food industry globally has been on the back foot, with innovation in food safety arising as a response to food scares, rather than in advance of them.

"Today sees the start of an ambitious research programme that will provide the global food industry with the opportunity to remain one step ahead of emerging food safety threats. It is Thompson's ambition to see the Northern Ireland agri-food industry lead the way in exploiting the application of this work and assuring buyers from around the world that, in sourcing produce from Northern Ireland, they are not only sourcing the best , but also the safest of any products available in the marketplace.

"For over 100 years the Thompson logo has included a statement to our customers that we hold dear to our hearts. To be 'Pioneers Of Better Feedingstuffs'. Thompson's involvement in this project is a re-affirmation to our customers that we continuing in that 100 year old tradition, as pioneers of better feeding stuffs."

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