



Food biotechnology hits the screen

The European public more readily accepts the use of biotechnology in medicine but is far more wary of biotechnological applications in the agricultural and food sectors. Legitimate concerns have been raised. In order to address them, the EU has funded a major Specific Support Action, the Multimedia Repository on European Food Science (MREFS). The action will enable rational media and public debate on the social, economic and ethical aspects of scientists' work to give Europe safer and healthier food.

The aim of the project is to explain the balance between benefits and risks in food science in a clear and approachable way. MREFS will use a range of resources to bring this discussion into the public forum, but its principal approach will take the form of a series of short concise films on EU-funded food research projects.

Accessing the material

Films are the chosen media here as they are easy to watch and can be widely distributed and broadcast. The team will select 16 European-sponsored projects from the areas of health-promoting foods, sustainable agriculture practices, and research into genomics and food metabolism.

They will make a four-minute film about each project that will be light but stimulating, aiming to introduce discussions on innovation, exploitation of knowledge that has been created, benefits and risks, and social and ethical concerns.

A multimedia library accessible through the internet will be set up to house the films for viewing. It will also store selected background material shot

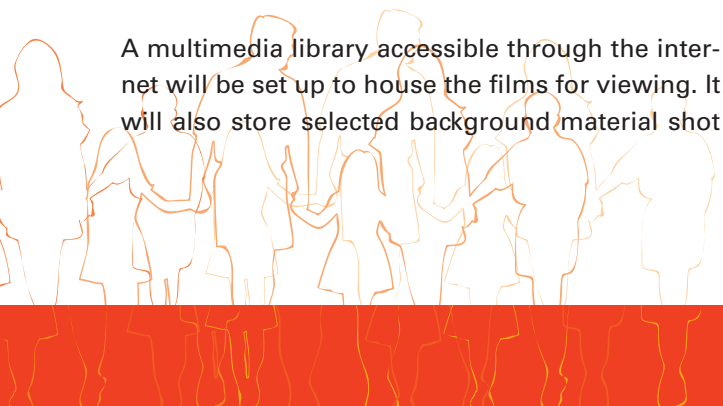
during preparation of the film. All this material can be viewed by the public, used by makers of other documentaries, and should contribute to the public debate.

Communicating the issues

MREFS will target the key stakeholders in society, aiming to narrow the gap between scientists on the one hand and the general public, educators and the media on the other.

The films will be shown by public and private television stations across Europe. They will also be available on video and CD-ROM, screened at schools and colleges and put on the internet. Copies will be sent to target groups suggested by project members and advisors.

Very early in its four-year course, the project will set up a Rapid Response Science Network where the public can hold a continual dialogue with scientists from the advisory board and the research projects featured in the films. It will give educators, media professionals and the interested public the chance to ask questions interactively. The Network will also support three focus meetings during the term of MREFS. They will involve European-wide organisations in helping to enhance the impact of the repository and in finding other practical ways to bridge the gap between science and the public. Feedback will ensure that science moves forward at the pace demanded by social needs and expectations.



organic farming
risk analysis
consumers

health
from farm to fork
food quality

food safety

Full title: A Multimedia Repository
ON European Food Science:
production, quality and safety

ACRONYM: MRFES

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