

A European Network for Food and Environmental Virology

A COST (www.cost.esf.org) Action has recently been established (*Action 929: A European Network for Environmental and Food Virology*) to provide a forum for information sharing and collaborative research planning among European and other scientists in an initiative to address the important problems of virus transmission through food and the environment. Though most viral infections are transmitted by "person-to-person" contact, a significant proportion are contracted through polluted water or contaminated food. Pathogenic viruses causing a variety of diseases such as gastroenteritis and hepatitis can survive and be transmitted through various environments (water, sewage, soil, air, and surfaces) and through foods if they have been contaminated during growth (such as irrigation of salad crops) or during preparation. This has important implications for public health at an international level.

The aim of COST 929 is to increase the knowledge of the role of the environment and food in the transmission of enteric viral disease. It will establish systems for effective European responses to viral hazards, and promote best practices to safeguard food and the environment from contamination with viruses. The network will gather information and knowledge on food-borne and water-borne viruses, and the public health implications of food and environmental contamination. The Action will also, through cooperation between European experts and research teams, develop strategies for controlling food and environmental contamination. Knowledge and skills will also be shared through exchange of scientific personnel between laboratories. The outcomes of the Action will be disseminated to various European stakeholders (scientists, industry, regulators, policy-makers, and the public), and they should lead to a better understanding of the role of food and the environment in the transmission of viruses.

The network is managed by a Committee consisting of representatives from each country which has signed up to the Action, and is divided into four Working Groups ("Current and Emerging Issues", "Analytical Methods", "Data Analysis", and "Stability of viruses"). The first meeting of the Working Groups takes place at the University of Wageningen in May 2007. The network is currently organising an international symposium "Current Developments in Food and Environmental Virology" to be held at the University of Pisa in October 2008.

For further information please see the Action's website (<http://www.cost929-vironet.org/>)