



e-MENSA

E-platform Technologies for the European Agri-Food Supply Chain

Position Paper

Executive summary

The e-MENSA project is a Specific Support Action funded within the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission. The project started in February 2005 and will end in July 2006. The rationale of the project is based on the understanding that solutions to food chain problems can be found through **improved supply chain sustainable management infrastructures**. Weak points in European food supply chains are co-operation between players and information transfer from the farm to the consumer and from the consumer to the producer. The project addresses the possibility of increasing safety and quality standards of the complete food chain introducing innovation-based management, which consists of electronic platforms.

An **e-Platform** is defined as a software infrastructure on which other programmes that provide specific functionalities (applications) can run and communicate with each other supporting a user in the performance of complex tasks through the coordinated set of functionalities it provides. Interesting examples of e-platforms in the food industry exist but none of these has yet achieved a fully collaborative approach.

The common position of the experts and stakeholders involved in the project focuses on the following issues:

a) E-platforms are built on a pre-existing collaboration between supply chain players.

Collaboration between players evolves from the joint definition of common food chain objectives which bring benefits to each member. The overriding objective is increasing competitiveness, but other objectives can also be logistic optimisation along the food chain, targeting niche markets for speciality foods, transparency, need for standards, reverse logistics, traceability, product liability, addressing dominating positions. Once the supply chain plans to collaborate, the e-platforms represent a necessary infrastructure.

b) Food quality and safety are positively affected by e-platforms.

First of all collaborative e-platforms contribute to improve transparency and the updating of regulations and norms for all food chain members. This is also felt by food chain players and consumers as an important element of confidence and trust in the food chain. Moreover, quality and safety were identified as a more complex issue now involving social responsibility, health issues, fair trade and much more.

c) E-platforms improve food supply stability and food chain integrity.

Improving the integration of agriculture with processes and players beyond the farm-gate and establishing a long-term partnership between food chain actors will increase food production stability and harmonise the authenticity, integrity, safety and quality standards of production. This will strengthen the competitiveness of the European food system, particularly concerning Small and Medium Enterprises in the agri-food chain.

