Progression of food industry technical and food safety support for manufacturing and processing small and medium-sized enterprises in Wales, UK.

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Introduction

A key priority in European Union, UK and Welsh Government strategic plans and policies includes increased sales/growth of the food and drink sector by 30% by 20201. In response to the lack of sector technical support in Wales, UK, the KITE (Knowledge Innovation Transfer Exchange) feasibility project was developed and implemented between 2008-20152.

KITE was designed to meet food and drink sector business and Government strategic needs and outputs were significant including 1861 new jobs/intentions, £163m increased sales, 859 new products developed and 83 third-party accreditations2. Post-2015, the KITE model was further developed to continue technical support to the food/drink sector in Wales.

Purpose

The aim of this study was to determine Welsh food-sector technical needs post-KITE and identify optimised delivery mechanisms for food safety and technical support in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Methods

• Interviews with SME managers (n=8) and review of >90 KITE knowledge transfer programme documentation/reports enabled collation of qualitative data evidencing business need for continued food safety/technical support post-KITE.
• Priority actions for industry engagement were determined from consultations with Welsh FDMR SMEs (n=45), knowledge-based technologists (n=9), Pan-Wales Food Centres (n=3) and Welsh Government strategists.

Results

Welsh food industry need for continuation of KITE was informed by the following:
• The success of the KITE Project, with outputs associated substantial SME growth, increased employment, NPD, technical accreditation and increased food safety/technical knowledge3.
• Establishment of an effective knowledge transfer mechanism and accessible technical support for SMEs.
• Direct feedback from the Wales Food Industry Board and qualitative research with private sector industrial partners (for examples of quotes see Figure 1).

Overall, KITE evaluation findings2 indicated the critical need and demand for continuation of the KITE project with a secondary transition, post 2015.

KITE and Project HELIX delivery structures found in Figure 2 illustrate the single knowledge transfer mechanism implemented by KITE feasibility study4 and the transition to the Project HELIX framework, designed to engage with Welsh FDMRs with increased flexibility to respond to an individual business needs.

Key priority actions related to HELIX activities were identified as food innovation, food strategy and food efficiency (see Figure 2); these concepts provide core pillars for 18 Project HELIX activities5. Activities aim to increase SME growth, jobs, regeneration, innovation / sustainability, increase NPD, embed technical knowledge / skills, reduce waste production and improve environmental impact associated with the food sector.

Project HELIX management, operations and monitoring systems6 evolved by incorporating ‘lessons learned’ from the KITE feasibility study. Required Project HELIX Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and output targets are found in Table 1.

Conclusions

• The innovative progression of the KITE model with Project HELIX has facilitated continued SME food-safety/technical support to enable business growth, innovation and sustainability.
• Project HELIX implementation also matches Welsh Government strategic objectives for the food-sector and is prototypical for international application.

References


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