



THE CONTRIBUTION OF HELLENIC FOOD AUTHORITY TO THE TRAINING FIELD OF FOOD BUSINESSES STAFF FROM THE AUTHORITY ESTABLISHMENT TO ITS MODERN REORGANIZATION

*Elias CHAIDOUTIS¹, Dimitrios KOSTAKIS¹

Hellenic Food Authority

Directorate of Training, Communication & IT.

Athens, Greece, echaidoutis@gmail.com,

*Corresponding author

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Abstract: *The Greek Government among other reformative measures in the field of Public Administration promotes the public sector rationalization in order to be managed more effectively and more efficiently in view of the strict fiscal policy which is currently being applied in Greece. In the context of the State transformation, the Ministry of Rural Development and Food proceeds to the organizational reorganization of the supervising bodies. Hellenic Food Authority (EFET) since its establishment up to nowadays has significantly contributed to the achievement of its mission through the training of food businesses staff. This article reports with conciseness the EFET work that concerns training subjects of food businesses staff before the modern revision of the authority organization. The EFET administration proceeded to the approval of the revised authority organization with purpose of its more effective function, continuing to offer its training services to the new configuration aiming to the protection of Greek consumers in the food sector.*

Keywords: *Training, food business staff, food safety, trainer registry, reorganization, Hellenic Food Authority.*

1. Introduction

The European policy evolution for food safety

European citizens must have access to safe and healthy foods which meet the highest strong specifications [1,2]. Food legislation has been a major issue of public interest within the European Union. Effective food control as well as achievement of a high safety level constituted an aim which can be achieved through assurance of food hygiene and safety as well as the effective protection of the interests of European consumers [3]. Nowadays, the European Union (EU) constitutes a global example for defining high specifications for food safety [1]. Most of 100.000 adequately trained inspectors who have specialized inspection capabilities control with impartiality and independence 25 million food businesses annually throughout length

of the agro-food chain on the basis of farm-to-table policy to guarantee the safety approximately 500 million EU consumers. The European Union (EU) tried to capture the conversation about the foundations of food legislation. Thus, in 1997, EU published the Green Paper which goes after the completeness of legislation over the expectations of European consumers and food businesses, the principles of impartiality, independence and effectiveness of official food control in order to provide healthy and safe food on the market [3]. Also, the aim of the Green Paper was the submission of proposals on behalf of the European Commission to receive suitable measures for the development of the EU Legislation for food.

Table 1.

Key objectives of the Green Paper on EU food legislation.

1. Ensuring a high level of Public Health and Consumer safety
 2. Ensure free movement of goods in the internal market
 3. Ensure legislation based on risk assessment and scientific data
 4. Ensuring the competitiveness of the food industry and enhancing exports
 5. Set primary responsibility for food business operators and use HACCP principles
 6. Ensure coherent and rational legislation “from the stall to the table”
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Source: European Commission, 1997

2. The scientific approach in the food sector and the establishment of competent authorities

In order to put foundations of scientific approach in the food sector in EU level, European Parliament issued on 25th February 1993 the Directive 93/5/EEC with aim to provide assistance towards Member States and their cooperation with European Commission over scientific evolution and examination of food-related issues [4]. Concerning the enactment of competent authorities which can cooperate and assist Commission for food sector, receiving of necessary measures on behalf of Member States is predicted by the Directive. Specifically, particular importance is given to the public health protection through cooperation of scientific disciplines that associated with food sector. The scientific disciplines which are involved in the EU Directive are branches of medicine, nutrition, health, biology, toxicology, food technology, chemistry etc. [4]. As regards the content of cognitive

object, the distribution of experts for the application of HACCP principles is identical at any stage of food chain is required [5,6].

Each Member State should define a specific responsible authority for the effective function of the cooperation procedure. In Greece, the responsibilities that related to the food sector were being distributed to different bodies and exerted separately depending on scientific character of body. Particularly, the Ministry of Agriculture (today, it is called Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food) was responsible for the primary production and the animal and vegetable foods, the Ministry of Health was responsible for public health and hygiene issues, the Ministry of Development was competent for industry and the Ministry of Finance (General Chemical State Laboratory) that was responsible for the

conduct of laboratory tests of chemical factors [7].

Different facts in the late 1990s which concerned food have shown that, there is a need for enactment of general principles and rules for food and feed at EU level. In this context, the European Commission designed a completed approach in the food safety “from farm to table” which is illustrated in the White Paper for Food Safety. This approach covers all the food chain sectors such as feed production, food processing and storage as well as transport and retail sale [1]. As continuation of the Green Paper of European Commission for Food Legislation, the current legislative framework is proposed through the White Paper (general food safety legislation, food hygiene package, official controls) [2].

3. EFET establishment and its enactment as competent authority to the food sector in Greece

The Greek Government with application of EU common perception in the food sector established Hellenic Food Authority (EFET) under act no. 2741/1999 [8]. The basic purpose of EFET is the consumer protection and the transference reinforcement [7,8]. All responsibilities of Ministries and organizations that is associated with food sector and separately exerted are accumulated in EFET [9] by aiming the hygiene assurance and concurrently the protection of consumers. Similarly, the distribution of EFET staff is come from the whole range of scientific disciplines that related with food sector [10].

The bodies (public services, ministries etc.) from whom EFET responsibilities come from become co-competent, their executive authorities take part in configuration of policy for food safety

[7,10,11] and the control authorities remain in their responsibilities area by participating in the single framework of official controls on the basis of the planning of the competent authority [10,12].

EFET has exclusive responsibility for determining of food quality specifications, the accomplishment of official control and the enforcement of sanctions. The above fact doesn't affect the mission of Ministries and services that already possessed the relevant responsibilities because their executive authorities become co-competent bodies to the co-configuration of policy for the food controls through National Control Policy Council for Food. The authority was developed at central executive level and regional control level [7] Specific aims of EFET are the prosecution of businesses to food businesses, the provision of technical assistance such as the training of businesses staff as well as the communication with consumer with purpose its training about food safety issues as well as its information [12].

4. Executive role of Training, Communication and Information Technology Directorate.

EFET in addition to fulfillment of inspections is responsible for assisting in food businesses at technical level such as training of businesses staff and inspectors and communication with consumers by aiming to their training on food safety issues and their information on EFET responsibility issues [7,9]. Considering the factors which contribute to the achievement of the EFET goals, directorates with executive character are created in its central service (**Figure 1**).

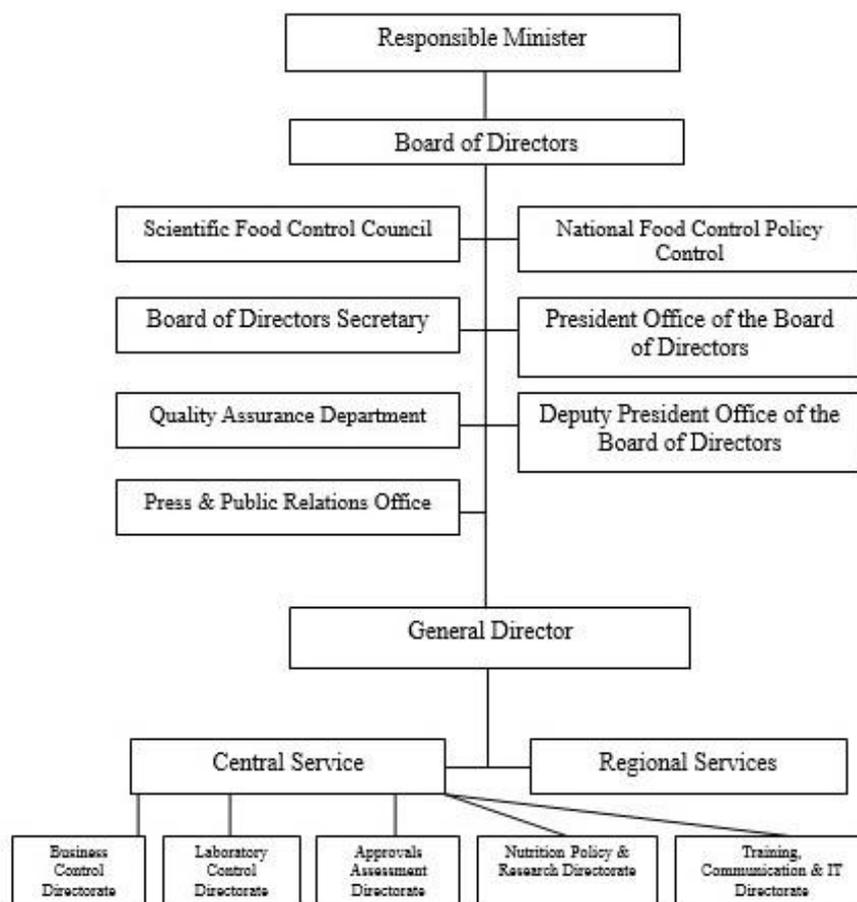


Fig.1 EFET development according to its initial organization (PD 223/2000).

Source: Hellenic Food Authority, 2000

The creation of Training, Communication and IT directorate had the following targets:

- I. The fulfillment of responsibilities that concern the staff training of executive authorities in order to achieve a uniform accomplishment of inspections and the cultivation of interdisciplinary cooperation.
- II. The training provision to the food businesses staff by reinforcing the effectiveness of market operation and the contribution to the health protection of consumers.
- III. The information provision to the consumers with aim its education about

nutrition, safety and other issues that is relevant with EFET responsibilities.

The Training, Communication and Information Technology Directorate were the competent service for continuous training of the EFET staff and the representatives of professional branches, the communication with consumers, food businesses and professional branches. The Directorate included the Training, Communication and Information Technology and Computerization Departments [9]. The Training Department has been responsible for devising of the necessary training programs for the representatives of food professional

branches, the EFET staff and the keeping of relevant records. The Communication Department was competent for food businesses information and any other interested body about the current legislation on food control issues and information of consumers on EFET responsibility issues through newsletters, multimedia and any other appropriate media. Finally, Information Technology Department had responsibilities which are related to informatics (software and hardware).

In order to fulfill its mission and by amending its founding Law under no. 2741/1999 (Law 3438/2006, issue A, Official Government Gazette, 33/14.02.2006), EFET extends its competence with the possibility to develop compulsory training programs for food business staff and the granting of a certificate of successful follow-up of these programs after the evaluation of the trainees by a three-member committee of EFET employees, who are defined by decision of its Board of Directors [13]. Following the authorization given by law, the responsible Development Minister issued the 14708/2007 Ministerial Decision (Official Government Gazette, issue B, 1616/17.08.2007) for the determination of the terms and conditions for the preparation and approval of the compulsory training programs of food businesses staff which belong to the EFET responsibility [14]. The same Ministerial Decision arrange the terms and conditions of training of co-responsible controls authorities and the bodies that exert official control to food such communal legislation defines [15,16].

EFET proceeded to the constitution of trainers' registry from which the trainers should be selected by interested implementation body of training, has developed a training package with a basic

training manual, slides and audiovisual material that is exclusively used by the registered trainers who take part in EFET programs in order to ensure homogeneous overall and integrated training of food businesses staff [17].

5. EFET training actions for the food businesses staff

Training which concerns the food hygiene is an objective with fundamental importance for the operation of food businesses [18]. Unsuitable practices of handling can provoke food contamination resulting in appearance of food-borne diseases and harm to the health of consumers [5,19]. Staff must know its role about the food protection from contaminations. Food handlers must have necessary knowledge and skills so that they can handle food with a sanitary acceptable manner [18,20]. The staff training is legal requirement of Regulation (EC) 852/2004 [14,21]. According to Codex Alimentarius, food handlers are considered persons who "handle directly packaged or unpacked food, food equipment and utensils or surfaces in contact with food" [5].

The Directive 93/43/1993 is issued by European Communities Council in order to be regulated issues about the food hygiene [22], this Directive predicted the training of food handlers depending on executed works. Greek Government has complied with Directive by adopting Joint Ministerial Decision 487/2000 for the food hygiene. By 2004, EFET takes care of the training of food businesses staff through training actions (e.g. training of food handlers which are volunteers in the limits of the Olympic Games, training of catering facilities staff of hoosegow etc.) [12] by using of training material (training manual and video) which includes 62 knowledge

assessment questions with 5 thematic areas about food hygiene (**Table 2**) according to

Joint Ministerial Decision 487/2000 [23].

Table 2.
Knowledge assessment questions per thematic area of basic training manual on the food hygiene.

Questions thematic areas	Measurements number
Microbes world	14
Food contamination and food poisoning	16
Food safety-supplies/receiving	10
Keeping food safe	11
Safe preparation before serving	11

Source: Hellenic Food Authority, 2004

The assessment writing examinations took place at implementation place by the program executor after the end of the procedure, by using questions from the basic training manual and the relevant documents are sent to the EFET after the program completion. By 2006, the number of trained food handlers was estimated at 56,100 [11]. After the adoption of Ministerial Decision with number 14708/2007 which regulates the terms and conditions for development and approval of compulsory training programs for food businesses staff the procedure takes different direction [14]. The aim of training programs is the quality assurance and the production of safe products for the consumer protection. The certification is given to food handlers who will successfully complete their assessment to the examinations which are organized and conducted by EFET [14].

Training helps to the accomplishment of Regulation (EC) 852/2004 requirement for the food hygiene. This Regulation predict that, food businesses managers ensure

training concerning food hygiene for those who handle food within their limits businesses as well as those who are responsible for training and maintenance of procedures based on the HACCP principles [21]. The procedure is applied to the businesses staff who processes, stores, transports, distributes food or deals with retail, food sale, mass catering, confectionery or is a food production, processing lab with small capacity. Excluded from the compulsory character of participation in training programs of EFET are the businesses that apply the HACCP principles to full development due to reasons of hazard control in the limits of their responsibility [14]. Also, after modification of Ministerial Decision ordinances, excluded from the procedure is the staff that has a certificate which clearly shows that the food handler is adequately trained in food safety and hygiene matters [24]. The least content which is approved by EFET as well as the terms and conditions that are put in the context of adults' training are followed for the

accomplishment of training programs. The programs can last for 8 to 12 hours and after the completion of program, the participators food handlers take part in examinations for their knowledge assessment [14].

From the beginning of new training framework for the food businesses staff to 2012, the total of participators food handlers in the EFET writing examinations is come up to 2148. Specifically, for the year 2012, became 87 training programs in which 1180 food handlers participated from 360 food businesses throughout Greece [25]. The last numerical data which are cited by EFET show that the number of trainees exceeds 60000 food handlers [26].

6. Registry of the food business trainers

Taking into account the legislation for hygiene and safety of food, the National policy and European strategy for the training of involved in food chain, EFET structured a registry of trainers according to the article 11 of the law 3438/2006 with purpose the improvement of the training system, the quality assurance of provided training services and the enhancement of training force through programs of food

businesses staff, authorities and control bodies [17].

The meaning of training for staff that is involved in the production and control of food as well as the trainer who should have typical and substantive qualifications which are required for carrying out of the specific work or profession as well as the necessary knowledge and skills for the approach of trainees are determined by adopting of the Ministerial Decision 14707/2007 which is authorized by the above law. Also, administrative matters about the provision of training work by civil servants who are enrolled in the registry as well as matters concerning conflict of interests are defined in Ministerial Decision ordinances [17].

The registry of the food businesses trainers includes information about the typical qualifications and the professional and teaching experience of the trainers and their additional information (pedagogical training, participation in other training programs etc.). The registry is accepted registrations by persons who possess diploma that is relevant with the food sector (**Figure 2**).

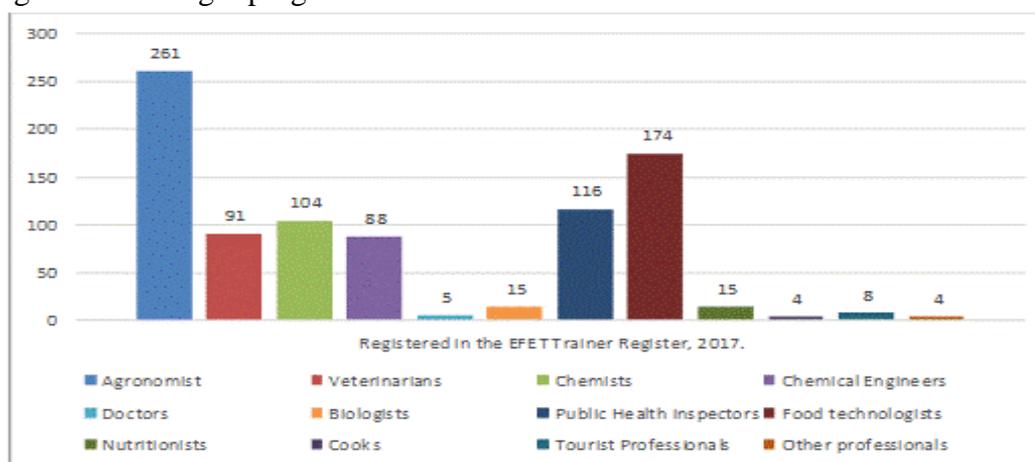


Fig.2 Registered in the register of trainers of food businesses staff per professional field.

Source: Hellenic Food Authority, 2018

Therefore, the conditions for interdisciplinary approach in the staff training food sector are created. Currently, about 900 registered trainers from various specialties are found in the registry of trainers of food businesses staff [27].

7. Modern data on the structure of EFET training services

Greek Government, among others reformative measures promoted in the field of public administration, promotes the rationalization of the public sector so that it can be managed more effectively and efficiently in view of strict fiscal policy implemented in conjunction with the accomplishment of the stability program [28]. In the context of the transformation of reformative actions that have been decided by the Greek Government for each Ministry, the organizational reorganization of the state services is included as a basic purpose.

Following the above government policy, the EFET Boards of Directors proceeded in the approval of the revised EFET organization and its mission under the supervision from Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food. Subsequently, with the publication of Presidential Decree number 71/2018, EFET acquired a new organizational chart [29,30]. According to the revised plan of the EFET organization, the body services have changed with the creation and abolition of organic structures as well as the scientific disciplines of the food sector that assist the body works.

From the beginning of the EFET new organization force, the Training, Communication and Information Technology Directorate is abolished and its services are reshaped. The reformative training department is under the new Directorate for Risk Assessment and Nutrition [30].

As regards, the training of food businesses staff, at the body mission, among others is included the care of continuous training of food businesses staff according to the requirements of food legislation. At the new training department remains the issue of circulars and guidelines for the definition of the training programs content and the responsibilities about the approval process of the training programs for food businesses staff, the maintenance of implementation terms and conditions as well as the good performance control of the training programs of the food businesses staff, the conduct of the evaluation procedures for the trained food operators and the issue of the relevant certificate in the Administrative and Financial Services Directorate (human resources department) [30]. The accomplishment of the training programs for business staff falls under the General Directorate, since it has not been included in any particular organizational unit.

8. Conclusions

Food in the European Union should be safe and healthy. Community legislation includes a total of rules which guarantee the achievement of this aim. Member States must apply the food legislation, attend and verify if relevant requirements are observed by responsible of businesses at all production, processing and distribution stages of food through the official controls [15, 16].

Concerning food safety, the people behavior is an important aspect of food businesses management and bodies which configure the public policy due to epidemic outbreaks of food-borne explanation occurrences which are due to inadequate food handling [5,31]. Hellenic Food Authority due to its responsibilities

plays a significant role in the configuration of the policy for food safety with determination of terms and conditions for the effective training of the food businesses staff [7]. Following the publication of the 71/2018 Presidential Degree in the Government Gazette, the new organization of EFET has been put in application. The EFET reorganization is expected to offer more possibilities to the provision of its training services on the sector of food businesses staff as well as correct inexpediencies which are created and detected since its establishment up to nowadays with the aim to protect the Greek consumer's health in the food sector [29]. However, time is required for the application of new organization in order to

10. References

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demonstrate its adequacy in comparison with objective needs of the food businesses, to cover gaps and clarify unclear ordinances about its services responsibilities in the sector of the food businesses staff training [30].

9. Conflicts of Interest

This article presents part of the work of the authors in the Training, Communication & Technology Directorate of the Hellenic Food Authority and also their critical view. Publishing of this article does not imply acceptance of the author's opinions on behalf of the organization. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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