

# Advancing Food Regulatory Affairs

## New Unique MSc degree in Food Safety Law in Europe

Starting September 2012 the Food Law and Food Science groups of Wageningen University in the Netherlands offers an interdisciplinary technical-legal degree at graduate level, fully taught in the English language. Open to graduates from all parts of the world, this specialisation is first of its type in Europe and aims to make a marked contribution to quality of food regulatory affairs staff at businesses, authorities and academia.



By Dr. M.C. Kühn\*

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### FILLING A CRITICAL GAP

The food sector, the largest production sector in Europe, is one of the most heavily regulated sectors in the European Union (EU). Regulatory interaction between businesses and authorities is intense. The introduction of far-reaching European food regulations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, together with countless existing rules and regulations in the Member States, poses a high demand on regulatory affairs professionals. Mistakes are very costly to companies, yet formal education in this area has been scarce.

Companies often have to train their new regulatory affairs personnel by means of specific short courses which often proves insufficient. A further complicating factor is that food regulation is to a large extent science based; it requires understanding both of law and of natural sciences. The new Master of Food Safety Law fills this critical gap. It is open both to life science graduates (BSc) and non-food graduates such as

lawyers (LLB) and business administrators (BBA).

### BROAD SCOPE

The MSc Food Safety Law curriculum attends questions on the European food market, case law, liability over food problems, the *instrumentarium* to place a new product on the market and beyond. Students with a science background are brought up to standard in legal matters and students with a law background are taught the essentials of food science.

The programme consists of a variety of courses that combine: *Food Law* to provide a structured analysis of EU requirements on food safety, such as market authorisation, food safety targets, hygiene, labelling, enforcement, private standards and international food law addressing WTO and Codex Alimentarius; *International and American Food Law* to carry out comparative law analyses in international food law (WTO,



Photo: Patrick van der Sande

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SPS, TBT, Codex Alimentarius) and American Food Law, from an EU food law perspective; comparative understanding of organisations such as JECFA, FDA and EFSA; and of concepts and procedures e.g., American GRAS vs. European approval of novel foods; *Chinese Law for Food and Agriculture* is of an explorative nature and provides basic knowledge to deal with the increasing importance of China as import and export destination for the European and American food businesses; *Intellectual Property Rights* analyses patents, trademarks, breeders' rights and the like from the perspective of the food sector; it discusses patentability of foods and living organisms, and the impact of the appropriation of ideas, and trains in patent search.

#### BEYOND TECHNICAL-LEGAL

As assuring food safety goes beyond technical-legal, the legal aspects of the curriculum of the Masters in Food Safety Law is complemented by courses in management, science and communication, such as: *Food Law, Management and Economics* which deal with the impact of food law on businesses; *Food Quality Management*; *Risk Communication*; *Risks Associated with Foods*; *Food Toxicology*; and others.

Practical functioning in the work environment is trained by *team work projects*, used for example to learn how to manage large scale food safety problems; and actual *internships* in a food business, an authority or other relevant player in the food sector or academic research.

#### WIDE APPLICABILITY

Food Safety Law masters graduates can work

in food businesses, with legislative and regulatory authorities nationally and internationally, in academia, specialised law firms, consumer and lobbying organisations, NGO's. The knowledge and skills acquired help graduates in their jobs not only in Europe, but also in many other countries in the world.

#### THE BEGINNING

When Wageningen University designed its successful Food Safety Masters programme in 2003, it was already anticipated that the discipline of Food Safety Law would be an essential part of the curriculum. In 2004 the first Food Law course was introduced by Prof. Bernd van der Meulen, Head Chair Group Law and Governance and Professor of Food Law. In the course of the years, the other courses of the Food Safety Law curriculum have been introduced. It was just a matter of time that all of these courses would be put together into a new interdisciplinary and highly useful Masters specialisation, benefiting from years of experience and aiming to make a marked contribution to quality of food regulatory affairs staff at businesses, authorities and academia.

#### INFO/STUDENT INTERNSHIPS

The MSc-specialisation in Food Safety Law ([www.mfs.wur.nl/UK/Programme/](http://www.mfs.wur.nl/UK/Programme/)) is a two-year programme, in the English language, and consists of one year of courses and one year of thesis research and internship. The internships and research can be carried out in businesses, institutions and other organisations. Requests for student interns are already being received via email to:

[internships@foodlinkforum.com](mailto:internships@foodlinkforum.com)

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**Wageningen University**, founded in 1876, acquired world renown because of its unique university model exclusively dedicated to life sciences, food and food production, and dealing with each part of the food chain. It is a highly international university, counting with students from over 100 countries. The university forms part of **Wageningen University and Research Centre** with a total staff of over 8,000 professionals in research and academia.

Read more: [www.wageningenuniversity.nl/UK/about/](http://www.wageningenuniversity.nl/UK/about/).