# FOOD INFORMATION TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE (FITI) KICK-OFF MEETING
## Scotland House, Place Schuman, Brussels, 20 March 2012

## FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

### Introductory Session

The meeting chair, Dr Herman Koëter (Orange House Partnership) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. He explained that the meeting will not be a sit-and-listen event; instead participants are expected to actively participate in the discussions, share their ideas, suggestions and concerns and provide input to the discussions. He further explained that the objective of FITI is to bring together the public and private sector parties and reach consensus on a wide range of food information items. The process will be driven by the participants, i.e. stakeholders from both public and private parties. Consumer involvement is crucial and societal input will be sought through networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

A Tour de Table was made: all attendees introduced themselves and explained their respective affiliation and interest in the project. The list of participants is attached to this report.

### Project Introduction

Presentation by Herman Koëter (Orange House Partnership)

Mr Koëter gave a general overview of the project and its building blocks. He pointed out that the objective of FITI is the provision of objective, factual information by electronic means. This information does not replace the required on-pack information as laid down in the new Food Information regulation (Regulation EU No 1169/2011). It creates the possibility to provide much more information on food items than possible by on-pack information alone. Background information can be provided to clarify statements on the label (such as an explanation of what is meant by using the word 'natural') or to provide factual information on issues such as the function and safety of E-numbers. Producers may appreciate to be offered the possibility to provide all sorts of factual information, e.g. on traceability, quality specifications of ingredients, etc. In addition to purely factual information, the project also offers the option to address ethical issues that require a certain level of judgement (such as how one defines child labour).

Mr Koëter further explained that all stakeholders will be asked to adhere to a Code of Ethics which will describe that all agree to provide only truthful information and make all efforts to monitor compliance with agreed principles and criteria. Mr Koëter also stressed that priorities within FITI will be set by the participants, not by the Project Management Team. The amount of work that can be tackled in one year is largely dependent of the available budget to which the private sector should not contribute more than 50%; the other half should come from the public sector to keep the balance and ensure that FITI will be perceived as a project of all stakeholders.

Presentation by Freek van Eijk (Caesar ICT Experts)

Mr Van Eijk demonstrated how food information would be made available by a smart phone or scanner in the shop. He showed the application structure that includes the option to mark a number of personalized items (currently four) and nine information categories, each providing three or more subsequent detailed levels of information. He pointed to the

differences with other systems including the fact that in FITI the information remains with the producer, at a dedicated web-server. Hence, there is no central database and only the producer has insight in what information about its product the consumer is interested in.

Presentation by Louis Van Nieuwland (Schuttelaar & Partners)

Mr Van Nieuwland outlined the process of an online stakeholder dialogue. He indicated that there will be dialogue rounds on each of the currently nine defined and prioritized information categories. Each dialogue round will start with a challenging interview with a high profile individual followed by a forum discussion. Reports of these will be circulated and posted for comments and suggestions by social media and (stakeholder) expert groups. This well documented process will be repeated, when needed involving face-to-face meetings, until consensus seems within reach.

The discussion phase will start with an explorative research of existing initiatives in the particular area and the mobilization of stakeholders to join the discussion. The digestion stage (when consensus is close) will include consumer research and experts review. Finally, the Stakeholder Forum, that will include high level professionals, will formally endorse the consensus outcome.

**General Discussion 1**

In response to a question from the representative of the Dutch Ministry of Health the Chair said that the project does not consider discussions on what is already legally required. The debate will be on what additional detailed information could be provided. It will go a step further than the required information. For example on how child labour should be defined.

The representative of the European Commission DG INFSO pointed out that it is crucial that there will not be a centralized database, that consensus should be reached on the public availability of information and that no new trust mark is needed. He added that there is no structural control of the content and the end use of the information. FITI provides a platform for all stakeholders and facilitates the consensus building process. The Chair confirmed that there will be no central storage or maintenance of data and that the project will not redo things that have been done already elsewhere at a level appreciated by all. The project looks to what has been done and include information from existing apps. One of its strengths will be that all will sign the Code of Ethics, once agreed by all.

The representative of the Eurogroup for Animals stressed that the project should not be largely driven by the private sector. She noted that only two NGOs are present today and wondered how they would be heard and maintain their credibility on such issues as sustainability. She believed that on such aspects there will be a judgement, not only factual information. The Chair explained that all participating parties whether supporting the project financially or not would have an equal say in the discussions and that the objective is to find criteria and approaches all stakeholders could agree on. Consequently, even one NGO could block the consensus until a solution has been found satisfactory to all. He further mentioned that in addition to NGOs there will be other public sector participants including national food management authorities.

The representative of GS1 questioned whether the framework that was presented by Freek van Eijk was final. Mr Van Eijk responded that the 'app' as presented was only meant as a clarifying example of how the smart phone 'app' would function. The framework used in the 'app' is a prototype and will be further developed following the consensus building process of the Stakeholder Forum. Friso Coppes (Bureau Brussels) added that the strength of the

project is not so much the 'app' as such, but what is behind it. Transparency, factual information and absence of a central database are the buzzwords.

**Focused Discussion 1: Existing Initiatives and Draft Overview of Possible Themes**

For the respective focussed discussions, Room Documents were distributed among the participants. The Chair explained that Room Documents are generally used (as is the case in many international organizations) as discussion documents to facilitate a particular discussion during a meeting. Consequently, Room Documents do not have a formal status and are not intended for distribution other than among the meeting participants (the Stakeholders).

Room Document 1 provides an overview of different certification initiatives that attempt to define sustainability. The purpose of this document was to give an indication how layered a certain concept can be and how existing third party certification initiatives cover this. Attempts by third party certification initiatives to cover certain concepts can provide an entry point for FITI to define concepts using the stakeholder discussions. In this way the wheel does not have to be reinvented.

The representative of EUFIC wondered how the comparisons were made between the 40+ listed initiatives, and what is the meaning of the respective percentages that were added to the various concepts addressed by each initiative. The Chair answered that it shows that many characteristics can be used to define a concept and which characteristics are actually used by the existing certification initiatives to define that concept. It should be stressed that the percentages do not intend to provide a quality score for each initiative but rather is an indication of the breadth of concepts covered by the respective initiatives. As it appeared that the table is not very well understood, the Chairman offered to redesign the table and circulate the revised Room Document 1 together with the report of the meeting.

Room Document 2 presents suggestions for main themes and sub-elements that could be developed and included in the software application. The representative of the European Commission elaborated on the compulsory information as indicated in the Room Document. He suggested that FITI should start giving high priority to the legally required information as an entry point. He also suggested that information provided in the 'app' should also be made available on the website of the producer to make this information more accessible for internet shopping consumers.

**Morning Session Evaluation**

Before breaking for lunch participating stakeholders were given the opportunity to comment and ask questions concerning the topics discussed in the morning session. The EUFIC representative expressed concerns about the project probably being too ambitious. As an example she pointed that even only EUFIC members (who generally have a common interest) have a hard time to agree on a single concept such as child labour.

The representative of BUNGE advised that we should not go too far and too fast. He suggested starting from a consumer point of view and exploring what the consumer wants to know in the first place. The representative of 'PS in Foodservice' informed the meeting that developing a broad framework of themes and sub-elements is certainly doable. 'PS in Foodservice' has already set up a similar framework. She suggested that the best way to start is to select a well defined product group.

The BEUC representative also expressed concern about the high level of ambition of the project but added that when starting with product groups, this should be done from a

consumer perspective. The representative of the Eurogroup for Animals said that in order to minimize efforts, the project could focus on what can be used from already existing effective schemes. For example, food safety seems to be covered well by the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) and sustainability issues are addressed in the Sustainable Consumption Production Forum. These initiatives could be entry points for a comprehensive framework for the app. However, in order to maintain consumer trust, FITI intends to evaluate all input from exiting initiatives and adapt these, as appropriate, on the basis of consensus reached in the stakeholder discussions before adding them in the framework of the app.

The representative of the NBOV (Bread and Pastry) expressed concerns about the effort necessary for (small and medium-sized) producers to input the detailed product data into the template format that would allow the smart phone software application to search for the information requested by the consumer.

The Chair expressed his appreciation of the frank discussion and comments made. He stressed that FITI intends to be realistic and that it will consider the feasibility of any proposal. How much work could be done will strongly depend on available human as well as financial resources. Options are to either limit the work by addressing a modest number of themes or by starting with some well-defined product groups. The direction, priorities and product groups that will be considered will depend fully on the decision of the stakeholders and the robustness of existing initiatives.

**Focused discussion 2: Action Plan and Road Map for Year 1**

The Chair explained the organizational structure of the project as visualized in Room Document 3: Management structure and action plan for year 1. The Project Management Team (Bureau Brussels, Caesar Experts, Orange House Partnership and Schuttelaar & Partners) will be in charge of the daily management and suggests experts to assist with the various stages of the consensus building process. In this way, the Project Management Team only facilitates the consensus building process by providing a platform.

The Stakeholder Forum (representatives of all stakeholders) is responsible for reaching the actual consensus by participating in and following the virtual dialogues and working groups which are initiated by the Forum itself.

The Funders Group (representatives of the project funders) receives advanced notice of consensus reached by the Stakeholder Forum and formally endorses the consensus before its publication. Furthermore, it advises the Project Management Team on all aspects of the project and on external communication.

Virtual dialogues and working group meetings of scientific and technical experts will be organized to engage in subject-specific discussions. The output of these discussions will be input to the Stakeholder Forum and its pertinent working group(s). The Chair stressed that the virtual dialogues will take place per product category so that product group specific experts can be involved. Social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) will serve as discussion platforms that provide input to the virtual dialogues and working group meetings. From these platforms information can be derived on the priorities/topics consumers and stakeholders consider important. This input will strengthen the priority setting process (the virtual dialogues, working groups meetings and Stakeholder Forum decisions). Louis van Nieuwland of S&P added that the participants to the virtual dialogues will not be anonymous.

Figure 2 of Room Document 3 visualizes the stepwise approach of the Action Plan, the time frame and road map for year 1. Step 1 includes the establishment of the Stakeholder Forum

and the development of the project website. Step 2 aims at reaching agreement on the Code of Ethics, priority themes and product groups and further details of the activities scheduled for year 1. Step 3 is the collection, analysis and evaluation of current information approaches for the selected priority themes and product groups. Step 4 is the software development for the smart phones. Step 5, that runs in parallel with Step 4, will include the theme-specific debating and consensus building process. This step covers the bulk of the work that will be conducted during the year. Depending on the available resources and the demands of stakeholders, the amount and the nature of themes that will be dealt with in parallel (and likely by different experts) will be limited or extended. Step 6 consists of the software development for the necessary web-service access and, finally, Step 7 will comprise the annual progress evaluation and decision making for year 2, if feasible.

The discussion of Room Document 3 started with the question what message the application would give when a consumer would scan a product of a producer who does not participate in the project, or a product of a product group not (yet) considered. The Chair explained the following possibilities: (i) the product is included in the project but the information is not yet available for the specific element requested (e.g., traceability of a particular ingredient), (ii) the product is included in the project but the producer prefers not to provide information on this particular element, (iii) the producer participates in the project but the product category to which the product belongs has not yet been dealt with, (iv) the producer participates in the project but not for the product category to which this product belongs, and (v) the producer does not participate in the project at all. The Chair mentioned that it may well be that the Stakeholder Forum would agree that for each of these different situations a specific statement should be developed by consensus which is adequately informative for the consumer to understand why the information is not available.

The representative of the European Commission (DG INFSO) expressed concerns about another topic: how would FITI address the requirement in the new regulation (Article 14 of Regulation EU No 1169/2011), that for distance selling (internet shopping) the same information should be provided (before the purchase) as is provided on the physical label? He suggested that the FITI project should provide especially all legally required information in a very clear way to ensure being in compliance with this new regulation that will implemented as of 13 December 2014. The representative of the NBOV reminded the meeting that the food industry still has 2.5 years to get everything in order. The representatives of Kellogg and AIM confirmed that this part of the regulation is not yet their highest priority.

**Focused Discussion 3: Project Budget and Fund Raising**

The Chair invited Friso Coppes of Bureau Brussels to introduce Room Document 4 (budget estimate for year 1) and 5 (sponsor categories). Mr Coppes started this topic by explaining that the costs will include: (i) the project management (project development, project secretariat, development of corporate identity, establishment of the organizational elements, press desk and website), (ii) all project activities (kick-off meeting, inventory of existing food information and approaches, software development and subject specific debating & consensus building) and, (iii) the annual progress evaluation.

These costs will have to be shared in a balanced way between the private sector (50 %) and the other parties. Other parties include the project management team, national authorities and international institutions, and NGO's such as environmental and human health organizations and consumer groups. The balanced approach for sharing the burden is essential to gain consumer trust in the independent nature of the FITI project.

Pointing to Room Document 5 Friso Coppes explained that the Project Management Team suggests to apply four levels of sponsoring, one of which does not require any financial support. This category is only considered for public entities who are willing (and eager) to contribute intellectually to the project but lack the resources to provide financial support. The other 3 categories are identified by increasingly higher levels of financial contribution: higher levels of financial support are rewarded by an increasing number of privileges . However, the size of the financial contribution does not influence the decision-making power of the stakeholder. The Funders Group (stakeholders contributing at the highest level) endorses, or may express its concern, about any consensus adopted by the Stakeholder Forum. In case of concern expressed by the Funders Group, the Stakeholder Forum will be requested to revisit the issue. However, the Stakeholder Forum (with representation of all paying and non-paying members) will have the final say whether or not it will revise its earlier achieved consensus following comments of the Funders Group.

The Chair remarked that the project will continue even if the requested budget will not be fully provided. In such a case the project will (provisionally) limit its scope and stricter priorities will be set. He also announced that the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE-Group) of the European Parliament has offered to organize an event for FITI that will be held in the European Parliament in May/June. He added that not only this group of MEPs showed support, at the event also MEPs of other political groups have shown an interest and will participate.

In order to enable scheduling follow-up activities and setting the agenda for the next meeting at the European Parliament, the Chair requested all participants and stakeholders to inform the FITI secretariat of their intention to continue participation and, hopefully, their offer for funding by the  20th of April.

**General Discussion and Meeting Conclusions**

During the discussion that followed Friso Coppes remarked that this project will be a tool for the producer (and owner of the information provided by the 'app') to reach its consumers directly and get a grip on certain negative public perceptions about food (such as: "E-numbers are bad chemicals and should not be in added to food") by providing unbiased factual information and explanation of the function of certain ingredients.

The representative of ILSI Europe expressed concern about the amount of workload for the stakeholders' experts involved in the project. The Chair explained that the amount of time needed to deal with the work will be kept as small as possible for external experts. Factors that will contribute to a high level of time-efficiency include:
- Making use of virtual dialogues and discussions;
- Providing experts with supporting documents such as compilations of comments and suggestions on the discussion at hand as well as summaries of these;
- Providing analyses and evaluations of existing initiatives in the same area or on the same subject;
- Limiting face to face expert meetings to the absolute minimum;
- Limiting face to face Stakeholder Forum meetings to twice a year (additional teleconferences may be necessary in between).

The representative of BUNGE Europe asked what the budget will be for the coming years as only the budget for year 1 was explained. The Chair responded that the budget for year 2 is strongly dependent of the amount of activities that can be done in year 1 and what priorities will be set for year 2. He further mentioned that the amount of work that can be done in a given year is also linked to the available expert capacity of Orange House Partnership. Since

its main mission is to provide assistance and training to the public sector in developing countries, the human resource capacity available for the FITI project will have its limits. Based on these limitations Herman Koëter predicts that the amount of work in the years after year 1 and, consequently, the budget, will be rather similar to that of year 1. The activities are planned to continue for up to 3 or 4 years. He stressed that the project team will always provide all stakeholders with adequate insight into the financial expenses.

The representative of the NBOV suggested that it would be nice to synchronize the finalization of the project with the implementation date of the new food information regulation (December 2014).

Some stakeholders noted that a relatively large number of Dutch representatives are involved in the project. The Chair confirmed this observation and explained that this was probably related to the fact that the project initiators coincidently were all Dutch. He stressed, however, that the scope of the project is aimed at Europe and, if successful, beyond Europe. When all stakeholders that have shown a strong interest in the project will also actively participate, the Dutch majority will quickly vanish! In fact, FITI also considers continuing in other areas once the project is successful in Europe. Wallmart and GreenScans in the US have already shown interest in the initiative. Even embarking on similar apps in sectors other than food have crossed our minds (IKEA looks at it with interest).

It is FITI's intention to synchronize its activities with other initiatives such as GreenScans and Boodschapp. For example, a link can be made to other applications for areas that are not covered by FITI such as fresh produce (covered by GreenScans).

The representative of Bunge asked what is the interest of Caesar in the project as they did not charge for developing the prototype of the application. Mr Aad Vanca of Caesar ICT Experts responded that this project will provide a perfect opportunity for Caesar to enter the mobile device software industry in Europe (and beyond) as smart phone applications are a booming trend. He added that big companies are in general less flexible and too much protectionists to change their business models, which is necessary in a turbulent and changing environment. The exponential growth of mobile devices is one of the trends that should be considered. The representative of the European Commission confirmed the need to embrace this trend.

**Closing Remarks**

The Chair requested the meeting participants to consider the Room Documents for use in their own organization/business only: these are part of works in progress and, as such, not suitable for broad circulation. He added that Room Document 1 will be revised based on the suggestions made at the meeting. Since the meeting participants agreed to share their email addresses, an updated list of participants will be send to all participants shortly, together with the updated Room Document 1 and the draft report of this meeting.

Before the 20th of April the FITI Project Management Team hopes to be informed by the participants on their interest to participate. Please contact for this purpose:
- Herman Koëter (herman.koeter@orangeOhouse.eu, phone: +32.23045903; mobile: +32.474190077), or
- Friso Coppes (friso.coppes@bureaubrussels.eu, phone: +32.22309222; mobile: +32.475432173)

Finally, the Chair announced that an invitation to the FITI event and connected technical meeting hosted by the ALDE group in the European Parliament will be sent in due time.