**PRESS RELEASE**

**Scientists leverage smart technology to support farmers and improve food safety – new EU project**

Globally every year there are several billion Euro losses to cereals and other crops through fungal infection, which also causes harm to human health from toxins (mycotoxins) produced by these moulds. In a new initiative that is being funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Programme, a group of scientists, engineers and IT specialists have teamed up to provide knowledge transfer to farmers and other decision makers in the food and feed chains. Using smart technology available on phones and tablets, decision-making tools will be made available to the agricultural and food communities to guide them in taking the most cost-effective actions to minimise fungal infection and mycotoxin formation. Advice will be given in real-time and customised to the individual situation taking into account numerous factors including climatic conditions as a means of forecasting potential fungal infection.

The co-ordinator of the project, Professor Rudolf Krska from the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna, who launched the project on March 8, 2016 said “*This exciting MyToolBox Project has the potential to save tens of millions of Euros per annum in reduced crop losses, as well as achieve reductions in dietary exposure to mycotoxins, which is immeasurable in terms of benefits to human health*”.

Of the 23 partners from 11 countries including China, there is a strong industry presence reflecting the practical significance of this project. Dr Michele Suman from Barilla, a world leading manufacturer of pasta in Parma (Italy) and a member of the MyToolBox team said “*This project could make a real difference to the cereal processing industry with the potential to reduce losses of wheat and maize during milling and produced safer products with lower levels of mycotoxins reducing human exposure*”.

At the kick-off meeting held in on March 8th and 9th in Tulln representatives from the European Commission, FAO, EFSA and food and feed industry groups were present as Advisors, indicating the importance attached to the success of MyToolBox.

“*MyToolBox is a leading scientific endeavor linking European experts with their Chinese counterparts and reaching out to the rest of the World*” commented Prof. Samuel Godefroy from University Laval, Québec, Canada, one of the members of the international expert advisory board of the project, former Vice Chair of the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission and current senior food regulatory advisor to China’s National Centre of Food Safety Risk Assessment (CFSA). He added: "*The applied nature of the project and its outreach will no doubt lead to not only enhancing food safety and consumer protection in the EU and in China, but will also foster trade of safe food and agrifood commodities worldwide*”.

**Notes to Editors**

MyToolBox is a 4-year, €5 million project funded under the EU Horizon 2020 framework programme. The project consortium includes some 40% partners from industry of which 5 partners are end users from the farming community, agronomists and professionals working in agriculture and food manufacturing

The EU produces yearly about 133 million tons (MT) wheat (~M€ 29038), 68 MT maize (~M€ 13571) and 8 MT oats (~M€ 1543). Almost 100% of the crops is contaminated with one or more mycotoxins resulting in annual losses due to mycotoxins estimated at 5-10%, this equates to €1.2-2.4 billion (Bn) in lost income for wheat alone, a reduction in these losses of only 1% would save €12-24 Mio. MyToolBox aims to achieve mycotoxin reductions of 20-90%.

MyToolBox project will not only pursue a field-to-fork approach along the food and feed chain, but will also consider safe use options of mycotoxin contaminated batches such as microbial energy conversion to efficiently produce biofuels. A consideration of the entire chain to ensure food & feed security and safety within a sustainable economic environment, is a major motivation behind MyToolBox.

Information and decision support tools will be developed for each level of the chain and will be integrated into the ergonomic and secure web-based MyToolBox platform that will also be accessible over all mobile platforms. As such, the MyToolBox platform will guide the end user to the most effective measure(s) to reduce biological contamination in crops, and will provide the necessary intelligence to ensure these measures take into account the prevailing conditions such as geographical location, meteorological conditions, land-use, crop management, storage and intended end use with relevance to specific crops.

**Further information:**

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