

Microbiome research: A key to improving health, driving food production, and boosting EU innovation

Brussels, 23 February 2016 - The next generation of functional food and feed will be directed towards the microbiome to improve health, drive food production and support a more sustainable agriculture.

These were the starting points of discussions at the workshop **Microbiome-based Foods for Health and Sustainability** which was held today, 23 February 2016, at the Thon Hotel EU in Brussels. This event brought together the research community, academia, industry, policy- and decision-makers.

The workshop was hosted by the [APC Microbiome Institute \(APC\)](#), the Irish research institute for diet, medicine and the microbiome which is funded by Science Foundation Ireland and industry partners.

Fergus Shanahan, director of the APC Microbiome Institute, stressed: *“As an institute our researchers have been at the forefront of relating food and microbial diversity with health. Our research is bringing tangible benefits to society by contributing to our understanding of the importance of microbes in individuals. We have a long history in understanding how the microbiome influences human health and finding novel ways to treat acute and chronic illnesses. As an organization we have ambitious plans to lead microbiome science to ensure that its benefits will be realized in specific innovations while making an important contribution to the EU research agenda.”*

The workshop is taking place at a time when microbiome science is being increasingly recognized as a central part of health. Today speakers highlighted the effects of dietary and lifestyle choices on food demands and the challenges faced by production systems in relation to food nutritional security and sustainability. Furthermore, the relevance of the microbiome and its associated transformative technologies to the food value chain was examined, as well as their potential to boost innovation for societal and economic impact for Europe.

“There is no one-size fits all solution when it comes to designing an agriculture policy, or a research policy, to address massive societal challenges. Intensive farming will have a role to play, as will small-scale organic production. Local co-operatives will have a role to play, as will academic institutions, and private investors. What we can all agree on, however, is that the improved use of science and innovation will make a vital difference in every sector – in every field and in every lab,” **Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development**, said as he addressed the participants of the workshop. *“I am also glad to see that more and more countries are developing research systems with a clear transdisciplinary approach. The APC Microbiome Institute is a perfect example with this respect; linking Irish science with industry and society while working across boundaries of traditional research sectors,”* he added.

The event coincided with the European Commission's Workshop on Plant Microbiomes. It is also happening in the context of several EU-level developments that will significantly impact and benefit microbiome and other scientific research in the EU, such as the publication of the 2016 ESFRI Roadmap, the approaching revelation of the ambitious European Open Science Cloud, the impending adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation, and upcoming Horizon 2020 mid-term evaluation and the work on preparations for the 9th Framework Programme.

For more information please contact

Brussels:

Eileen O' Herlihy, PhD, EU Grants Manager, APC Microbiome Institute
tel: +353 87 6774520, e-mail: eoh@ucc.ie

Declan Kirrane, Managing Director, ISC Intelligence in Science
tel: +32 2 8888114, e-mail: declan.kirrane@iscintelligence.com

Cork:

Catherine Buckley PhD, Communications and Outreach Manager, APC Microbiome Institute
tel: +353 21 4903362 or 086 8554744, e-mail: c.buckley@ucc.ie

Notes for the editor

The APC Microbiome Institute (APC; <http://apc.ucc.ie>), is the Irish research institute for diet, medicine and the microbiome. Funded by Science Foundation Ireland and industry partners, the APC is a partnership between University College Cork and Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority. Since its establishment in 2003, APC scientists have related food and microbial diversity with health, have discovered new anti-microbials and anti-inflammatories and developed templates for future foods. The microbiome is not only a target for diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease; it is a repository for functional food ingredients, new drugs and biomarkers of disease. The APC has had a long history in understanding how the microbiome influences human health, and, exploring the brain-gut-microbiota relationship and finding novel ways to treat chronic illnesses such as IBD.