



PRESS RELEASE

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COLLABORATION AGREEMENT between the JRC (Joint Research Centre) of the European Commission and VITO (Flemish Institute for Technological Research)

**Significant step forward in food and feed safety and quality in Europe,
made in Flanders**

Geel, March 17, 2006

*Today, the JRC Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements (IRMM) represented by Alejandro Herrero Molina, Director, and the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO NV), represented by Dirk Fransaeer, Managing Director, sign a collaboration agreement concerning scientific research on **food and feed safety and environmental quality assessment**.*

The overall objective of this agreement is to contribute more effectively to understanding and resolving issues on food and feed safety and environmental analysis in the European Union. The agreement will have the following objectives:

1. To obtain the scientific data needed to better understand, plan and implement food safety and quality programmes in the European Union. This will include efforts to improve chemical and biological analysis of food and feed and environmental samples.
2. To deepen the understanding of the scientific, economic and social issues relating to food safety in the European Union.
3. To improve the co-operation with and communication within the European Union network of Community and National Reference Laboratories (CRL and NRL). IRMM is a CRL on feed additives and has been selected by the Commission and the Member States to be a CRL for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), mycotoxins and heavy metals in food and feed. Its neighbour VITO is a RRL (Regional Reference Laboratory) for environmental monitoring.

IRMM and VITO already work together on issues like organic food, assessment of beneficial versus toxic substances in food, and VITO is one of the National Reference Laboratories in the network for CRL for feed additives authorisation, operated by IRMM. A formal relationship will stimulate co-operation in research, exchange of scientists, training, and technology transfer.

Through joint efforts of VITO and the IRMM, new approaches can be identified and developed in the areas of analytical quality assurance, safety and reference tasks (environmental, food and feed), thus working to the mutual benefit of both organisations and the achievement of their objectives and respective missions.

Collaboration in practice

IRMM and VITO will establish a Steering Committee to guide projects/activities agreed by the parties. The Committee should meet approximately once a year to evaluate past activities, develop yearly plans for future projects, and discuss any matter concerning the functioning of this Agreement. To this end, VITO and IRMM will each designate a person to serve as its co-ordinator with responsibility for planning and co-ordinating matters.

IRMM and VITO, neighbours of high standard joining forces

IRMM is one of the seven Institutes of the Joint Research Centre (JRC), a Directorate-General of the European Commission (EC). The JRC employs about 2700 staff of which 350 work at IRMM in Geel, Belgium. IRMM provides independent scientific and technical support to Community policy-making. It promotes a common and reliable European measurement system and helps to build confidence in the comparability of measurement results. IRMM

- is one of the world's largest reference material producers,
- does research to improve knowledge in the field of food and health and consumer issues, and
- is an independent advisor on monitoring and validation of procedures for testing of e.g. food, feed and consumer products.

The main objectives of the IRMM in the area of **environmental measurements and food and feed control** are peri-normative research and scientific support concerning e.g. contaminants, residues or ingredients in food and feed. Method development and inter-laboratory validation are carried out as well as preparation of certified reference materials.

VITO is an independent research organisation in the field of energy, environment and materials. With close to 500 highly qualified employees, VITO

- is the largest and best-equipped research centre in Flanders in these fields, and
- develops innovative products and processes, translating the latest knowledge and technologies into practical applications.

Priority is given to protecting the environment and the sustainable use of energy and materials. VITO offers feasible solutions and independent advice to companies in Belgium and abroad, as well as to regional, federal and European governments.

The main objectives of VITO in the area of environmental measurements and food safety are **risk assessment studies to evaluate environmental and health impact of chemicals present in environmental compartments including biota and food**. VITO has experience in modelling the transfer of chemicals through the food chain and identifying risks for contamination of the food chain. VITO develops and validates chemical analytical techniques and bioassays for safety evaluation. Current emphasis is on food allergens, dioxins, PCBs, flame retardants, endocrine disruptors and on evaluation of health benefits such as anti-mutagenic activity of biological foods. VITO has experience in population studies for studying exposure and health effects of contaminants. VITO acts as an independent organization for monitoring of food contamination both for industrial and governmental clients. VITO has large experience in the field of participation in certification exercises.

The co-ordinator for the IRMM shall be:
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Please, do feel free to contact the co-ordinators for more information on the agreement.

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