

**Third EU-SPF Strategic Meeting & Workshop
on
Fermented Foods, Public Health and Social Well-being
for the
Press/Media- and Social/Health Workers**

organized by
SASNET- Fermented Foods,
Anand Agricultural University, Anand; INDIA
Institute of Rural Management, Anand, INDIA and Lund University, Lund, SWEDEN.

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SASNET Fermented Foods is an association of researchers, professionals, academicians, food industry personnel and all those who are interested in research and development of traditional and novel functional fermented foods for production and marketing in an industrial scale. During the year 2005, the Network undertook to organize a number of strategic meetings under a EU sponsored small project facility on "Fermented Foods, Health Status and Social Well-being" in association with Institute of Rural Management, Anand; Lund University, Sweden and Anand Agricultural University, Anand. Under this project, the first meeting and workshop was organized for the policy makers of R & D institutions in May 2005 and the second one was for the Policy Makers of the Dairy and Food Processing Industries in September 2005. The third workshop for press/media persons and social/health workers was organized on 17th December, 2005. Twenty five delegates from the press and media and 12 social and health workers attended this event along with a few invited guests including the minister for food processing industries, government of India Sri Subodh Kant Sahai and his advisor Mr Alok Basaria and a number of scientists, students, representatives of the Indian food and dairy industry and a few participants from abroad including Sweden, Japan, France, and Australia.

The programme was started with a formal inauguration programme. Shri Subodh Kant Sahai, Honourable Minister of State for Food Processing Industries, Government of India, was the Chief Guest and Dr Verghese Kurien, Chairman, Institute of Rural Management, Anand was the Guest of Honour. Prof. M C Varshneya, Vice Chancellor, Anand Agricultural University, presided over the function.

In his welcome address, Dr Baboo M. Nair, Professor Emeritus, Department of applied Nutrition., Lund University, Sweden and the Chairman of the SASNET-Fermented Foods extended a warm welcome to all the participants. He congratulated the present government of India for giving due importance to poverty alleviation as one of its main goals and for recognizing the importance of developing the agro-food processing sector for producing value added products as a means of improving the productivity and income of the poor people of the country to achieve

that goal. He also highlighted the need to spread the awareness regarding the enormous potential of traditional fermented foods of India among the researchers and industrialists. The best approach should be to exploit the potential by for their further development into highly value added fermented functional food products which could be marketed in the global market for a higher price.

Dr Verghese Kurien then voiced his happiness in being associated with such a network that was honest in its mission and devotion to the cause of health and social well-being of the people. He opined that fermented foods being an integral part of the Indian diet would be relatively easy to market and that there was a huge market waiting to be tapped. This was followed by the Presidential address wherein Prof M C Varshneya, expressed his appreciation over the progress and committed work of SASNET-Fermented Foods. He applauded the role of the network in bringing the importance of research and higher education in food science biotechnology especially in the field of traditional fermented foods to lime light and for giving it the impetus that it needs so that in a long run, not only the consumers but also the producers who provide the raw materials could ultimately benefit from value addition through fermentation. In his address the Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Shri Subodh Kant Sahai, expressed his pleasure that such a network on fermented foods is functioning and that it is working for promotion of the health status and economic development and social wellbeing of the low income sector of the Indian population. He stressed that given the major problem of malnutrition that the country is fighting; fermentation could be one of the suitable and viable solutions. He extended whole hearted cooperation and support of his ministry to the SASNET-fermented foods for reformation of higher education and advanced research in food science and biotechnology to suit the requirements of the present trends of globalization by setting up a model laboratory unit and a model production unit for developing and testing functional fermented foods to be exported to foreign countries. The programme ended with a vote of thanks by Dr J B Prajapati, Coordinator of SASNET-Fermented Foods.

This was followed by an interactive session. This session started with an introduction to the network, SASNET-Fermented Foods by the Chairman Prof Baboo M Nair. He elucidated the objective, mission and vision of the network as it is stated on its website <http://www.fermented-foods.net>. He also outlined the activities and the future plans of the network and explained how an increased input on advanced research and higher education in food science and biotechnology specially on fermented foods would ultimately be beneficial to the agro-food sector and through that the coveted goal of the government of India which is alleviation of poverty by a considerable degree can be achieved by increasing the productivity of the agro-food sector raising the income level to a significant extend. This was followed by a lucid presentation on "Applications of Fermented Milk for Community Feeding" by Dr C D Khedkar, Professor, Dairy Science College, Warud, Maharashtra. He explained the mode of action of the probiotics and then outlined how major health benefits accrue by the consumption of fermented milks on a regular basis by presenting the data from the feeding trials that he conducted on the tribals of Maharashtra.

The presentations were followed by an open house discussion, which was handled by a panel of experts, namely, Dr J M Dave, Retd. Principal and Dean, SMC College of Dairy Science, Anand; Dr Nagendra Shah, Professor of Food Science and Nutrition, Victoria University, Australia; Dr S S Sannabhatti, Retd. Principal and Dean, SMC College of Dairy Science, Dr P A Shankar, Dean PG Studies, Bangalore and Dr J B Prajapati, Professor & Head, Dairy Microbiology Department, SMC College of Dairy Science, Anand. The panel was supported by technical expertise of Dr G Vijayalakshmi from Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore; Dr Rekha singhal from University Department of Chemical Technology, Mumbai University and Dr Sagarika Ekanayake from Faculty of Medicine, Sri Jayewardenepura University, Sri Lanka. After an exhaustive question and answer session with the journalists of the press/media and workers of the social/health sector, the meeting decided to make the following recommendations.

- There is a need to continue to inform the politicians, managing directors of the food industries, food scientists and people in general about the major health benefits of consuming fermented foods so that the society realizes the importance of these foods. This will ultimately help to improve the health status of the public and at the same time create more market for novel functional fermented foods.
- There is a great urgent need to direct more resources into advanced research and higher education in food science and biotechnology for isolation identification, characterization, preservation and commercialization of the advantageous micro organisms from several traditional fermented foods.
- The nutritional and health benefits possible from each of these organisms must be documented after scientific research and careful validation.
- Fermentation as a means for value addition of food products should be given due consideration and should be popularized at all levels especially among students of food science and biotechnology.
- The time has come for initiating manufacture of fermented foods of India in an industrial scale for marketing in the world market. The organized sector and the private companies should be encouraged to come forward for implementing this so that the rural producers get remunerative returns.
- Emphasis should also be given on meeting international standards of quality for global marketing of such foods.
- There is ample scope for including fermented foods with probiotics in the school children feeding programmes of the government, such as mid-day meal scheme.

(J.B. PRAJAPATI)

Project Director