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## Faster detection key to improving food safety, says GFPI boss

By Elaine Watson, 09-Jan-2012

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**Firms that can improve sample collection and preparation and make pathogen detection faster and cheaper will secure the first cash injections from the Global Food Protection Institute's (GFPI's) Emerging Technology Accelerator (ETA) initiative this month.**

The ETA initiative is a seed fund that will invest "modest sums" into firms with emerging technologies in food safety, GFPI president Dr Julia Bradsher told FoodNavigator-USA.

*"One of the challenges is bringing technology into the field so potential problems can be detected and dealt with more quickly."*

### Portable sampling and testing

GFPI staff have evaluated more than 40 potential recipients for ETA cash injections and are particularly interested in firms developing sampling technologies that can test entire batches or shipments (removing the random sampling errors) she said.

They are also interested in firms with portable methods that can be used to prepare samples in the field, without complex or expensive laboratory equipment, technologies that can quickly concentrate target analytes to detect microbes that are present in low cell counts and user-friendly tests that can detect several contaminants at a time.

Platforms of interest include:

- Rapid, sensitive nanoparticle-based assays for food based toxin detection
- Antigen-detecting biosensors for early pathogen detection
- Surface Plasmon resonance spectroscopy
- Antibody-based biosensor kits to detect food pathogens such as mycotoxins
- Molecular sensors to detect trace amounts of molecules in food and water
- Microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) technologies on integrated circuit chips
- Naturally occurring bacteriophages for capture and detection of bacteria and endotoxins
- Microfluid-based diagnostics

### Training, novel food safety technologies, symposia

Set up in 2009 with \$7m of initial funding from the W.K Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Michigan-based non-profit organization the GFPI now has 15 dedicated staff and has established three initiatives to improve food safety:

- Improving training for food safety professionals via the International Food Protection Training Institute (IFPTI), which partners with Western Michigan University and has been awarded a multi-year grant of \$1.3m a year from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- Advancing novel food protection technologies via the ETA seeding initiative.
- Raising awareness via the Imagined Food Futures symposia, which will deliver four conferences a year, with the first scheduled to run in in May at Battle Creek.

### Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

The Food Safety Modernization Act, which was signed into law in January 2011, is being implemented progressively, although uncertainty over whether it will be properly funded continues, said Bradsher.

There is also uncertainty over how key aspects of it will be implemented in practice, particularly in relation to vetting overseas suppliers, she added.

*"A lot of the rulemaking is still being written, so firms still don't know what will be required to prove that suppliers are compliant with FSMA requirements."*

A key issue is whether overseas sites that have been audited according to various industry certification schemes will be considered compliant.

She added: *"Will audits compliant with Global Food Safety Initiative rules be sufficient? What we don't need is people in the US focused on FSMA and people in Europe focused on something else and so on."*

*"We don't want to compete, we need an approach that works globally and that will involve more public private partnerships."*

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