CEPI – cross-border cooperation of two universities commenced with a conference and student exchange in January

The joint project of Vetmeduni Vienna and the Georgikon Faculty of the University of Pannonia titled „CEPI – Centre of Excellence for Poultry Innovation" has been launched by a two-day programme organized in Vienna on 19 and 20 January.

University students from Zala visiting Vienna

As the first event of the project funded by the Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Cooperation Programme, ten students of the Georgikon Faculty were hosted by the University Clinic of Poultry and Fish Medicine of Vetmeduni on 19 January. As part of the professional programmes, two presentations were made about selected research topics of the Clinic: one about diseases caused by adenoviruses, and another one about the effects of Campylobacter on the digestive processes, which constitutes one of the major areas of research in the project. Afterwards, the group of students visited the Mödling site of AGES, the Austrian agency for food safety and security. Here, among others, carcasses of birds infected by avian flu, the greatest current animal health risk affecting both countries are examined.

First, the history and the structure of the Austrian food-safety system was presented for the students. The presentation was followed by a visit to the department of pathology, and also to the laboratories, where, among others, cases of avian flu infections are examined. In the afternoon, our students had the possibility to participate at a lecture organised in the frames of the PhD education programme of Vetmeduni. A leading researcher of Biomin held presentation about the effects of mycotoxins and their metabolites on animal health. The Thursday programme was closed by a pleasant dinner in Bierfreihof Napoleon.

A projekt az Interreg V-A Ausztria-Magyarország Együttműködési Program keretében az Európai Unió, Magyarország, valamint a Bécsi Állatorvos-tudományi Egyetem támogatásával valósul meg./ Dieses Projekt wird im Rahmen des Interreg V-A Österreich–Ungarn Programms durch die Europäische Union, Ungarn und die Veterinärmedizinische Universität Wien gefördert.

Kick-off conference – the outset of a continuation

On occasion of the opening conference of the project taking place on 20 January, Dr. Otto Doblhoff-Dier, Vice-Rector Research and International Relations, and Ms. Nora Tefner, Attache of External Economy of the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna welcomed the participants.

Dr. Ylva Huber, National Contact Point for Research Programmes of the European Union, introduced the three pillars of Horizon 2020, cited examples of cooperation under implementation within the frames of the programme, and referred to other funding options supporting cross-border research activities.

The cooperation of agricultural and animal heath areas provides an excellent basis to enhance present knowledge in poultry production – emphasized Dr. Michael Hess, head of the Department for Farm Animals and Veterinary Public Health of Vetmeduni Vienna, and leader of the Austrian part of the project. Dr. Hess also introduced the common results of the previous period of joint work, which go far beyond professional and scientific cooperation in several senses. Dr Károly Dublecz, professor of the Department of Animal Sciences at the Georgikon Faculty of the University of Pannonia, project leader, underlined the importance of close contacts between science and practice; and introduced the key elements, the objectives and implementation milestones of the currently starting project.

Dr. Attila Csorbai, chairman of the Hungarian Poultry Board, presented the peculiarities of the Hungarian poultry sector, the changes taking place in the preceding years and recent challenges, the greatest of which is represented by the need to handle the huge damages caused by avian flu virus.

Michael Wurzer, managing director of the Austrian Poultry and Egg Federation (ZAG) introduced the special features of the Austrian egg industry. Mr. Wurzer referred to the consequences of the changes of the husbandry techniques in Austria, and the elimination of the caging system. Mr. Wurzer introduced the egg labelling system, which has proven to work out efficiently and affects the marketability of the egg produced.

Mr. Harald Schliessnig, managing director of the Austrian Poultry Health Service (QGV) evaluated the conditions of the Austrian poultry meat industry. Mr. Schliessnig referred to the effects of GMO free feeding; and also introduced the Austrian poultry health database, which operates very efficiently in the country. The database has contributed to a great extent to the strong decrease in the use of antibiotics in the sector, and the occurrence of human diseases caused by salmonella.

Between the presentations, a music group played well known Hungarian and Austrian songs on zither. We got acquainted with the members of the group when we visited Varga Szárnyas Kft., a poultry meat processing company in Becsehely, Zala County, during a previous student exchange programme.

The whole event was closed with a site visit and introduction to the campus of Vetmeduni. As part of this, our students also visited the experimental unit and the laboratory of Clinic of Poultry Medicine.

About CEPI project

The overall objective of CEPI – „Centre of Excellence for Poultry Innovation" is to intensify contacts between the poultry sectors of the two countries and enhance the cooperation between institutions in education and research.

Georgikon Faculty of the University of Pannonia in Keszthely is regarded as a leading institution in poultry nutrition research. By virtue of its diverse professional contact network and advisory activities, it holds a recognized position in the field. The Clinic of Poultry Medicine of Vetmeduni Vienna is known as a first class institution in poultry disease prevention, diagnostics and medicine. At the same time it is also an outstanding place of animal health research, which is proved by several high-ranking publications. The cooperation of these two institutions of long tradition allows for the synergy of different, but complementary scientific profiles and infrastructures.

Centres for scientific research and educational activities are mainly the universities. However, the involvement of the leading poultry boards of both countries plays an outstanding role in keeping contact with production enterprises and maintaining the flow of information, which is considered one of the key elements of the project. The role of the Hungarian Poultry Board, the Austrian Poultry and Egg Federation (ZAG), and the Austrian Poultry Health Service (QGV) in the project is to contribute to the formation of the professional contents of project, to convey the needs of the poultry sectors and disseminate the results of research and advisory activities.

The objectives of the project include joint publications for poultry and feedstuff producers as well as for consumers, and the incorporation of the knowledge base into the university curricula. The complementary fields of knowledge of the two partners give the possibility to provide Austrian producers with professional advice on issues concerning poultry nutrition, and Hungarian producers on problems regarding poultry health.

Both countries have established their own strategies in response to the emerging challenges, which offers several synergies. The planned events, conferences, workshops and plant visits shall provide space for the exchange of different experiences. Twice during the project summer schools will take place. The target groups of these shall include practicing professionals primarily. Exchange programmes for professionals are also planned to be organized during the project. These provide the opportunity for personal discussions besides lectures and plant visits.

The overall objective of our common work is to establish an active knowledge base between science and the poultry sectors by means of an enhanced professional and intercultural cooperation of the two project partners and the three strategic partners.