



TRADEIT: Helping Producers of Traditional Foods to Innovate

Transcript of Episode #020 of *The Artisan Food & Drink Business Show*

Catherine: Hello, and welcome to episode 20 of *The Artisan Food & Drink Business Show*, the show where artisan producers tell their brand story and share the secrets of their success. I'm your host, Catherine Moran.

My guest on today's show is Dr. Helena McMahon, from the Institute of Technology Tralee. Dr. McMahon is the Coordinator of TRADEIT, which is the subject of our discussion today.

TRADEIT is a large pan-European project, funded by the European Commission, which provides multidisciplinary support and services to food producers who make traditional products in of three categories. Other people involved in the traditional food sector can benefit from TRADEIT too, but our focus here is how you, the food producer, can benefit.

The support offered by TRADEIT is available until October 2016, so there is plenty of time to get on board and see how TRADEIT can help you and your business. Let's now get on with the show.

Welcome to *The Artisan Food and Drink Business Show*, Helena. Thank you very much for coming on the show.

Dr McMahon: Good morning, Catherine. Well thank you for the invitation to join you this morning for this discussion.

Catherine: It's my pleasure. My understanding of TRADEIT is that it's a collaborative project in which experts from a range of different disciplines come together to provide services and support for companies who are making either traditional dairy, or traditional meat, or traditional bakery products. The key thing there is the word "traditional". Would you give an overview of what TRADEIT is?

Dr McMahon: Absolutely, and you're correct, it is. It's a very large collaborative project that's been funded by the European Commission to develop and support a network of traditional agri-food stakeholders. When we say stakeholders, what we really mean are the traditional food producers, consumers, policy makers, and researchers who all have activities and interests in the traditional or artisan food sector.

Catherine: I was interested to hear you mentioning consumers there as well.

Dr McMahon: Yeah.

Catherine: That's interesting. I thought it was just from the production side of things.

Dr McMahon: No, it's a more holistic approach really to the sector, because there are ... We are focused on supporting the food producers, and how we look to support them is by providing them with access to information, best practice, new technologies, new trends, and I suppose a critical part of that is consumer trends and consumer interest in artisan foods. That's why we are also very interested in the consumer angle as well as the food producer angle.

Catherine: Sure. I guess you can't do one without the other, and the consumer needs to support the producer to make it all happen.

Dr McMahon: You know what was interesting was when we put this project together in the first instance and we submitted the bid to the Commission, they came back with some wonderful feedback. What they did actually say was that we feel that you need to have a stronger focus on the consumers within your work programme.

Yeah, they were very interested in that aspect. As technologists and business support agencies sometimes we're very focused within the companies, and we do also need now increasingly to look to consumers for guides on how we can develop and improve product offerings on how businesses can grow.

Catherine: Sure, and you said that the funding source is the European Commission?

Dr McMahon: Yeah.

Catherine: So this is a Europe-wide project?

Dr McMahon: We've received 4,000,000 euros in funding from the European Commission, which is quite significant. They were very clear in the fact that they wanted the project to be pan-European in its perspective, so we have developed now a European-wide network, which is excellent. I think we are working with over 100 organisations spread across the EU. I think we have a collective reach of about 250,000 stakeholders across Europe, which is really wonderful. We are thrilled with the developments to date.

Catherine: Wow! Yeah, that's fantastic. And those stakeholders wouldn't just be food producers, I presume?

Dr McMahon: No, no, not at all. The way we've broken down our network is that we have nine regional hubs from which the project operates. We offer supports to the food producers and food researchers from these nine hubs. They're located across Europe. We have two in Spain, we've one in Ireland, we've one in the UK, Finland, Germany, and Portugal.

Catherine: Why two in Spain?

Dr McMahon: Yeah, it's interesting. I suppose when we were putting the project together, we were very much looking for particular sets of expertise. We were looking to bring on board partners who had key skill sets. In Spain, we are working with a wonderful organisation called Food Cluster + Innovation, located in the Logroño region of Spain, so that's in the La Rioja region. It's got such a fantastic food culture.

What they're bringing to the project is a very specific set of expertise in traditional meat production. They are the meat hub. Then, in addition, we are working with another fantastic organisation called ITENE. They're located in Valencia in Spain, and they really are European leaders in the areas of packaging, logistics, and supply chain.

Catherine: Wow, yeah. My mouth is watering at the concept of experts in packaging and supply chain because they're potentially such headaches for food and drink producers. It's nice to think that there could be someone that could help you out.

Dr McMahon: I agree. Supply chain and logistics is a huge challenge for these small-scale food producers, and it is one of the areas that we address through our Knowledge Transfer Programme. Now, in the coming months, we're going to be rolling out events and activities across Europe addressing supply chain. I know we're having a particular event in Ireland that's going to address that.

When we were developing the agenda and looking at who we would invite to speak, we did look internationally at best

practice and what's happening around the world, and I think we could really learn a lot from what's going on in the States at the moment around food hubs and agglomeration centres. They really have made massive progress in this kind of collaborative, space sharing, supply chain sharing, and logistical issues for small food producers. We're hoping to emulate some of the success in the States here in Europe.

Catherine: Yeah, obviously you have a lot of lessons that can be learned from the US.

Dr McMahon: There's a huge amount of online resources that the US government has made available to the international food community. We will be learning from some of those resources and using them in our workshops, which is a great resource to have online for food producers.

Catherine: You've got a TRADEIT hub in Coventry in the UK, don't you?

Dr McMahon: We do. The hub in Coventry is one of the nine TRADEIT hubs, and they're doing great work within their region to support food producers. I really would encourage anybody in the UK to go onto the TRADEIT website and to check out the team in Coventry. Tess Lukehurst is the TRADEIT hub advisor in Coventry, and I know she has a fantastic programme of supports and events to come over the next twelve months in the area.

Catherine: As regards the Irish hub, then, who is responsible for the Irish hub?

Dr McMahon: The Irish hub is based at Institute of Technology in Tralee and we're the coordinating organisation. The TRADEIT hub advisor here in IT Tralee is Michael Gleeson. Any food producers who would be interested in joining TRADEIT events and activities here over the next twelve months should get in touch with Michael. His contact details are available through the TRADEIT website.

Catherine: Okay, that's fantastic. I will put all the links that you mentioned in the show notes that will go live when the podcast episode is live, so that will be great.

I'm interested to know why these three specialties — dairy, meat, and bakery — were targeted for the project.

Dr McMahon: Yeah. When we were looking, as we reflected on the partners that we had, and we looked at the expertise within the network, we really felt that dairy, meat, and bakery are such broad encompassing terms under such big parts of the food industry, that we would get very good coverage of quite a lot of food producers if we picked those three specific sectors.

Catherine: Right, right.

Dr McMahon: In addition, it's not possible for the project to serve the needs of all sectors, so we did have to be a little bit selective, and say that we're going to focus on these three sectors. We'll get very good coverage of food producers who fall under these broad umbrella areas, and they were the discussions that we had within the consortium.

Now, what I will mention is that at the time TRADEIT was funded, another project was also funded, called TRAF00N. That project is identical to TRADEIT in its objectives; however, it is focusing on different sectors. They are looking at the fisheries sector, meat, and vegetables and grains. Together, the two projects really are covering quite a diversity of sectors.

Catherine: Are the dairy, meat, and bakery focuses ... Are they the same across the European hubs?

Dr McMahon: Well, I suppose ... We are working with artisan bakeries right across Europe, but of course the nature of the firms that each of the different hubs are supporting are very different. If you look to ... let's say our Finnish partners. The bread offering of the bakeries in Finland is so different than the bread offering of the bakeries in Ireland and the UK. They are very focused on

rye flours, and the products that they offer are very, very different.

Catherine: Of course dairy and meat are incredibly important for the Irish food scene, I suppose exports, and also local trade as well?

Dr McMahon: Yeah, absolutely. We have wonderful cheese producers here in Ireland and so we've worked really well with the Irish network, so that has been fantastic. We've worked closely with some of the raw milk cheese producers in the project as well. Just right across Europe, the cheese offering, as you know, is just so wonderful.

We've developed such an excellent network now of small food producers, that what's happening is we bring them together on quite a number of occasions. We'll have pecorino producers from the hills outside Rome, Irish raw milk cheese producers, Spanish cheese producers, and Finnish cheese producers.

They get to come together, they get to network, they get to share ideas, discuss their relative production processes, explore and taste each other's products, and just talk about their business experience. The food producers are learning as much from each other as they are from the knowledge that we are imparting to them through our workshops and training activities. I think that has been one of the biggest successes — unexpected successes really — within the project, this whole aspect of network and knowledge sharing.

Catherine: That sort of collaboration can be immensely fruitful, in terms of business insights, and I guess mistakes maybe some companies might have made, and passing on tips and tricks, too.

Dr McMahon: You know, it's been wonderful how open some of the food producers have been. We've had training... In our training events, we're very focused on bringing in companies to share their stories. Some of them will be absolute success stories and how businesses have grown and done really well.

Some of them, you will have food producers who will come in and tell the “guts and all” stories, we like to call it within the project. Where they'll come in and say, "I did this and I did that and it failed; and it was terrible, and I had to pick myself up off the floor and just start afresh." I think that is really reassuring to a lot of food producers, because running your own business is so demanding and it can be very, very challenging. I think that has reassured a lot of the food producers, and given them the motivation and the inspiration to continue on their journey.

Catherine: Something that's not, strictly speaking, related to TRADEIT; but I was interested to hear you mention the raw milk cheese producers. There are particular challenges associated with using raw milk, if you are a cheese maker. How have you addressed that?

Dr McMahon: There are, absolutely. What we've done is ... The project is very focused on sharing knowledge and best practice and new technologies. As part of our dairy brokerage event in Poland recently, which is where our dairy hub is located, we had a very nice event where we showcased some new technologies in the areas of filtration, which the raw milk cheese producers found really interesting and of huge value.

Then we also have a lot of HACCP documentation and best practice and food safety workflows that we've been sharing with the different food producers, to keep them up to speed on new developments that might be relevant to their production processes.

The feedback has been great. They found it really useful. Some of the filtration technologies, a lot of them weren't aware of, and were very open to integrating within their operations. I think that was a good outcome.

Catherine: You mentioned filtration technologies. That's the whole sort of tech side of some of the services and supports that you offer.

What are some other services and supports offered by TRADEIT?

Dr McMahon: Okay. Just to give you a flavour for what we do. It's such a large project. We offer ... Our knowledge transfer pillar of activity really is all of our training events. What we have is nine key training areas that we provide workshops on. We run those across Europe at each of the nine hubs where the food producers can come and get trained in areas such as costing and pricing strategies we've found to be hugely interesting. A lot of people don't really know if they have the right margin on their products. That has been hugely useful. We address areas such as supply chain logistics, provide training in the area of business models and new plant design. We're constantly running workshops and activities.

Another area we're very focused on is networking. We do a lot of networking events where we get people to come together to develop new business opportunities. We're active in the area of technology transfer. That's providing access to technologies that are on the market, but also providing food producers with insights on new technologies that are coming out of EU funded research projects across Europe.

Catherine: That question of margin comes up again and again and again. It's obviously just a complete bugbear for small food companies. Actually, probably some quite big food companies as well.

Dr McMahon: Yeah, I would expect so.

Catherine: Yeah, and it's so fundamental to get it right.

Dr McMahon: And what we've done is we've just taken a very simple approach where we've brought the food producers in and we've some very nice simple tools based around spread sheets. We've highlighted the key areas of costings within their business, and they've found them really useful. A lot of them have looked at revising their prices based on participating in

some of the workshops, so I think that's been a positive outcome as well.

Catherine: Absolutely, yeah. What is the TRADEIT Marketplace, which is on your website? Is that an electronic database?

Dr McMahon: Yeah. That's the nuts and bolts of it. It's an electronic database. We like to call it our online agri-food community because really what it is, is a platform for business development and open innovation. Through this online marketplace, we encourage people to register and create a profile. You can create a profile as a food producer. You might be a technology provider. You might be a researcher. Through posting technology offers, business offers, cooperation offers, what's happening is people are coming together to identify business opportunities and develop new partnerships.

Catherine: Very good, and this is, of course, across Europe. Are you saying that somebody in Ireland could say "I need some help with labelling", and then somebody in another European country like the UK or Poland, could say, "Well, I'm absolutely expert in this, I can help you out." That's how it works?

Dr McMahon: Yep, that's exactly what it is. A nice, neat example is that we had a food producer, a baker in the UK, and he was looking to upgrade his bakery. He was expanding, and he wanted to get some energy-saving ovens and heat extraction technologies to try and reduce his overall cost within the bakery. We worked with him to put the offers up on the Marketplace, and then we managed to find some technology providers in Germany who had exactly the equipment at the scale he needed for his particular bakery. We matched them up, and now they've done some business together. That's what we do.

All the time, in the background, we have nine TRADEIT advisors, based at each of our hubs, who are constantly monitoring the offers and the activities on the Marketplace to

provide that extra little bit of support to make the connections between the food producers and the tech providers.

Catherine: Just facilitating the whole thing, really?

Dr McMahon: Yeah, because we are all so busy. You can go away. You can put up the offer, and then you can feel pretty confident that you've pitched it in the right way, and then you can go about your day-to-day business. The TRADEIT advisors are there just to nudge the process along.

Catherine: Sure, yeah, yeah. You mentioned the training and the workshops component of the offer earlier, and I was interested to read about a couple of the workshops you offered at the Irish hub. One was Protecting Tradition as a Strategy for Growth. That was to do with PGI, which is Protected Geographical Indication. Also, PDO, which is Protected Designation of Origin. I was quite interested to see how you could be innovative, but protect tradition at the same time. Could you tell me a little bit more about that particular workshop?

Dr McMahon: Yeah. It's a fascinating area this whole protecting tradition and protecting products and protecting areas. It's a big priority area for the European Commission. They see it as a way of protecting what's unique to particular regions and enabling them to leverage on their uniqueness within regions to grow businesses.

In the particular workshop that we did, we brought together groups of food producers who felt that they had products that had potential to be protected. To get these particular types of designations, your products have to be very much linked to the region within which you are based. They have to be an indigenous product. They have to have a very good story, or a heritage around them: so a history that can be validated. They have to be existing in the marketplace for quite a while.

There are particular characteristics in the products, and typically to apply for these types of designations you do need to form consortia. Have groups of producers located within a region that are producing the same product, or variations of a product.

Catherine: They will group together, and basically put the case forward to why this is special and why it should be protected?

Dr McMahon: Absolutely. When you're looking at building your case around an application, you have to clearly define the history and the association with the region, and the production process associated with developing that food. The case is always stronger if there are groups of food producers that apply for it. I know in the UK, I think most recently it was the Bramley Apple that managed to secure a designation?

Catherine: Yes.

Dr McMahon: Yeah, yeah. What we did was we put out a call, and we got the food producers to come to our session. We just did a really nice workshop where we had the people from the Department of Agriculture here in Ireland to explain the system to them. It can be a little bit confusing. It's quite technical and legalistic when you read some of the documentation behind it. We presented it in a very accessible way, and we just had some fantastic discussions around the nature and characteristics of the foods that they had. We had meat producers that had some very nice products that they feel had the opportunity to apply for it. We brought in a company called the Waterford Blaa.

Catherine: I was going to mention that, yes.

Dr McMahon: We had Dermot Walsh from Waterford Blaa to come in and to present his story. How they built their consortia, how they applied for the designation, and the impact that the designation has had within that business. I mean, we've all heard the success of Waterford Blaa following this designation,

and it really did inspire the group of producers that we had. At the moment we're continuing to work with these food producers to help them put together dossiers and hopefully have some success stories here in Ireland for any designations.

Catherine: We should say that the Waterford Blaa is a type of ... Would you say it's fair to say it's a type of bread roll?

Dr McMahon: It's a soft, white bread roll. It's cooked in a batch format. They're just absolutely delicious. They're so soft, and they have a wonderful history. I think they've been baked in Waterford since the time of the Huguenots, and they were using the scraps of the flour from baking larger loaves of bread to bake this kind of peasant roll that really did feed the city of Waterford. It has a wonderful heritage to it, and they are absolutely delicious. I know they've been getting very far afield. They were on the Aer Lingus flights menu for quite a while, and I think they've gotten as far as Dubai now.

Catherine: Gosh, absolutely wonderful!

Dr McMahon: The whole strategy, it's incredible really, isn't it?

Catherine: Yeah. Did they get, that group get, was it PDO status they got for the Blaa?

Dr McMahon: No, they got PGI.

Catherine: Okay. You were saying that that made a phenomenal difference to their ... Basically, I suppose, ultimately their sales? That's the most important thing?

Dr McMahon: They did. When we talk to the food producers, the traditional nature of their product is so precious, you know. A lot of the times you can't really change the nature of the products, but what you can do is you can look at your marketing strategies, your packaging, your organisational strategies. PGI is a very clever way of protecting, really, the intellectual property that you have within your company. What these designations are

considered to be a form of intellectual property management.

Catherine: Right, yeah.

Dr McMahon: Through doing that it has enabled ... I think the company has grown 20% year-on-year for 5 years.

Catherine: Gosh, that's phenomenal.

Dr McMahon: I know. Really, a success story. I think the Waterford Blaa and Dermot are great ambassadors for this scheme.

Catherine: Yeah, yeah. It shows the importance as well of uncovering the story behind your product and telling it. As you said, getting your marketing right is very important, as well.

Dr McMahon: Absolutely. I mean there is a huge amount of dormant value within a lot of traditional and artisan food companies that could be unpicked and capitalised on just through a little bit of creative thinking, and just by having the time to sit back and reflect on what it is that makes your product unique. What it is that attracts consumers to that product, and really, how you can leverage on that uniqueness. I think this is a good example.

Catherine: Absolutely, yeah, yeah. I know that one of the concepts or techniques employed by TRADEIT, is 'action learning'. It's very interesting to me, and I was wondering would you be able to explain what that is?

Dr McMahon: I suppose the best way to describe it is that it's an approach for solving problems that involves taking action and then reflecting on the results of your action. And coming together with people to share your problems with them, how you addressed them, to get feedback from other people. It's a very iterative approach to solving problems in collaborative ways. It's really by bringing groups of people together to explore and solve problems, that you get the most impact.

Catherine: In a way it's a bit like, but not quite, a little bit like mentoring, it sounds like?

Dr McMahon: It is, absolutely. It's where people are learning from each other, absolutely, so it is a little bit like mentoring. We've found it to be hugely effective within the project. A lot of the reasons why we bring in these food producers is part of this action learning strategy where the food producers are sharing the stories of their company, and the approaches that they took to solving problems. The food producers can identify with the other food producers that are there.

Sometimes they go, "Ahh, I never saw that opportunity within my own business," or "I never thought of taking that approach to solving that particular problem." It can be a very subtle and useful tool to unlocking the answers to problems within companies.

Catherine: I think that a lot of the time if people sort come up with the solutions themselves they're potentially more motivated to actually take action.

Dr McMahon: Absolutely. It is empowering. In addition to using action learning to support the food producers, we also use it within the project to strengthen our own project team, by coming together and using action learning approaches to reflect on how we are actually running the project and supporting the food producers. We're all the time trying to optimise what we're doing, and we take this action learning approach to that challenge as well.

Catherine: Okay, right. I would like to ask you briefly about ... It's something that the Food Safety Authority of Ireland did, I think it was in May. They published a piece on marketing, the use of food marketing terms like "artisan" and — the word that is going to be absolutely key for TRADEIT — "traditional" and "farmhouse" and "natural". I'm wondering how traditional food producers can use these guidelines to their advantage?

Dr McMahon: I think this is a wonderful development from the Food Safety Authority in supporting the traditional and artisan food sector. Really what the document does is that it addresses the issues and the concerns that were raised by these small manufacturing businesses about, I suppose, the over-prolific use of the terms marketing artisanal, farmhouse, and so on.

What it does now is that it adds consumer confidence when they see the terms on the products, so they know that they are getting a product that was actually produced by these artisan food producers in the sustainable, faithful way that they want the food products to have, the characteristics they want the food products to have. I think it is adding value, more value and more confidence, to the nature of the products that they are buying.

Catherine: Yes, and I think hats off to the FSAI for actually putting it down in writing. They're potentially difficult terms to define and protect, but hats off to them for doing that. It's a great boost to people who have traditional and natural foods.

Dr McMahon: Absolutely. I agree entirely. The consultation was really comprehensive, and I think they engaged really well with all the stakeholders. It is a challenging topic to address, so it's a space I'm going to be watching going forward; to see how this is implemented and rolls out.

Catherine: With companies who produce genuinely traditional food, how can they take advantage of innovation? Whether it's in manufacturing, their manufacturing processes, or their packaging, or their marketing. In other words, does the former "traditional" preclude the latter "using innovation"? Is there not a big contradiction in terms there?

Dr McMahon: When the project got started, we spent so many hours discussing the term "traditional" and "innovation" and how we were going to address that challenge, because it is so contradictory. From my perspective, in my opinion, I think they

are very much complementary, and there are huge opportunities.

The example I like to give is a food producer in Spain, called Martinez Somalo. They're an absolutely amazing company. They've been in existence now, I think they're fourth generation; so they've been operating for over 100 years. They produce wonderful chorizos and serranos and hams and they have just a fantastic offering. They're very traditional products. Some of them have PGI status. They've been really innovative in their approach.

What they've done is they have developed a new product range based around chorizos. They've brought together the La Rioja wine that we all know so well, that beautiful red wine, and chorizo, and they combined them. They created a Chorizo Con Vino. It's a fantastic offering, and it went down really, really well. So well received by consumers, and they wrapped a fantastic marketing campaign around it. Based on that then, have developed new varieties and new ranges of products. Based upon traditional products, but still kept their key offerings. They still have the very traditional chorizo, but then they have varieties thereof.

In addition to developing the new flavours and the new varieties, they've also looked at things like their packaging, their marketing campaign, the level of saturated fats in their offering, the level of salt in their offering, the convenience of the packaging, and the portion size. There are huge amounts of opportunities for food producers to look at innovation from a process and technological perspective.

Then there are also the whole areas of the business model, the PGI as a business strategy. Actually looking at their distribution networks and collaborative opportunities with other food producers in the region. I think a lot of food producers, traditional food producers, worry that innovation will change

their product; but that's not the intention, really. I think it's just to open new opportunities.

Catherine: Absolutely, yeah. I can understand the fear, but it's probably unfounded, really. And really it's the only way to move forward, isn't it? To stay on your toes, to be innovative, and be able to deal with competition, and all that sort of stuff.

Dr McMahon: Yeah, there's a huge, huge opportunity for the traditional artisan food producers. It's the one segment of the market that really is continuing to grow. We as consumers, we're so interested in supporting local as well. I think that is a big driver for a lot of people. They really do want to support the businesses in their areas, and I think to capitalise on that growth and the new demand, the food producers just have to be looking at little ... I suppose smart changes that they can make to enable their businesses to grow at this time.

Catherine: Yeah, tweaks here and there, I suppose.

Dr McMahon: Yeah, yeah.

Catherine: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about the Strategic Research Agenda?

Dr McMahon: We have the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda. Basically what that is, is that we've consulted with food producers across Europe to figure out what the key challenges are within their business. We're just at the point now where we're assembling our consultation document, which details all of the challenges that we've identified, but we'd like to get feedback from food producers across Europe and other stakeholders, consumers, researchers, whatever, on the content of the document and if there are any areas they would like to see included in the document.

That particular document then is going to go to the European Commission, and we hope will inform future funding opportunities for the sector. It's a very real opportunity. The

partner that we have developing the document, has, I think, over 20, 30 years experience in preparing these documents for the commission. It is a real opportunity, so I think it will be nice to flag that.

As you know, 99% of companies in the food sector in Europe are SME's.

Catherine: That many, wow! An overwhelming majority.

Dr McMahon: It's crazy. Then of that, these traditional food producers are a very particular subset and they have their own, very unique challenges, which are very different from your more mainstream FMCG-type food producers. I think that's why the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda document is so important, because what we've found out is that the business challenges ... The challenges that these food producers have are not really related to food production, because they're very, very good at that. What they do have is a lot of challenges in the organisational and strategic areas of their business.

Catherine: Being able to see the wood for the trees and all of that sort of thing?

Dr McMahon: Yeah, a lot of people who go into business aren't necessarily formally trained in business, so it can be quite difficult to get the mix of being so knowledgeable and in-depth and expert in producing food, and then having a very 'finessed' set of business skills to wrap around that. It's a big ask, really I think, to be honest.

Catherine: Is that going to be available on the website?

Dr McMahon: Yeah, so what we'll do in the first week in November, we're going to launch the online consultation where they can just log on and just simply to provide their feedback through an online submission.

Catherine: Okay.

Catherine: One of the objectives of the project is to, I suppose, ease the transfer of innovation from researchers to companies. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Dr McMahon: We do this in two ways. On one end we work with the food researchers to up-skill them in the areas of commercialisation and business skills. Food researchers are wonderful at laboratory research, but sometimes they don't consider how their research output or how their innovations will eventually be applied in the marketplace or within an actual functioning food enterprise. So what we try and do is we try and make them think about that a little bit earlier in the research process. How we've been doing that, is we've been providing the entrepreneurial training or commercialisation skills through our Entrepreneurial Summer Academies that we've held in year one and year two.

In year one, we had a wonderful summer academy with 30 food researchers from across Europe and Ireland, and we just had one last summer in Como in Italy, where we had another 30 food researchers come together with food enterprises to address the commercialisation challenge. I think it's been really positive. The food producers had a really wonderful time. I think for some of them, they hadn't been in a university in quite a while. We were in a university setting, in Como, with such wonderful food all around us. I think we managed to get the food part and the education part just right, so that was great.

Catherine: I think it's all terribly exciting and hopefully, great things will happen. I'm sure they will.

Dr McMahon: We are working at the moment on looking at identifying new opportunities for future funding to continue the work that we're doing. I think that all of the hubs across Europe really have developed fantastic regional networks through the activities and the projects, so we're very focused on trying to keep that going post-project. I think also the Strategic

Research and Innovation Agenda that we're developing, a lot of the opportunities or the needs that we see within the food producers, we're hoping that they will become new funding topics that we potentially can encourage people to apply for to support food companies in their areas.

Catherine: How can companies join TRADEIT?

Dr McMahon: We've got so many opportunities. You can contact your local hub advisor through the nine hubs. If you just log on to the TRADEIT website, which is tradeitnetwork.eu, you can join directly through our website. You can join through our Marketplace. All you have to do is just put in your contact details, and a TRADEIT advisor will follow up with you.

Catherine: What about the cost to companies? What sort of costs are involved?

Dr McMahon: You know, the wonderful thing about this project is that it's 100% funded by the European Commission to support food producers, so there are no costs. The only cost is the food producer's time.

Catherine: Wow, that's phenomenal. Often it's you come up with 50% of the funds, or 60%, or whatever. It's 100% funded, yeah.

Dr McMahon: It's 100% funded, so there are no registration fees for any of our events.

Catherine: Okay. That sounds wonderful.

Dr McMahon: It is. It's great. We're very lucky.

Catherine: Um-huh [affirmative]. How long is it going to go on for?

Dr McMahon: We just have another 12 months left now: I can't believe it. We started in November 2013, and we will finish in October 2016. We do have a huge amount of activities that are going to roll

out across the nine hubs. I think we probably have another 50 workshops and sorts of activities that are going to run.

Then we also have this really nice programme called the Small Business Technology Transfer Programme. In that programme, what we're doing, is we have 20 SME's that we take on a more intensive business development and support experience. The hub advisors, in their closest hub, work with the food producers on a particular business or technology challenge that they have. We work collaboratively to try and solve that over a four- to six-month period.

Catherine: There is still time for companies to get on board and really ...

Dr McMahon: Oh, absolutely. Our doors are open, so I really would encourage any food producers to log on to the website and to get in touch with their local hub advisor.

Dr McMahon: So, that's that, really.

Catherine: Well I've certainly asked all the questions that I wanted to ask you. And I think we've had a very comprehensive discussion.

Dr McMahon: Well, look. I hope I'm coming back to talk about another project and another opportunity with you.

Catherine: Yeah, that would be fantastic. Yeah.

Dr McMahon: Great. Super. Thanks for your time, Catherine.

Catherine: Thank you for your time, Helena, I really appreciate it.

Dr. McMahon: No worries.

Catherine: Take care, then, bye.

Dr. McMahon: Bye.

Catherine: Thank you once again to Dr. Helena McMahon for taking the time to come on the show. All of the links mentioned on the

show are available at the show's website, which is www.myartisanbusiness.com. You can also download a free transcript of the show there.

To get updates on when I publish new episodes of the show, subscribe to my email list at myartisanbusiness.com and I'll let you know when new episodes are live.

You can find me on Twitter as @FoodDrinkShow so please do get in touch if you have any comments or questions.

Until next time, I'm Catherine Moran signing off. Take care and happy cooking, brewing, happy fermenting and thanks for listening.
