**Expo 2015: the European Commission promotes opportunities for investments and partnerships in the food and wine tourism sector**

***On 28 September 2015 a conference will be held on food and wine tourism as a driving force for growth and employment, as well as for valorising the traditions and culture of the territory. In the afternoon, B2B meetings between European and Third Countries companies will take place.***

**Palazzo delle Stelline, Corso Magenta 61, Milan**

During [Expo Milano 2015](http://www.expo2015.org/it/index.html?packedargs=op=changeLang), the European Commission is organising a series of events dedicated to the theme of the Universal Exposition: “**Feeding the Planet. Energy for Life**".

In particular, seizing the occasion of Expo 2015, a global event with the presence of 145 Countries and 3 International Organizations, the Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) of the European Commission is promoting a series of high-level events in Milan to boost the European SMEs system and facilitate their internationalization.

This project is part of the programme “Missions for Growth”, launched in 2011, with the aim of supporting the development and competitiveness of European companies and to facilitate their access to strategic markets.

As a part of these events – organised in collaboration with the Enterprise Europe Network, the network created by the European Commission to support SMEs, and Promos, Special Agency of the Milan Chamber of Commerce for internationalization – a series of free-of-charge Business to Business meetings will be organised among European and Third Countries companies and clusters.

The event of 28 September will focus on food and wine tourism as a driving force for growth and investments in the territory. EU and international operators working in the sector are invited to participate, with particular regard to the protected geographical indications (PDO, PGI, TSG) and to the promotion of the territorial culture and traditions.

Partners of the initiative are the European Commission Representative Office in Milan, and the Lombardy Region.

The event will be structured as follows:

* In the morning, a conference will be held, opened by Antonio Tajani, first Vice President of the European Parliament, with the participation of representatives of international organisations, European institutions, governments and Regional authorities, as well as stakeholders in the food tourism sector.
* In the afternoon, Business-to-Business meetings will take place, in order to offer companies, clusters, consortia and other public and private operators the chance to look for business and cooperation opportunities with partners from countries outside the EU.
* In the late afternoon of 28 September and on 29 September, a series of visits to Expo Milano are scheduled, organised by the European Commission for the companies willing to participate.
* Furthermore, on 1 October, Parma Alimentare offers to the participating companies the opportunity to visit some top-ranking agro-industrial production facilities in Emilia Region.

Companies operating in the abovementioned sectors and willing to participate to the EU Food Tourism Conference, including B2B Meetings, are invited to register on the website: <http://www.euexpo2015-foodtourism.talkb2b.net>. Participants will have to cover their travel expenses.

The Conference and B2B meetings will open the [EU Food-Tourism Week](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=8204). During the three-day event, different aspects linked with the tourism and food industries will be discussed, thanks to the cooperation with European networks involved in the development of concrete initiatives in food and wine tourism.

**Background**

Europe is a unique destination in terms of the extraordinary wealth and variety of food traditions and high quality production. The particular characteristics of many European products are not, in fact, linked only with the climate and characteristics of the soil, but also with the culture and knowledge developed in the territory. This wealth is also testified by the 1,280 products registered with PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), PGI (Protected Geographic Indication) and GTS (Guaranteed Traditional Speciality) labels.

Already today, the food and wine industry is a significantly attractive factor in European and international tourism. But there is still further unexpressed potential for our exclusive heritage to contribute to attracting more tourists, especially from countries outside the EU, thus also favouring an increased knowledge and awareness of our typical products.

A series of studies have emphasised the significant impact of the food and wine industry on tourism. For example, it is estimated that in Italy there are 6 million tourists interested in the food and wine industry every year, generating from 3 to 5 billion Euro in profits. In Spain, more than 7 million visitors per year are attracted by the local food, and this trend is increasing. In the United Kingdom, tourists spend more than 31 billion Euro per year on food and drinks.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) indicates gastronomic events, taste routes, and cooking courses and workshops as key elements in promoting food and the territory. Food allows the tourist to have a wealthier travel experience and to get to know the region and culture better. Food and wine tourism also helps to protect not only the territory, but also the heritage of knowledge that has been created over time and that makes many European products impossible to find anywhere else.