



European Union  
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## Action plan 2018

*Produced by each region, the action plan is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the cooperation will be exploited in order to improve the policy instrument tackled within that region. It specifies the nature of the actions to be implemented, their timeframe, the players involved, the costs and funding sources.*

### South Ostrobothnia, Finland

29.3.2018

Update: 01.10.2018



ETELÄ-POHJANMAAN LIITTO  
REGIONAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH OSTROBOTHNIA

SeAMK  
SEINÄJÖEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU  
SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



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## 1. Executive Summary in Finnish

Toimintasuunnitelman tavoitteena on edistää ruokaketjun innovatiivisuutta. Maakuntastrategiaan pohjaavan suunnitelman toimenpiteet on koottu ruokaketjun haastattelujen, työpajojen ja kansainvälisten hankepartnerien hyvien käytäntöjen pohjalta, tiiviissä yhteydessä ruokaketjun toimijoiden ja sidosryhmien kanssa.

Prosessin aikana toimintasuunnitelman teemaksi nousi alueen brändäys. Tarve tähän tuli selvänä esiin niin ruokaketjun haastatteluissa kuin työpajoissakin. Toimijat kaipasivat vahvempaa yhteistä pohjaa johon tukeutua, yhteishenkeä ja verkostoitumista, näkyvyyttä kuluttajille ja yhteistyökumppaneille yhtenäisen brändin avulla. Tämän nähtiin tukevan mm. mahdollisuuksia ideointiin, kehittämiseen ja erilaisiin toteutuksiin sekä itsenäisesti että yhteistyössä muiden toimijoiden kanssa. Myös maakuntastrategiassa on alueen ruoka-alan näkyvyyden kehittämistä tukevia teemoja. Alueellisen brändin rakentaminen oli myös keskeinen hankkeessa havaittu kansainvälisten partnerien hyvä käytäntö.

Aluebrändi-teeman alle muodostui prosessissa useampi toisiinsa linkittyvä ja toisiaan tukeva toimenpide. Toiseksi tärkeäksi teemaksi nousi ruokaturvallisuus, joka toimii osana brändiä. Myös kansainvälisyys ja koko maakunnan yhtenäisyys toimivat läpileikkaavina teemoina. Erityisen tärkeä painoarvo toimintasuunnitelmassa on yhteistyöllä, joka korostuu sekä toimenpiteiden tavoitteena, että niitä toteutettaessa. Toimenpiteet toteutetaan yhteistyössä paikallisten toimijoiden kesken Etelä-Pohjanmaan ruokaketjun innovatiivisuuden edistämiseksi.

Toimintasuunnitelma on laadittu osana Interreg Europe -rahoitteista NICHE (Building Innovative Food Value Chain in Regions) -hanketta, jossa Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto on hankepartnerina. Muut hankekumppanit ovat Romaniasta, Puolasta, Virosta, Kreikasta, Irlannista sekä Pohjois-Irlannista (UK). Hankkeen kaksivuotinen aktiivivaihe on alkanut huhtikuussa 2016 ja projekti siirtyy kaksivuotiseen seurantavaiheeseen huhtikuussa 2018. Tämän toimintasuunnitelman toteutumista seurataan osana NICHE -hanketta aina maaliskuulle 2020 asti.

### **Action 1: Aluebrändin kehittäminen ja lanseeraus - Ruokaprovinsi**

NICHE-hankkeessa oli mahdollista hakea rahoitusta ns. pilottitoimenpiteeseen, jollaiseksi Etelä-Pohjanmaalla nostettiin aluebrändin kehittäminen ja lanseeraus. Koska markkinointiin ei ole mahdollista saada rahoitusta tavanomaisia kanavia pitkin, on tämä hyvä tilaisuus toteuttaa alueen ruokaketjun brändin kehittämistä markkinointinäkökulmasta. Mahdollinen rahoituspäätös saadaan maaliskuussa. Mikäli pilotti toteutuu, toteuttaa ulkoinen asiantuntija toimenpiteen Etelä-Pohjanmaan liiton tarjouspyyntöjen pohjalta. Toimenpiteessä on linjattu, että toteutus tapahtuu tiiviissä yhteistyössä sidosryhmien kanssa.





Toimenpide sisältää:

- brändin kehittäminen markkinoinnin ammatilaisia hyödyntäen
- toimintamallin kehittäminen ja toimijoiden sitouttaminen
- Ruokaprovinssi-labelin ja kriteeristön luominen
- brändin lanseeraus

### **Action 2: Yhteinen sivusto: Foodprovince.fi & Ruokaprovinssi.fi**

Tässä toimenpiteessä kehitetään nykyistä ruokaprovinssi.fi -sivustoa, sekä perustetaan englanninkielinen foodprovince.fi -sivusto. Tarkoitus kummallakin sivustolla on helpottaa ruokaketjuun ja sidosryhmiin liittyvän tiedon löytymistä sekä parantaa yhtenäistä näkyvyyttä, ammattimaisuutta ja houkuttelevuutta niin kuluttajien kuin potentiaalisten yhteistyökumppanien näkökulmasta. Englanninkielisellä sivustolla painottuu erityisesti alueen vahva TKI-osaaminen ja aluebrändi, suomenkielinen sivusto jatkaa kuluttajanäkökulmassa, laajentuen tukemaan aluebrändiä ja TKI-toimintaa.

Toimenpiteessä kerätään sisällöt sekä luodaan ja julkaistaan sivustot. Lisäksi luodaan toimintamalli sivuston ylläpitämiseksi jatkossa. Toimenpidettä toteuttaa AB Seinäjoki (hanke päättyy 8/18) tiiviissä yhteistyössä Into Seinäjoen sekä Action 1 toteuttajatahon kanssa. Lisärahoitusta ei haeta tämän toimenpiteen osalta, mutta jatkomahdollisuuksille ollaan avoinna.

### **Action 3: Ruokaprovinssiverkosto -ryhmä Facebookissa**

Facebookiin perustettavan ryhmän tarkoituksena on lisätä kaikkien eteläpohjalaisten ruokaketjun toimijoiden ja sidosryhmien verkostoitumista, tiedonvaihtoa ja yhteistyömahdollisuuksia hyvin matalalla kynnyksellä. Ryhmässä julkaistaan ajankohtaista tietoa ruokaketjun tapahtumista, tutkimuksista ja innovaatioista, rahoituksista, työpajoista, jne. Lisäksi keskustellaan, ideoidaan ja rakennetaan yhteistyötä. Ryhmää ei ole tarkoitus käyttää kaupalliseen mainostamiseen eikä ruokaketjun vastakkainasetteluun. Ryhmässä hyödynnetään quadruple helix –mallia, eli mukaan ovat tervetulleita ruokaketjun yritysten lisäksi kehittäjäorganisaatioiden edustajat ym. kiinteät sidosryhmät, kiinnostuneet alan opiskelijat ja ruokaharrastajat, sekä rahoittajien ja hallinnon edustajat. Ryhmän ylläpitäjät ovat eri kehittäjäorganisaatioiden edustajia. Sisältöä ryhmään voivat julkaista kaikki osallistujat. Yhteistyön ansiosta kuormitus ryhmän ylläpitämisestäkään ei kasva liian suureksi.

Ryhmässä on tarkoitus järjestää tapaamisia tarpeen mukaan, esimerkiksi 2-4 kertaa vuodessa. Myös pienempiä tapaamisia järjestetään tarvittaessa, esimerkiksi tietyn teeman, kuten hankehaun ympärille. Ensimmäisenä epävirallisena tapaamisena toimii NICHE Action Planin julkaisutilaisuus 9.3.2018. Toimenpiteessä perustetaan ryhmä ja käynnistetään toiminta, joka jatkuu toistaiseksi. Ryhmä on jo toiminnassa: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/149547935724626/>. Ylläpitäjinä





toimivat tällä hetkellä Soila Mäntymaa (SeAMK), Pia Kattelus (E-P liitto), Suvi Takala (Into Seinäjoki) ja Nina Harjunpää (Seinäjoen Yliopistokeskus). Ryhmän yläpito ja osallistuminen tapahtuu osana organisaatioiden normaalia toimintaa.

#### Action 4: Ruokaturvallisuus alueellisena osaamisvalttina

Tämä toimenpide keskittyy alueen ruokaturvallisuus-osaamisen tunnistamiseen ja tuotteistamiseen. Ruokaturvallisuuteen profiloitumista nostetaan esiin ja kehitetään edelleen. Toimenpide sisältää:

- Uusien ruokaturvallisuuteen liittyvien hankkeiden haun
- Koulutuspakettien muodostamisen ruokaturvallisuuteen
- Alueellisen verkoston keräämisen ruokaturvallisuuden osaajista. Verkoston jäsenet voivat tehdä yhteistyötä esimerkiksi hankehauissa, ja yritykset voivat osallistua koulutusviintiin FLEN-verkoston kautta.
- Food Safety 2020 -ERIAFF konferenssi, joka mahdollistaa laajemman profiloitumisen, tiedottamisen ja uudet kansainväliset yhteistyöverkostot
- Ulkomaisten ruokaturvallisuuteen profiloituneiden oppilaitosten benchmarkkaus, potentiaalisten yhteistyökumppanien kontaktointi liittyen koulutusyhteistyöhön, hankkeisiin ja henkilövaihtoon.
- Olemassa olevien hankkeiden edistäminen teemassa, esimerkiksi:
  - Frami Food Lab
  - H2020 + Atria + China
  - FLEN deals with southern Africa, Asia and Gulf area
  - Andalusia Big Data and Traceability, Interreg Europe

Päävastuu toimenpiteestä on SeAMK:lla ja yhteistyökumppanit ovat tervetulleita. Tärkeitä sidosryhmiä ovat alueen organisaatiot ja yritykset, joilla on ruokaturvallisuusosaamista, ja jotka ovat kiinnostuneita sen kehittamisestä ja hyödyntämisestä. Rahoitusta tullaan hakemaan eri lähteistä.

#### Action 5: Frami Food Lab

Frami Food Lab on SeAMK:n koko ruokaketjun kattava, Framille tuleva uusi elintarvikelaboratorio. Frami Food Labissa opiskelijat, tutkijat ja ruoka-alan yritykset voivat toimia yhteistyössä. Modernina oppimisympäristönä se lisää SeAMK:n ja koko ruokaketjun koulutuksen houkuttelevuutta sekä uusien opiskelijoiden, että kansainvälisen yhteistyön näkökulmasta. Frami Food Labissa pystytään opettamaan ja hyödyntämään uusia ruokaturvallisuuteen ja jäljitettävyyteen liittyviä menetelmiä. Frami Food Labissa toteutuu uudenlainen oppimisympäristö, joka huomioi modernin, innovatiivisen ruokaketjun tarpeet. Tämä vahvistaa koko ruokaketjua Etelä-Pohjanmaalla sekä korostaa Ruokaprovinssin ammattimaisuutta. Lisäksi uusi laboratorioympäristö lisää alueen houkuttelevuutta TKI-toiminnan näkökulmasta, tuo lisäarvoa, synergiaa ja tehokkuutta.

Toiminnassa on EAKR-rahoitteinen Frami Food Lab -hanke, joka sisältää laboratorion tila- ja konseptisuunnittelun, arkkitehtisuunnittelun, yritysverkoston rakentamisen, sekä laboratorion





rakentamisen vuoden 2018 aikana ja käyttöönoton. Toimenpide seuraa laboratoriahankkeen etenemistä, sen hyötyjä ruokaketjun innovatiivisuudelle Etelä-Pohjanmaalla, alueen toimijoille ja ruokaturvallisuuteen profiloitumiselle. Toimenpiteen päätoteuttajana on SeAMK yhteistyössä sidosryhmien kanssa.

#### **Action 6: Vierailukeskus, näyteikkuna Ruokaprovinssiin: "Ruokaheureka"**

Tässä toimenpiteessä selvitetään uuden vierailukeskuksen mahdollisuuksia Seinäjoen asemanseudulle. "Ruokaheureka" vahvistaisi maakunnan Ruokaprovinssibrändiä. Sen toiminnan suunnitellaan suuntautuvan sekä TKI-yhteistyöhön että ruokaketjun kuluttajatiedotukseen.

Toimenpiteessä integroidaan ja sitoutetaan ratkaisevat sidosryhmät ja tarkennetaan vierailukeskuksen suunnittelun ja perustamisen prosessit. Toimenpiteessä hyödynnetään tutkimustietoa, kirjallisuutta sekä kansallisten ja kansainvälisten vierailukeskusten ym. benchmarkkausta. Päätoteuttajia toimenpiteessä ovat Vaasan Yliopisto (Katja Lähtinen) ja Tampereen Yliopisto (Esa Vuorenmaa & Jari Kolehmainen), yhteistyössä Tampereen teknillinen yliopisto (Ari Hynynen). Rahoitusta tullaan hakemaan eri lähteistä.

#### **Action 7: Innovaatiokilpailu osana ruokaketjun opetusta: Food Business Challenge**

Toimenpiteessä varmistetaan innovaatiokilpailu Food Business Challengen jatkuvuus. Kilpailu on käynnistetty AB Seinäjoki -hankkeessa, ja se on koettu tärkeäksi toimenpiteeksi ruokaketjun innovatiivisuuden edistämiseksi myös opiskelijoiden näkökulmasta. Kilpailu jatkuu SeAMK:n vapaasti valittavana opintona AB Seinäjoki -hankkeen päättyessä. Tuomaristo ja palkintorahojen sponsorointi hankitaan edelleen yhteistyökumppanien kautta, jolla edistetään myös yritysyhteistyötä ja vuorovaikutusta. Into Seinäjoki on toimenpiteessä mukana tarjoamassa mahdollisuuden ideasparraukseen omissa, kisasta irrallisissa valmennuksissaan. Into Seinäjoki on myös mukana tuomaristossa. Toimenpiteestä on päävastuussa SeAMK ja AB Seinäjoki, yhteistyökumppaneita toivotaan sekä vuosikohtaiseen että pidempikestoiseen yhteistyöhön. Hankerahoitusta toimenpiteelle ei olla hakemassa.

#### **Action 8: Lähiruuan saatavuuden parantaminen**

Lähiruuan saatavuuden parantaminen ravintoloihin, kauppoihin ja kuluttajille on ollut esillä pitkään, ja tarve tämän haasteen ratkaisemiseksi nousi jälleen toimintasuunnitelman prosessissa vahvasti esiin. Tilaus- ja logistiikkajärjestelmän kehittäminen lähiruuan saatavuuden helpottamiseksi on avainasemassa. Toimenpiteessä luodaan projektisuunnitelma, kootaan toteuttajat ja haetaan rahoitus varsinaiseen projektiin, jossa:

- luodaan yhdistetty tilaus- ja maksusovellus lähiruuan hankkimiseksi ravintoloihin, kauppoihin ja kuluttajille
- kehitetään logistiikkaratkaisu
- luodaan toimintamalli ja sitoutetaan toimijat jatkoon





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Toimenpidettä ovat toteuttamassa SeAMK, logistiikkaosuudesta kiinnostuksensa on osoittanut Jyväskylän Yliopisto. Yhteistyökumppanit ovat tervetulleita.

### **Toimintasuunnitelman seuranta**

Toimintasuunnitelman seuranta tapahtuu NICHE -hankkeen kaksivuotisen toisen vaiheen aikana projektikoordinaattorin kautta. Hankkeen sidosryhmäkokoukset ovat kahdesti vuodessa, ja niiden yhteydessä esitellään lyhyesti kunkin toimenpiteen tilanne joko toteuttajien tai koordinaattorin toimesta. Seurantajakson lopulla toimenpiteiden toteutumisesta toimitetaan laajemmat raportit. Nämä sisältävät kussakin toimenpiteessä eriteltyt seurantakohtat ja analysoinnin toimenpiteen tuloksista. NICHE projektikoordinaattori analysoi toimintasuunnitelman vaikuttavuutta kokonaisuutena, ja esittelee tulokset sidosryhmälle. Projektikoordinaattori huomioi erityisesti toimintasuunnitelman vaikuttavuutta, huomioiden myös maakuntaohjelmien indikaattorit. Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto järjestää paikallisen infopäivän aiheesta hankkeen lopulla.

### **Toimintasuunnitelman kirjoittaminen**

Action Plan -prosessi toteutettiin Seinäjoen ammattikorkeakoulun Ruoka -yksikön asiantuntijatyönä Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitolle 9/2017-3/2018. Päävastuussa työstä oli Soila Mäntymaa, kirjoittamassa olivat mukana myös Risto Lauhanen ja Antti Pasila. Lisäksi mukana prosessissa olivat Leena Perämäki, Anu Portti, Karri Kallio sekä muut toimintasuunnitelmaan kuuluvien hankkeiden projektipäälliköt ja asiantuntijat. Tiivistä yhteistyötä tehtiin projektikoordinaattori Sanna Inkerin kanssa, mukana Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitolta olivat myös Pia Kattelus ja Marjatta Eväsoja. Lisäksi tärkeitä yhteistyökumppaneita toimenpiteiden suunnittelussa olivat Into Seinäjoelta Suvi Takala ja Sanna Kankaanpää, sekä Seinäjoen Yliopistokeskukselta Esa Vuorenmaa, Katja Lähtinen ja Nina Harjunpää. Lisäksi NICHE -hankkeen sidosryhmä on ollut mukana prosessissa. Tärkeinä sidosryhminä ovat olleet myös muut maakunnan kehittäjäorganisaatiot, ruokaketjun yritykset ja muut toimijat.



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## 2. General information

Project: NICHE - Building Innovative Food Value Chain in Regions

Partner organisation: Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

Country: Finland

NUTS3 region: South Ostrobothnia

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## 3. Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:

- Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the Policy Instrument addressed: Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 South Ostrobothnia, section 1.2.1.: Sustainable Food Systems and New Solutions for the Bioeconomy.

The sustainable and efficient elements of the regional Food Systems include primary production, agro and production technologies, food processing, logistics and environmental solutions, marketing as well as consumer experience. National and International Food Systems Innovation Cluster of South Ostrobothnia will be strengthened in the policy instrument.



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#### 4. Overview of the current situation

The overview of the current situation bases on the following strategies, policies and analysis during the NICHE project:

- Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 South Ostrobothnia (the policy Instrument addressed in the Action Plan)
- Regional Operating Programme 2018-2021
- Strategy for Smart Specialisation
- Baseline analysis
- Improve analysis

The role of food sector is very important in the region of South Ostrobothnia. The region is well known for its strong sector of agriculture and agrotechnology companies, entrepreneurship, and companies in food producing. Also in the policy instrument implemented: Regional Operational Programme 2014-2017, it is stated that the nationally most important branches of business in South Ostrobothnia are agriculture and the food industry.

South Ostrobothnia's surface area is 13 444 km<sup>2</sup>, which is 4,4 % of the total surface area of Finland. Population was 193 977, which is 3,6 % of the total population of Finland. According to Strategy for Smart Specialisation, South Ostrobothnia is the most specialised Finnish region in primary production and food-stuff refining. This can be observed from the number of workplaces, personnel or turnover perspectives. Finland's highest employment in agriculture and the food industry is in South Ostrobothnia, there were about 18,000 employees in the food sector in year 2014. The proportion of food sector was 21 % of the whole labor respectively. In comparison, the labor of food sector in Finland on average was about 13 % of the whole labor. Also 16 % of turnover for the whole country's food industry is located in the region. The effect of agriculture and food industry is 25 % of the total GDP of the region.

Total investments for agriculture were 153.6 M€ in South-Ostrobothnia in 2014, when the total investments were 1,291.0 M€ in Finland. This is 11,9 % which is more than any other region. Total investments in the food industry were 76.9 M€ in South Ostrobothnia in 2014, when these investments were 539.0 M€ in whole Finland. This is 14,3 %, investments were the second biggest in Finland in the year 2014. The annual variation is typical for these numbers, but this indicates the importance of food value chain in the region, and on the other hand the importance of the region for Finland's food production.





In 2015, the pig meat production of the region was about 20 % of the total production in Finland, the share for milk production was 11 %, and the share of chickens, broilers and turkeys was about 25 %. The share of agriculture land was about 10% of the Finnish amounts.

According to the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2017, in 2011 there were on average 17,241 companies in South Ostrobothnia. Companies in the region were small on average, employing just 2.9 persons, which is the smallest of all the regions in Finland. On the other hand, there are some large companies, which have significant effect on the industry of the region. The share of the whole country's revenue of manufacture in beef and poultry products was 40.0 %, and the production of starches and starch products was 56.8 %. Also in the commercial sector, the region's proportion of the national revenue was highly focused in the wholesale trade of agricultural and forestry machines and equipment, and the wholesale trade of tools and equipment.

The education in the food value chain is very important in the region of South Ostrobothnia. Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences has about 800 students in the food supply chain. In addition, the University Consortium of Seinäjoki and the Vocational Center of Sedu have important roles in the education of food chain.

R&D activities in the food chain are important for the region. The annual project budget of food chain is about 1 M€ in the School of Food and Agriculture at Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences alone. Also INTO Seinäjoki Ltd., Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, Finnish Natural Resource Center (LUKE Seinäjoki), Research Institute of Potato (Petla), ProAgria Etelä-Pohjanmaa, Vocational Center of Sedu and Helsinki University carry out many important food chain projects. Foodwest Ltd. is an important development company of food chain. Support and close cooperation with RDI actors and Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is important while preparing and applying the projects, and also during the operational response to run the projects in e.g. SeAMK.

Expectations for the international activities have increased, and the actors of South Ostrobothnia want to be actively part of this. To get in to the international projects and networks all regional actors must produce and deliver new data of world widely interest. These activities in South Ostrobothnia are for example the food safety in the food chain. These are based on the following four items:

- Traceability of the food chain
- Big data collection and management
- Nutrition effects through the food chain
- New protein sources (insects and green powders)

Region is also part of the following European Platforms: Big data, High tech Farming and Nutrition.





Challenges recognized in the Strategy of Smart Specialization and the baseline analysis concerning innovativeness of the food value chain, were low number of companies with strong R&D operations, low level of internationalization of companies, and that the companies are smaller than average and amount of growing companies is low. These are mostly in line also with the results of Improve analysis of the NICHE -project. On the other hand, the main enabling factors for innovation in the food sector at regional level are:

- Regional operational and development culture: strong partnerships, reciprocal trust and entrepreneurial operation modes
- Jointly recognized strategic goals
- Regional higher education operations (Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, University Consortium of Seinäjoki and Epanet-research network) and strong vocational education.

These form very good base for the development. Challenges and enabling factors have been taken into consideration in the Action Plan process.

### **Process of the NICHE Action Plan**

The process of NICHE Action Plan was carried out in five stages: interviewing local enterprises through the food value chain, arranging two workshops, comparing the Good Practices of NICHE project partners to the needs of the region, inviting implementing actors and drafting the actions with the interested partners. The draft was analyzed and commented by the stakeholder group. In the final phase, key organisations were contacted again to ensure their knowledge of the Action Plan and to invite them to participate.

In the process, clear themes came out. Those were tightening of cooperation, branding the region, and emphasizing the knowhow in food safety. It is also important to notice, that the Action Plan concerns the whole region, not just Seinäjoki area. Also internationality is an important cross-cutting theme through all the actions. It is also noticed, that possible changes in EU's regional development funds during the next funding period, will set challenges in applying for funding for the actions that need it. This has however been taken into consideration by the implementing actors. In all, the Action Plan pursues togetherness and cooperation of the food value chain in the region, utilizing the existing cluster, and this way improving innovativeness in the food value chain.

Producing this Action Plan was done by Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, School of Food and Agriculture. The organisation was chosen to carry out the following task "Producing a regional Action Plan concerning innovative food value chain in South Ostrobothnia", based on call for proposals from the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia. The main responsible person for the process was expert RDI Soila Mäntymaa, with participating senior expert Risto Lauhanen, senior





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expert Antti Pasila, faculty dean Leena Perämäki and other experts of the organization. The process was carried out in close cooperation with the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, Local Stakeholder Group, local actors in food value chain and RDI-organisations, and the NICHE project partners.



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## 5. Action 1: Developing the regional brand: Food Province (Ruokaprovinsi)

### 5.1 Background

Strengthening the brand of South Ostrobothnia as “The Food Province of Finland” is a top priority in order to develop innovative food value chains in the region. Identifiable brand has been emphasized by actors of all stages in the food value chain as an essential component. The brand, ‘Food Province’ (Ruokaprovinsi) already exists in the region, but it is not used very widely or known well enough. There has been very good work for the brand for years, but in too small scale considering the current need. The brand needs to be developed further and expanded to benefit all the committed actors of the food value chain and the stakeholder organizations through the region. That way the region can really benefit what it already has: very strong actors and knowhow in food producing and related businesses. In addition to raising interest and sales of the local products, regional brand offers its actors supportive environment to develop their business and innovations, and very important support from the other actors in the field.

Contribution to the policy instrument is strong: the pilot supports many of the key targets in the policy instrument Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 South Ostrobothnia, section 1.2.1.: Sustainable Food Systems and New Solutions for the Bioeconomy, especially following:

- strengthening the visibility of the region as food province, by bringing up the food theme as experience and interaction factor
- developing the local food value chain, strengthening the competitiveness and viability of primary production and food industry, and securing continuity of the sector
- strengthening the local innovation center, both national and international level
- promoting the food-related innovation and knowledge environments, reinforcing development of actor networks and platforms, and networking both national and international level.

Branding the region is also noticed as the kind of Good Practice from other project partners that we can import to our region and learn from these Good Practices: The Food Coast: Donegal, Ireland; LegenDerry: Derry-Londonderry, Northern Ireland; Cooperative Linkages Fund: Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland; Agronutritional Cooperation of the Region of Crete: Region of Crete, Greece. These good practices contribute directly to the action.





## 5.2 Action description

The action is to develop the Food Province (Ruokaprovinsi) brand of South Ostrobothnia in both national and international scale. The implementing actor will work in close cooperation with all the interested stakeholders of the region. This includes careful planning, workshops and interviews of the key actors. Work has been done for the Food Province brand already, and extending the brand to be regional is done considering the actors who are already involved. The actors of the food value chain feel that the regional brand needs to be significantly stronger than currently, in order to organizations and companies to be able to benefit from it and to use the brand as a tool for innovative working. Common brand would also increase the feeling of togetherness in the food value chain in the region. It is also important that the brand is truly regional, not focusing too much in Seinäjoki area.

Key of the pilot action is to develop the operating model, how the brand is carried on in the future, and especially who takes responsibility for it after the pilot. Food Province brand also needs its own label for the involved actors, and an administrator for it. During this action, the brand also needs to be launched to its new scale.

Key tasks are:

- Planning and developing the brand with the key stakeholders and marketing professionals
- Developing the operating model and assigning responsibilities
- Creating the label and criteria for the Food Province actors
- Launching the brand and committing the actors

After the pilot, funding for further development actions for the regions food sector, other than marketing and branding, can be applied from the ROP where appropriate. Pilot enables testing of a regional brand in order to be later capable to apply for funding and being further developed from the ROP directly linked to the existence of a strong regional food brand in the region. It is likely that the operating model and criteria for the brand will generate new development projects which can be funded from the ROP. Actors of the Food Province will keep up the visibility of brand in social media and in their own marketing materials. This leads to the situation that funding for basic marketing or branding is not necessary after the pilot, even though it was crucial to start with.

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is not the only responsible body of the ROP, so the decisions about the funding of future are dependent on several different public bodies. It should also be noted that at this point the cohesion policy for the next funding scheme of seven years is still unknown.





### 5.3 Stakeholders involved

The action is led by the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, which is a regional authority and a generalist organisation not specialized in food systems and the food value chain and will therefore need external expertise to implement the pilot action successfully. There are several potential organizations, which will be contacted in order to go through a tender process (bid-at-three). Involved in the process in close cooperation are the interested actors of the food value chain and other stakeholders of the region.

### 5.4 Timeframe

After the launch of the action plan, Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, as the project partner of NICHE, will start with tender process in April 2018. After the tender process and selecting the external service provider, implementing of the pilot will start in May-June 2018. It is estimated that the pilot project could run until September 2019 so altogether approximately 1 year 3 months.

### 5.5 Costs

Estimated budget for the action is altogether 61.500 € from Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia NICHE project budget. Budget of the action will consist of 50.000 € from the BL4 (External expertise) from the project partners NICHE budget. It will cover external expert working time (estimation 60 %) and the needed marketing materials (logos and advertisements) as well as some general costs. Budget for implementing this pilot action will also consist 10 % working time from the project coordinator of Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia in order to support the work of the external expert. Estimation for this is 10.000 euros.

### 5.6 Funding

Described action cannot be funded via national (Regional innovations and experimentations, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment) or regional funding (ERDF) because marketing and branding related actions are not eligible for funding in the region of South Ostrobothnia, Finland. Due to these reasons, Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is requesting Interreg Europe programme funding which is required for successful implementation of this action.

### 5.7 Expected impact on SMEs

The pilot action is expected to have notable impact on the local SMEs of the food value chain. Branding the region offers the SMEs better business environment to develop their business and innovations, and very important support from the other actors in the field.





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The food sector of the region will be more clearly represented for both local consumers and potential partners regionally, nationally and internationally. This will work as positive visibility, and raise interest for the local SMEs. This will also promote exporting food products. Common brand and visibility gives more professional image of the region's food sector. It can work to benefit both the existing actors and their business, and startups. Cooperation is also emphasized in actions 2 and 3.

### **5.8 Expected impact on innovation level**

Branding the region in the pilot action will also have a positive impact on innovation level in the local food value chain. As referred above, branding offers the actors better business environment to develop their business and innovations, support from the other actors in the field, and more professional visibility for both local consumers and potential partners nationally and internationally. By increasing the togetherness of the actors, the pilot raises the amount of cooperation and development. Because the brand includes also the RDI-organizations, this will make their services and results closer to other actors. This will also be emphasized in actions 2 and 3.

### **5.9 Action monitoring**

Pilot action will be implemented in close cooperation with the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia. The NICHE project coordinator will include 10% % working time in the pilot, in order to support the work of the external expert. This will make the monitoring of the action's progress a continuous process. Concrete steps of the monitoring will be the key task of the action, mentioned in chapter 5.2 "Action description", divided by semesters of the NICHE project. Stakeholder group of the NICHE project will also participate the monitoring.



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## 6. Action 2: Foodprovince.fi & Ruokaprovinsi.fi – developing the regions food brand website

### 6.1 Background

Action 2 connects strongly to Action 1: “Branding the region: Food Province (Ruokaprovinsi)”. In addition to developing the regional brand in Action 1, it is very important, that the brand has a common website. The food sector of the region needs to be well represented for both local consumers and potential partners nationally and internationally. Information of all the actors is fragmented to different websites, and it is hard to find. Most of the food producers of the region are already listed in ruokaprovinsi.fi -website, but there has been expectations, that a common site would exist, and would be used by the whole food sector for the regional brand. The website should also be available in both Finnish and English. Into Seinäjoki Busines Development owns the ruokaprovinsi.fi-site, and they will be the key partners of this action as well. Developing regional brand and visibility for local actors is also their goal. Into Seinäjoki has done significant work in their projects for the Ruokaprovinsi brand for years, the site included. In this action, the use of this website will be taken to larger scale with the regional branding. Priority for Into Seinäjoki is that the website services the needs of the local companies. In this Action we can partly benchmark the same partners as in Action 1: The Food Coast: Donegal, Ireland; LegenDerry: Derry-Londonderry, Northern Ireland; Cooperative Linkages Fund: Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland; Agronutritional Cooperation of the Region of Crete: Region of Crete, Greece.

### 6.2 Action description

In this action, the English website will be planned, created and published, and the Finnish website developed in cooperation. The information will be collected from different organisations, and the contents created. The action also includes creating the operating model, which will engage actors to moderate the site in the future. This will happen in cooperation with the Action 1.

By this action, the food sector of the whole region will be more clearly represented and promoted for both local consumers and potential partners nationally and internationally. For the local actors this website will offer information about other actors, make it easier to find partners and increase awareness of local RDI, ongoing projects and the results. It will also equally inform actors from different areas of the region. Shared website will increase the togetherness of the actors, and give more professional image of the region’s food sector





### 6.3 Stakeholders involved

The main responsibility for the work in the Action is at AB Seinäjoki –project and key partner for this is Into Seinäjoki Business Development. AB Seinäjoki is local innovation community of the agrobioeconomy field. It is funded by ERDF, and the partners are Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (coordinator), University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute, Natural Resources Institute Finland and Into Seinäjoki Business Development. AB Seinäjoki has been an important pioneer project in enhancing interaction between various actors of agrobioeconomy, and it is natural that the results keep on developing after the project.

Into Seinäjoki is an important actor because the ruokaprovinsi.fi –website has been done in their projects. The ownership of the site still belongs to Into Seinäjoki, and they will be the main responsible actors of the Finnish site. AB Seinäjoki will focus on setting up the English site. Input from other food sector stakeholders is expected because the site works to benefit all the actors. AB Seinäjoki will create the operating model for the future and delegate the responsibilities for the key actors. Close cooperation with also the actors of Action 1 is necessary.

### 6.4 Timeframe

Key tasks in the preparation of the website and committing the actors will be done before August 2018, because AB Seinäjoki –project will be ending then. First version of the new website should be opened by that. Collecting more information and moderating the page will continue in cooperation with actors of Action 1 and other stakeholders.

### 6.5 Costs

Main costs will be the salaries of the work in AB Seinäjoki –project (ERDF). The input from other food sector stakeholders is expected. Costs will also come from purchased services or external experts and maintenance of the domain.

### 6.6 Funding

So far, no additional funding is planned to be applied. The working time and possible other collaboration will be done with AB Seinäjoki –project and Action 1. “Branding the region: Food Province”, from their funding, where that fits their contents.

### 6.7 Expected impact on SMEs

This action is expected to have impact on SMEs of the food value chain in the region. By this action especially, the food sector of the region will be more professionally represented for both local consumers and potential partners nationally and internationally. For the SMEs, it will also make it easier to find the RDI-actors of the





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region, ongoing projects and the results. In addition, the website will act as a promotion for the regions food sector for both consumers and professionals. Shared website will also increase the togetherness of the actors. This will also be emphasized in actions 1 and 3.

#### **6.8 Expected impact on innovation level**

Expected impact on innovation level will be mostly through RDI in food value chain: the results of RDI-projects will be easier available for SMEs and other companies to implement. The RDI-actors will also be better aware of the other projects and results. Through common visibility and strong regional brand, the actors will have more credibility in regional, national and international level.

#### **6.9 Action monitoring**

Action will be monitored by the contents of the website: actors represented, RDI-projects and results. The number of visitors in the website will be monitored, and if possible, locations of the visitors.



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## 7. Action 3: Network of Food Province in social media (Ruokaprovinssiverkosto)

### 7.1 Background

As referred in previous actions, in South Ostrobothnia there is a strong cluster of food value chain. The challenge is that the actors do not know each other well enough, what the other actors are doing, or how to build best networks and cooperation. During the NICHE Action Plan process, several different actors along the food value chain brought out the need for a better communication and informing other actors. This came out in both interviews and workshops. It was also noticed, that new cooperation and even innovations had often started from common conversations with other actors of the field, without this even being the goal to start with. In addition, the togetherness, understanding and team spirit in the food value chain was seen as a need for improvement.

Within the key RDI-actors of Seinäjoki-area, there is currently a network called KERRU. KERRU-group brings together researchers and developers working with the topics of Sustainable food solutions in the University Consortium of Seinäjoki (UCS), the research network Epanet (Epanet) and the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK). Sustainable food solutions is one of the four main priorities of research contributed by UCS, Epanet and SeAMK. All priorities are strongly connected to development of the main clusters in the region. Compared to the other groups, KERRU includes also other actors of food solutions in the region. The mailing list includes over 70 reserchers and developers coming from over 15 different organisations. KERRU-group meets every two months. The main focus is to connect different actors and spreading out information. It has been found to be very good practice and this kind of network was hoped for even wider group of actors. Therefore, an idea of a quadruple helix network for the food value chain was created.

Quadruple helix –model has been used in the region for example in food-themed ERDF-project Ruokaverstas (Food workshop) and Interreg Botnia Atlantica project Food Bait. This has been found to be successful way to develop specific themes around food. From these projects, there already is a loose network of “food enthusiasts”, consumers who actively participate in food development. There is also direct sales channel for local food: “REKO”, where local food producers sell their products based on the orders the customers make beforehand. This network has already over 7800 consumers in the region, interested in innovative ways to buy local food. These channels will be utilized to find





the most active and interested consumers when building the new quadruple helix – network.

Also the network of actors in the Good Practice of The Food Coast: Donegal, Ireland, will be benchmarked in this action as well.

## 7.2 Action description

The main task of this action will be creating a Facebook group to gather network of actors in the food value chain in the whole South Ostrobothnia. The group will work as a network of quadruple helix model around the food theme: RDI and education, public administration, enterprises and customers. The group will be open to all interested quadruple helix actors of the food value chain. The group will be moderated and the applying persons will need to specify their active role in the food value chain, before being accepted in the group. Content of the group will consist mainly of informing about timely events and processes, for example workshops, seminars and possible funding to be applied. It is also meant for common conversation over the topic, and changing ideas together. This will likely lead to new ideas, which can be developed into business ideas, innovations or possible projects to be applied. The network will not be for commercial use.

When needed, the group can have live meetings. Meetings can also be arranged for smaller groups of the network: for example the actors, which are most interested in international projects and funding availabilities. These actors will be easier to find through the big network of actors. This network will also work by itself to promote Food Province brand. The committed actors of all stages of the food value chain are likely to share the information about Food Province forward for their own networks, and this way increase positive awareness. This network combines networking and exchanging information between all interested actors of the food value chain in South Ostrobothnia. This enables free conversation, discussing ideas, added awareness of timely topics in the food value chain and finding new contacts from the whole region. It also increases the communication between the different stages of the food value chain.

## 7.3 Stakeholders involved

The network will include wide range of actors in the food value chain, seen as the quadruple helix; RDI and education, public administration, enterprises and customers. Main responsibility of maintaining the network and moderating the Facebook-group will be shared with key development organisations: Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia; Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, School of Food and Agriculture; University Consortium of Seinäjoki and Into Seinäjoki Business Development. Moderators of the





group will be from these organisations. They will also call in the live meetings. There will also be communication and cooperation with the responsible actors of Action 2: The Food Province internet-site. All the members of the network are also important in keeping up active informing and discussion in the group. Moderators will keep an eye on the direction of the discussions, so that the material and discussions in the group will stay appropriate. For example, commercial advertisements in the group are forbidden, and the atmosphere of the group is meant to stay constructive and positive.

Actors from SeAMK will establish the group. The key organisations will continuously have at least one person assigned to moderate the group. Other key organisations for moderating can also be added or changed if needed. All together at least three or four moderators should always be named, so the workload will not grow too much.

#### **7.4 Timeframe**

The Facebook group was already established in February 2018, during the Action Plan process. It is marketed in different mailing lists and other communication channels of the key organisations, and already existing smaller Facebook-groups. At the same time with the publication event of this NICHE Action Plan, AB Seinäjoki –project (ERDF) will organize a common photoshoot for the local actors of food value chain. This event will be marketed in the network group as well. This event will also give the actors the first possibility to come together in informal atmosphere. During the publication event, they will also get to know the concrete actions that are planned to increase innovativeness of the local food value chain. After this, the first official meeting will be arranged by the moderators, when seen useful for the group. The initial plan is to have 2-3 larger meetings per year, but this can change depending on the upcoming needs of the group. Possible smaller group meetings with more specific topics such as preparing project ideas will be in addition to this. It is intended, that the group will continue working until further notice. The operating model will be developed within the two years of the NICHE project, and the routines formed.

#### **7.5 Costs**

The main costs consist of the salary costs of the moderators and other active participants, who will participate as representative of their organisations. There can also be possible travel costs to the meetings, workshops and possible other events organized by the network, and possible catering for the meetings. In general, the costs will however be rather marginal, for the shared responsibilities between the organisations, and the activities being rather similar to the normal communications and networking in the developing organisations. This is why also the moderating of the network will be possible as part of the normal communication in the organisations. Working time for





actual moderating of the group is estimated to be approximately one - two hours per moderator per month. Publishing and discussing in the group will be considered for all participants as part of the normal communication from their occupations, and therefore not to be counted in the costs of this action.

### **7.6 Funding**

The costs will in general be covered by the organisations and enterprises involved, as part of the work of the person participating to the network activities. The networks as such is not able to apply for funding as it is informal, but if there is an activity developed within the network, the interested organisations may apply for suitable funding, for example ERDF, for the implementation - as e.g. a project - depending on the nature and contents of the activity.

### **7.7 Expected impact on SMEs**

As food sector SMEs will be invited to participate to the network, the more systematic flow of information, news, ideas, innovations, research results etc. in connection to their business sector will be to their benefit. Involvement in the activities of the group should have a positive impact on the SMEs in the food sector. The group can also work as a way to encourage the SMEs to internationalization and closer cooperation with other actors.

### **7.8 Expected impact on innovation level**

This action is expected to have notable impact on innovation level. Quadruple helix – model of the group enables new kind of communication between the actors. Also the mentioned more systematic flow of information, news, ideas, innovations and research results will be available and prompting new ideas and actions. In the network, it will also be easier to find project partners to innovative projects and find suitable funding to be applied. Involvement in the activities of the group should have a positive impact on the innovation level of the food value chain in general. The group can also work as a way to encourage all kinds of actors to innovativeness and participating actions that help developing their innovation level.

### **7.9 Action monitoring**

This action will be monitored by following:

- number of net members in Facebook-group, including clarification about the amount of different actors of quadruple helix model
- number of meetings arranged within the network/year
- number of project ideas developed to an application/year





## 8. Action 4: Food safety as a regional competence

### 8.1 Background

Region of South Ostrobothnia has several actors with remarkably strong knowledge on traceability, food safety and operations of the food supply chain in its entirety. These include enterprises, offices and development organisations. On international scale, food safety in Finland is in very high level. Based on the different high skilled actors of the substance, this can be seen as a regional competence as well. This competence should be brought out to benefit the competent actors in its full potential. Food safety is also an important and timely theme internationally, and knowhow in food safety has wide demand.

Seinäjäki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK), School of Food and Agriculture offers education in all stages of the food supply chain in close cooperation with other activities in the organisation, actors through the food supply chain and the stakeholder organisations. SeAMK has an important role in South Ostrobothnia region because it is the only higher education institute on the area. SeAMK has been active to utilize on national level both ERDF and structural financing. Lately there have been especially food sector projects financed by Interreg Botnia Atlantica, Interreg Europe and Horizon programs. The support of the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia has been important while SeAMK has prepared and applied these projects. Here are shortly described some of the key projects and networks in SeAMK. These projects form an important basis for the competence in food safety in the organization and benefit the region as well.

#### Frami Food Lab

Frami Food Lab is a significant project in enhancing education and RDI related to food safety. The goal of this ERDF-funded project is to develop an innovative food lab concept for the Frami Campus Area and for the region of South Ostrobothnia. As a part of SeAMK Food and Agriculture, a new food laboratory venue will be planned and invested in. In Frami Food Lab, the students, researchers and food companies can collaborate and network with each other. The project can further be used to improve companies' knowledge and expertise regarding food safety. Companies and students can also develop new and even safer products in the test laboratory by utilizing RDI.

#### FLEN -network

The FLEN (Food Learning Export Network) is an educational export pilot for food business, funded by ERDF. It combines the strengths of five Finnish Universities of





Applied Sciences (HAMK, JAMK Savonia, SeAMK and TAMK) for one network, and creates an operational model, which has the necessary skills and prestige in order to achieve international success. Food quality management and food safety systems are strengths of the Finnish food chain and export business. FLEN also adds value for the Finnish food export by offering educational solutions for food quality and safety related issues, especially, in areas such as: Asia, Persian Gulf region and Baltic Sea Region.

#### ERIAFF -network

South Ostrobothnia region has been active in international networks. For food sector one important network is ERIAFF (European Regions for Innovation in Agriculture, Food & Forestry). The main objective is to strengthen the performance of the European Innovation partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP AGRI). SeAMK and ERIAFF -network have organized an international conference in Seinäjoki in year 2014. The next international ERIAFF -conference will be organized in Seinäjoki in June 2018.

#### EU - E-P -Foodnet

EU - E-P -Foodnet project seeks suitable European food networks, and especially the ones related to the food safety, to the faculty of SeAMK Food and Agriculture. The results and advantages of finding the suitable networks are the increased international contacts among the different type of partners taking part in the platforms. The other and very important advantage is the ability to apply for the funds, for food safety projects, which EU already has resourced over the European regions. The project is funded by ERDF.

#### Food Bait

The long-term goal of the Botnia-Atlantica funded Food Bait project is to enhance cross-border growth for food related SME companies in Botnia Atlantica region by accelerating collaboration and knowledge transfer between SMEs and researchers over Kvarken. A series of workshops is arranged, for SMEs, researchers, students and food enthusiasts to get together to solve companies challenges related to concept/brand, product and business development. Food safety, food traceability and sustainability are themes that are continuously discussed in the workshops.

#### SME ORGANICS

SME ORGANICS is an Interreg-Europe funded project, improving both South Ostrobothnia region organic sector by supporting SMEs and enhancing their competitiveness and sustainability, and also the growth capacity of the entire organic sector in regional, national and international markets. The project bases on interregional





learning process. Local SMEs can utilize the gathered information about other regions good organic practices, develop their knowhow about food safety in the organic sector even further, and develop their processes.

“Healthy Kids of Seinäjoki” (Lasten ja nuorten terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin edistäminen osaamisvientituotteeksi)

In this project, the “Healthy Kids of Seinäjoki” model is productized to education export packages. Healthy nutrition choices are important part of the model, together with lifestyle guidance and physical exercise. Food safety must be considered in the nutritional part of the model.

#### Nefertiti

SeAMK Food participates to the H2020 NEFERTITI project (Networking European Farms to Enhance Cross Fertilization and Innovation Uptake through Demonstration). NEFERTITI is a unique 7 M€ Network (H2020) comprising 32 partners and coordinated by ACTA. NEFERTITI establishes 10 interactive thematic networks and brings together 45 regional clusters (hubs) of demo-farmers and actors involved (advisors, NGOs, industry, education, researchers and policy makers) in 17 countries. NEFERTITI addresses range of topics in agricultural sectors, where food safety will be also covered.

#### S3P “High Tech Farming” thematic network

The involved partners are working together to improve the efficiency in the connections between primary sector and relevant technology, and are seeking complementarities in their programming tools so that public expenditure can intervene in the most appropriate projects and leverage further private investments.

#### S3P “Traceability and Big Data” thematic network

Regions and regional stakeholders of S3P Agri-food on Traceability and Big Data are addressing more efficiently traceability & big data and digitalisation in the agri-food sector, which constitute a priority in smart specialization strategies. The network will contribute to rural development and concentrate on creating R&D projects towards traceability and big data, which are highly important to food safety matters in agrifood sector.

## 8.2 Action description

In this action, the profile of food safety as regional competence will be emphasized and developed. The competences will be identified and the knowledge compiled. In practice, this will include:

- Applying new projects of food safety





- Preparing certified training programmes about food safety for both SeAMK's own curriculum and education export.
- Gathering a network of regional enterprises and organisations with competences on food safety. Actors of the network will for example be able to apply for funding in international food safety -themed projects together. Enterprises working in food chain can also participate in education export activities organized by FLEN-network.
- ERIAFF conference in 11.-13th June 2018, Seinäjoki
  - o Profiling the region in international scale
  - o Informing about food safety and good practices
  - o Building new cooperation with the participating international actors
- Benchmarking the foreign universities which are profiled in food safety, and contacting possible partners for cooperation in projects, education and exchange
- Furthering the existing projects and goals of the food safety theme, such as:
  - Frami Food Lab
  - H2020 + Atria + China
  - FLEN deals with southern Africa, Asia and Gulf area
  - Andalusia Big Data and Traceability, Interreg Europe

### 8.3 Stakeholders involved

SeAMK will take the main responsibility of the activities in this action. Key stakeholders are the organisations that take part in the activities developing food safety and its utilization in the region: Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, University of Helsinki: Ruralia Institute and University Consortium of Seinäjoki. Also international networks and partners, such as ERIAFF network, partner universities and partners in various international projects. Very important stakeholders can also be the local companies with remarkable competences in food safety.

In interviews for local enterprises about high tech solutions in agriculture, it was found that smaller companies are interested in high tech solutions that also support food safety and traceability. This was also seen as strength for the companies. Both farmers and industry companies providing high tech solutions to agriculture and food supply chain were actively moving forward and searching new possibilities developing their operations. Networks and also international information were seen as a big part of this.

### 8.4 Timeframe

During the two-year action plan implementation time, described activities will happen simultaneously. Detailed timeframes will be created by the action. Most activities will continue further after the NICHE project implementation time.





### 8.5 Costs

In this action, the main costs will consist of the salaries of the persons working in the activities. There can also be travel costs to network meetings and international conferences. Also in some cases there can be costs of arranging meetings and events.

### 8.6 Funding

Some of the activities will be carried out by the implementing organisations, without additional funding. Some parts will be implemented as part of already running projects like FLEN and EU-EP Foodnet. Funding from for example Erasmus, Leader, Botnia-Atlantica, ERDF or AIKO (Regional innovations and experimentations, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment) will be likely to be applied also. Ideas that will be further developed and then possibly applied for AIKO-funding are for example:

- Frami Food Lab
- ERIAFF node in Seinäjoki
- H2020 + Atria + China
- FLEN deals with Namibia and Gulf area
- Food technology education with university of Helsinki
- Traceability digital research with T3

### 8.7 Expected impact on SMEs

Local SME's of food value chain will be able to utilize the network by participating projects. Some of the companies can participate the education export with their own expertise. Other SME's will be able to develop their own knowhow on food safety, and this way improve their own processes. Food safety as regional competence will improve the image of local food value chain, and this way have positive impact on the SME's.

For example, FLEN network has develop Food Edu-concept, which in South Ostrobothnia region is themed on food safety and food technology and consequently called Food Edu Tech. Food Edu Tech is a miniature education export concept built and implemented by FLEN network together with 3-5 food technology company operating in the region and already exporting their technology to abroad or interested in exporting. The companies and the target markets or country can be different in every case. The education offered by FLEN and the products offered by the Finnish companies are wrapped together and sold as one complex either directly to international customer or in export event abroad. The SMEs in South Ostrobothnia region will be able to export their food safety or technology products abroad together with FLEN and enhance their own knowhow about education export and international markets.





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### 8.8 Expected impact on innovation level

Developing activities about food safety will open new possibilities for innovative solutions in the food value chain. Action will also strengthen and open new cooperation possibilities in RDI and education worldwide. Raising of common awareness of the importance of food safety and the high level of competences in that field in the region will also work as a booster for innovations.

### 8.9 Action monitoring

This action will be monitored by following:

- Number of new projects that include food safety
- Food safety courses offered in SeAMK and to export.



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## 9. Action 5: Frami Food Lab

### 9.1 Background

"Sustainable food solutions" is one of the main strategic topics in the region of South-Ostrobothnia. This topic is also part of the profile of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK). For example, the University Center of Seinäjoki (UCS) follows the same sustainable food solutions topic. SeAMK Food is the school of agriculture, biotechnology, food processing and hospitality. In Seinäjoki, the education model for the whole food supply chain is a unique solution in Finland. However, it has lacked a common, modern laboratory that benefits the food supply chain and furthers the cooperation between programmes. It is seen necessary to prepare an advanced laboratory learning environment on the Frami campus area. SeAMK has responsibility to take the initiative on Frami Food Lab arrangements, and it offers the benefit of cooperation for the important stakeholder organisations and the enterprises of the food value chain. Food safety is also a crucial international theme, and it is seen as an important competence in the region. The Frami Food Lab project strongly supports Action 4: Food safety as a regional competence, and furthers the theme in its own processes.

### 9.2 Action description

The goal of Frami Food Lab invest project (FFL invest project) is to invest an innovative food lab concept for the Frami Campus Area and for the region of South Ostrobothnia. As a part of SeAMK Food, a new food laboratory venue will be invested and constructed. In Frami Food Lab, the students, UCS -researchers and food companies can network.

As a modern education venue, Frami Food Lab will help Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences in the catching of the new students for the education in the whole food chain. Frami Food Lab introduces the students to exploit the methods which farms, food industry and retail use while they implement the traceability. Frami Food Lab invest project will co-operate with the Frami Food Lab development project simultaneously.

The project will result in a new learning environment that will consider the needs of the modern and innovative food chain. Frami Food Lab invest will strengthen the food sector of South Ostrobothnia. The region is called "Food Province" that needs students, researchers and labor for food chain. In addition, Frami Food Lab will invest a food chain infrastructure that will aid the region to gain new researchers and innovators in the long run. In the case of FFL, the new food chain venue will produce added value and synergy as well as better effectiveness.





### 9.3 Stakeholders involved

Main responsible organization for the action is SeAMK. Important stakeholders are the other RDI-organisations UCS and EPANET-professor network, Natural Resource Center (LUKE) in Seinäjoki, Potato research institute (Petla) and INTO Seinäjoki development company. Also the local food companies have a key role in the Frami Food Lab. Seinäjoki EVIRA the Finnish Food Safety Authority has an urgent need for new laboratory environment. EVIRA Seinäjoki has a responsibility to research the infectious animal diseases. This research is crucial for animal husbandry in South Ostrobothnia. The UCS universities in Seinäjoki do not have own laboratories in Seinäjoki. A common target of all the Universities who take part in UCS is the cooperation with companies in the region. The needs of the stakeholders will be further detected during the project.

### 9.4 Timeframe

Frami Food lab project is scheduled for two years' period in 2018-2019. The first phase contains interior planning, concept designs and preparations for future building constructions. The second phase includes architectural planning. Also building the business network and conceptual design will be completed in this phase. In the third stage, building new laboratories begins. This will be ready by the end of 2018. The last step is to extend the network and start up the new premises.

### 9.5 Costs

The combined costs of the Frami Food lab project is 258 600€. This includes future acquisitions, project wages and purchasing services. However, this does not include the cost of building property, which comes from the budget of SeAMK. These costs will be estimated by an architect in March 2018.

### 9.6 Funding

The Frami Food lab project is partly funded by ERDF. Self-financing will come from SeAMK.

### 9.7 Expected impact on SMEs

Frami Food Lab is a coalition of activities that offers services and cooperation for SMEs. The earlier separate location of different laboratories has caused overlapping for SMEs. In Frami Food Lab the main idea is to get the services "through one door". One of the biggest impacts of the project on the SME-sector are the RDI-opportunities that it offers. Companies are offered the opportunity to do development work in new premises and the cooperation with RDI actors. Companies can also use the students in their projects if they want. In that case the work is free for the company, and the students will gain important skills and connections for the future. The new lab offers a unique opportunity





for the SMEs to explore their own products, develop new products and train their workers.

### **9.8 Expected impact on innovation level**

Innovations arise from research work. Frami Food Lab offers UCS and EPANET professors a new possibility to carry out research work to benefit the local SMEs and other stakeholders. Through this research, innovations are expected. Expected impacts concern both the SME sector and larger companies. Especially companies' RDI activity and innovation work will be able to rise to a new level due to FFL –project. The laboratories provide a unique opportunity to conduct and pursue research. The business network created during the project will provide students and staff with more meaningful and challenging projects where they can learn in real-life working situations. This will improve networking of students, staff and businesses and likely lead to innovations of the food value chain.

### **9.9 Action monitoring**

In this action, the progress of Frami Food Lab project phases will be monitored, focusing especially on networks and future innovation possibilities. Once the laboratory starts working, it will be monitored by the amount of the research projects, number of involved researchers, students and enterprises.





## 10. Action 6: Research and Experience Center: Window of the Food Province “Ruokaheureka”

### 10.1 Background

In Finland, strong signals exist that a formation of a network of national visiting centers is emerging through hubs established, e.g., Turku (Vierailukeskus Joki) and Vaasa (Fisketshus). As South Ostrobothnia is a region characterized by strong value-chains in food production, it would be essential to establish in the area a visiting center acting as an exhibition arena for different aspects of responsible nutrition. This would also be in line with the strengthening regional brand of the Food Province, implemented in actions 1, 2, 3 and 4.

At the moment, scientific indications exist that Finnish consumers have different types of expectations on product-service supply connected to its local and ecological responsibility. From the perspective of age segments, evidence also has been found on the lack of environmental knowledge among children and adolescents. Regarding the location of the center, there are strong motivations in Seinäjoki to develop railway and bus station area, which makes the momentum for forwarding the initiatives for center development especially fruitful.

### 10.2 Action description

The overall purpose of the action is to integrate and engage the key stakeholders into the project, and to define in collaboration with them the processes (i.e., financial aspects, product-service supply and administration) crucial for establishing and planning the operations of the center. The operations of the center are divided into two parts: 1) Research and innovation center acting as a platform for creating synergies between different local, national and international scientific and education organisations, and 2) Experience and communication center between actors in research and development, businesses and general audience.

The added value of part 1 is related to capturing and exchanging R&D capabilities related to food value chains in the international business environment (e.g., scrutinizing possibilities for researcher and expert residences). The added value of part 2 is connected to providing experiences for visitors (e.g., companies and general audience) on issues related to food products and services and receiving information (e.g., through living labs) from visitors to enhance local innovations related to food value-chains.





The information for implementing the action will be received through analysis of existing survey data (appr. 300 respondents in Finland) gathered in autumn 2017 (Ruokaheureka -project), literature reviews, benchmarking with national and international cases of visiting centers, workshops and living labs.

The results will be published in popularized forms (e.g., slide packets and magazine articles) and as scientific publications (e.g., international peer-reviewed journal). The main target groups for the project during the action implementation are business, research and education organisations (please, see more detailed description in chapter 10.3), who in the future are the potential actors to involve in visiting center operations. In addition, at the phase of starting the project, e.g., an advisory group will be formed.

### 10.3 Stakeholders involved

Implementing actors with main responsibility of this action are University of Vaasa (Katja Lähtinen) and University of Tampere (Esa Vuorenmaa & Jari Kolehmainen) in cooperation with Tampere University of Technology (Ari Hynynen). As the purpose of the center development is to enhance both businesses, research and education related to food value chains, there are a myriad of stakeholders involved in the initiative. So far, in the development work the following actors have been participated in the project: Universities (Uni. of Vaasa, Uni. of Tampere, Technical Uni. of Tampere, Uni. of Helsinki), research organisations (Natural Resources Institute Finland), development organisations (Into Seinäjoki) and companies acting in food and real estate businesses. In addition, in the future abreast with many additional R&D and business actors, also non-governmental organisations (e.g., Scouts of Finland, 4H in Finland, the home economics Martha Organization and Suomen Latu the Outdoor Association of Finland) will be integrated in the project.

### 10.4 Timeframe

During the first year of the project, the different processes (i.e., financial aspects, product-service supply and administration) crucial for both parts 1 and 2 of center operations will be defined together with integration and engagement of different key stakeholders in the planning and center implementation processes. After this, during the second year, the actual short-term operations and long-term strategic goals will be defined by employing service design approaches in collaboration with key stakeholders and test groups of general audience.

### 10.5 Costs

Budget for different project partners will be calculated in the course of developing more detailed plan for project implementation.





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#### **10.6 Funding**

Funding will be applied from various national (e.g., Sitra) and international (e.g., EU funding) sources.

#### **10.7 Expected impact on SMEs**

The expected impacts on small- and medium-sized enterprises will be broad, e.g., as a result of entirely new benefits received through new collaboration and business opportunities, which can be measured e.g., with economic indicators (e.g., increase in turnover and value-added) and social indicators (e.g., increase of employment).

#### **10.8 Expected impact on innovation level**

The expected impacts on innovations are multi-dimensional, e.g., related to products and services, marketing and collaboration both at the level of companies and region (i.e., South Ostrobothnia).

#### **10.9 Action monitoring**

At operational level, the success of action implementation is assessed with the amount of collaboration partners to be engaged in final initiation of the center operations (parts 1 and 2). At scientific level, the innovativeness of action implementation is evaluated through articles to be published related to action results.



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## 11. Action 7: Innovation competition for students of the food supply chain: Food Business Challenge

### 11.1 Background

The Food Business Challenge is a competition, developed by ERDF-funded project called AB Seinäjoki that has been boosting agrobioeconomy in the region of South Ostrobothnia. AB Seinäjoki project has organized the Challenge twice, in 2017 and 2018. The Food Business Challenge is a competition looking for new business ideas and innovations involving food value chain - from field to fork. The Challenge is targeted to students studying in Finnish universities in bachelor's or master's degree programs. Doctoral students may also participate. The winner of the Challenge gains 7000€, funded by Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK), Into Seinäjoki Business Development, University Consortium of Seinäjoki and University Association of South Ostrobothnia. Three top ideas are awarded by 2000€. The jury of the competition is composed of highly appreciated experts.

Related to the Challenge, there is a coaching course of food business ideas, offered among elective studies in SeAMK. The course is organized in cooperation with Into Seinäjoki, which arranges several different trainings for startups and other enterprises.

During the action plan process, in the workshops and interviews, came out the importance of innovative thinking and ideas, that students and graduates bring to the companies. Food Business Challenge and the Food Business course have been seen very effective concepts to encourage innovative thinking and to develop startup-skills of students. The AB Seinäjoki project will be ending in August 2018, but the Food Business Challenge is seen such good practice, that this action focuses on developing the operating model for the competition in the future. SeAMK has significant focus on entrepreneurship, and innovativeness is an important part of the studies.

### 11.2 Action description

In this action, the Food Business Challenge innovation competition will be implemented in the curriculum of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, School of Food and Agriculture. This will give continuity to the model that has been tested and found effective way to raise interest in innovations in the food supply chain, and produce concrete innovations. This will also strengthen the perspective of innovativeness in the education of the food supply chain. The Food Business Challenge competition will be implemented as elective studies, and available to all students in SeAMK. It will also be





available as a course of Open University, which makes it possible to participate also for others than students of SeAMK.

The curriculum of different programmes in SeAMK offers students increasing ability to innovative thinking. The Food Business Challenge competition will give students the possibility to use the skills they have gained. Competition works as a climax of innovation studies. This is why Food Business Challenge is mostly targeted to 2-4 class students. Food Business Challenge will be actively marketed during earlier courses of the food supply chain and innovations, which helps the students to prepare for the participation from early stage of studies, and elaborate ideas.

In the future, the competition model will be slightly simplified. The competition will be held in one round, no finalists for the second round. The students can participate the “Liikeideat lentoon”-coaching from Into Seinäjoki, when there are places available. The coaching is part of Into Seinäjoki’s normal operations, and is organized four times a year. Award ceremony of the competition will be held in an annual Into Seinäjoki’s event “Food Business Summit”, if the schedules fit together.

Jury will still consist of external experts from business world and the food value chain. Into Seinäjoki as key partner has offered their expertise to the jury, especially in the perspective of the feasibility, profitability and business possibilities of the competition entries. The annual prize money will be sponsored by interested partners. AB Seinäjoki project will make the arrangements and deals for the continuity as far as possible.

### 11.3 Stakeholders involved

SeAMK Food and Agriculture will be the responsible actor for the implementation. Contact person is Head of Degree Programme Anu Katila. The teacher of the course will be assigned yearly. Into Seinäjoki has wide coaching for business-idea development, and these services are available for the students preparing for Food Business Challenge as well. Stakeholders from the local and national enterprises and organisations of the food supply chain are involved when selecting the jury and sponsoring the prize money for the competition. Also the actors of the Food Province network and the organisations of the ending AB Seinäjoki project are seen as key stakeholders.

### 11.4 Timeframe

The Food Business Challenge competition will be an annual event. Head of Degree Programme will assign the teacher for the course. Teacher will contact the stakeholders for the jury and sponsoring. The marketing for students will start immediately, focusing





on late autumn, when the registering for the course is timely. The actual competition will be in spring.

#### **11.5 Costs**

Costs will consist mainly of the prize money and the working hours of the teacher. The members of the jury participate as part of their own work. The facilities and other reimbursable costs will be considered as a normal part of the course in curriculum.

#### **11.6 Funding**

Additional funding will not be applied, implementing the action is considered as a feature of organisations' normal operations. The prize money will be sponsored by stakeholders.

#### **11.7 Expected impact on SMEs**

The Food Business Challenge is part of teaching and encouraging students towards innovative thinking and entrepreneurship. This will benefit the SMEs of the food value chain by educating innovative employees for the future, and encouraging also the SMEs to see things in new light. The competition can also lead to completely new SMEs, like the winner of The Food Business Challenge 2017.

#### **11.8 Expected impact on innovation level**

Expected impact on innovation level is important: Food Business Challenge encourages the students on innovative thinking, and searches concrete solutions on the actual challenges of the food value chain. It also highlights the education of innovativeness and its importance for both students and the actors of the food value chain.

#### **11.9 Action monitoring**

Action will be monitored by following:

- number of participated students from SeAMK
- number of participated students from other universities
- number of participated stakeholder companies and organisations





## 12. Action 8: Local Food Availability initiative

### 12.1 Background

New kind of operating model is needed to ease and further increase the use of local food products from small local producers. Both restaurants and grocery stores have suggested that they would like to use more local products, if the ordering system and logistics would work out efficiently. At the moment many of the local products have to be ordered separately by telephone or e-mail, and the producer brings the product to the buyer. Also it's felt that new producers are hard to find. On the other hand the producers feel that it's hard to find the buyers. By compounded ordering system with optimized logistics, this could be done very much easier for both parties. At the same time the solution would increase the used amount of local products, and encourage the producers to focus on high quality, added value products. This would also help the restaurants and grocery stores to offer their clients the kind of local food that they want. Interest and demand for the local products exists and grows all the time.

Direct selling from farmers to consumers is a growing trend. In Finland and in South Ostrobothnia there already exists REKO-direct selling groups. They base on orders made beforehand in a Facebook-group, and the producers bringing the products to the market. Products are mostly paid with cash. This is not very flexible model for the producers nor the customers. It runs anyway, because people are willing to do extra effort for local food and direct selling. For example, REKO Seinäjoki group alone has over 7,800 members, who are interested in buying from REKO-groups. The ordering and logistics solution developed in this action, would also work for consumer use. The Action 4: Research and Experience Center "Ruokaheureka" could provide potential facilities for the local food distribution for consumers in the future. Within the Food Province actors and the producers in REKO –groups of the region there is a good recourse of producers who already have been seeking for innovative ways to sell their products.

### 12.2 Action description

In this action, key task is to develop a specific project plan, gather project partners and apply for funding. This will be done to develop the local food availability solution. The project will include:

- developing compounded ordering- and payment system for local products for restaurants, grocery stores and consumers
- developing optimized logistics solution for delivering local products
- developing the operating model and committing responsible actors for the future.





### **12.3 Stakeholders involved**

This action will be implemented by Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, School of Food and Agriculture. University of Jyväskylä has indicated interest on the logistics part of the project. Key stakeholders are all the users of this solution: the local producers, consumers, grocery stores and restaurants, who are interested in increasing the amount of local food they offer.

### **12.4 Timeframe**

The preparation for the project and applying for funding will be done during the two-year implementation time of NICHE action plan.

### **12.5 Costs**

Costs of the preparation will consist mostly of the salaries of the persons working on the action.

### **12.6 Funding**

The preparation is planned to be done without additional funding. Funding for the project will be applied as part of the action.

### **12.7 Expected impact on SMEs**

Expected impact on SMEs is happening as result of the project planned in this action. The solution would increase the used amount of local products, and encourage the producers to focus on high quality, added value products. This would also help the restaurants and grocery stores to offer their clients the kind of local food that they want.

### **12.8 Expected impact on innovation level**

The action itself is a plan of developing a significant innovation for the food supply chain. Once piloted, it could be scaled and duplicated to other regions as well. It will also encourage the actors of the food supply chain to create innovative products.

### **12.9 Action monitoring**

Action will be monitored by the phase of the project plan, project partners and applied funding.





### 13. Monitoring and Impact of the Action Plan

The action plan will be monitored by personally contacting the actors by the NICHE project coordinator. The coordinator will work to support the implementation as representative of the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia. Concrete monitoring of the actions will happen in line with NICHE stakeholder meetings, which are two times a year: August 2018, February 2019, August 2019, February 2020. Before each meeting, the project coordinator will request the responsible actors of each action short reports about the state of the action. The reports will be presented in the stakeholder meetings by the project coordinator or the implementing actors.

Before the last stakeholder meeting at the end of the second phase of NICHE project, the implementing actors will be requested for complete report of the implementation. In the final report, the implementing processes will be described and the results displayed. Reports should include analysis of the concrete key points specified in each action, under chapter "Action monitoring", and analyzing the overall results of the action. The NICHE project coordinator will analyze the impact of the whole action plan, and present the results for the stakeholder group and project partners. Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia will organize a local info day of during the last semester (October 2019- March 2020).

Project coordinator will consider especially the impact this action plan has in the policy instrument: Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 South Ostrobothnia, section 1.2.1.: Sustainable Food Systems and New Solutions for the Bioeconomy. The results will also be compared to new Operational Programme and Regional Strategy. Also the overall numbers will be considered:

- number of actively participated implementing organisations and companies
- number of the stakeholder groups involved
- number of new projects
  - o national
  - o international
- the visibility for the region through the actions
  - o national
  - o international
- number of innovations in the food value chain, influenced by the action plan

The commitment of the implementing actors has been ensured as far as possible, already in the process of developing the actions. All of the actions have been developed together with the implementing organisations. The actions are responding to actual needs, and creating new possibilities that organisations are interested in seizing. Regular communication with the NICHE





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project coordinator will offer spurring and reminder of the importance of the actions, that develop the innovativeness of the food value chain in South Ostrobothnia.



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## 14. Signature

The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia agrees to support and promote the implementation (and where appropriate implement) of the plan detailed above. I confirm that I have the required authority of my organisation to do so and that the required authorisation process of my organisation has been duly carried out.

Date: 29.3.2018

Date of update: 1.10.2018

Signature: 

Name and position: Antti Saartenoja, Deputy Regional Mayor

Stamp of the organisation:

