Strategies for Regional Innovative Food Clusters

Now the European project STRING has come to an end we can look back on a project which improves the performance of regional development instruments and programs in building strong agri-food innovation systems across Europe and promotes agri-food innovation clusters as testbeds of (new) co-creation and cooperation in the agri-food production sector.

The provision of smart, healthy and sustainable food is a top priority in Europe. The liveliness and dynamism of some European regions depends on the activity of the agrifood sector. STRING boosts the competitiveness of agrifood companies and clusters through innovation and international development.

Agri & food for regional growth

The agri & food industry is a challenging driver for regional innovation and growth. STRING unifies European regions sharing the ambition to improve the (international) competitive capacity of their agrifood clusters. Because those clusters have enormous economic-societal impact; today and tomorrow.

Improvement of regional policy instruments

All STRING regions have been renowned for their food production traditions, and for their innovation potentials. They all are engaged in food innovation and production in different roles.

The overall objective of the partners - independent from their development level and the strength of cohesion in their regional food sectors – is to improve the performance and implementation efficiency of development policies and programs related to food Research, Development and Innovation and clusterisation to promote innovation value chains for the sector.

By deepening cluster integration and creating more added value contributing to smart growth – each region will reach this ambition.

But how to boost such a strong and competitive regional sector? STRING has found the answer to that question in seven participating regions across Europe.

STRING promotes intensive interregional learning, knowledge exchange and everlasting intercluster cooperation. As the result of STRING, the performance and implementation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) financed policy instruments related to agri-food innovation and to the vertical, triple helix clusterisation - both supported by enhanced SME participation - are improved. Intra and inter cluster cooperation is deepened, serving the proper operation of food innovation value chains in the 7 partner regions and EU widely.

Strategies for creating added value are adopted and successfully applied also via (new) food innovation projects born at the interface of coworking among economic sectors, like health care, high-tech systems and big data.
**The future of food**

Key figures per agrifood region

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**Province of North Brabant**
- The Agrifood sector accounts for nearly 10 per cent of the national income and employment of the Netherlands. The sector also accounts for 25 per cent of the country’s exports and more than 50 per cent of its trade surplus. The sector is the second-largest exporter of food in the world. Every year the sector generates €50 billion of added value and accounts for over €80 billion of exports.
- Noord-Brabant is the biggest agrifood region in the Netherlands and accountable for 20.5% of all Dutch agrifood production. When we look at the total Dutch Agrifood export, Noord-Brabant is accountable for 17.3% of total Dutch export. Agrifood employment more than 100,000 people in Noord-Brabant. Over 13,000 companies participate in this sector. They represent an added value of 7.5 billion euros.

**Central Denmark Region**
- With a total population of 1.2 million, inhabitants CDR is the second largest of the 5 regions in Denmark. CDR accounts for 6% of Danish food exports and 5% of the total Danish turnover. The total exports from CDR is €10.000 million. The level of employment directly related to farming and the percentage of farming related to the total GDP is relatively low – 3.6% and 1.7% respectively. If you include related industries (secondary and tertiary industries such as food processing, service, ingredients, machinery etc. but excluding retail) the employment level rises to 7.1%.
- CDR counts for 1340 agri-food companies with 134,000 employees and a total volume turnover of €16.000 million.
- CDR is renowned as a R&D hub where both SMEs and large companies such as ARLA, DuPont and Danish Crown have located their R&D activities primarily in and around Aarhus, the main city of CDR.
- A lot of small innovative food companies that cater to the thriving gastroscene in and around the many cities of Denmark is also present here.
- The closest to having a FOO in CDR is the native “Limfjords oyster” that is cultivated in and around the northern and western part of the region. Denmark as such has 10 different products under PGI and none PDO.
- Main agricultural production: pigmeat, dairy and cereals.

**Covasna County**
- The Central Region is situated in the central area of Romania, within the great curves of the Carpathian Mountains, on the upper and middle courses of Mures and Olt. Natural resources are diverse and include important reserves of natural gas, salt, nonferrous metals, building materials (basalt, anemite, marble, travertine), small coal deposits and many mineral water springs.
- The agricultural area of the Center Region is 1909 thousand hectares representing 55.5% of the total area of the region and 13% of the agricultural area of Romania.
- Total number of agri-food firms in this region: 2775 with >210.000 employees and a total production volume of 3.2 million.
- Main agricultural products: dairy and meat.

**Aria Alsace**
- Excellent and extremely favourable environment for implementation and development of new activities (large pool of consumers, ease of logistics, natural resources: water plentiful and easily accessible).
- Quality and know-how Sector structured around market niche.
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**Castilla y León**
- Castilla y León is one of the largest region in Europe with a territory of 94,225 km².
- Population of Castilla y León represents over 5% of country population with 2,415,900 people.
- The Agrifood sector is the main-economic sector, representing more than 13% of the regional GDP.
- Agri-food industry is the main branch of the industrial sector in the Region. It represents 23.5% of the industrial turnover and 25.4% of the industrial employment.
- Approximately 3,100 companies (mainly micro-SMEs) operate in this industry in the Region, employing more than 35,000 people, its weight in regional GDP (2014) is 3.7%, with turnover of 9.37 billion euros.
- Castilla y León: ranks number three in the country, representing 17% of the national agri-food GDP.
- High quality of the raw materials produced, and the high specialization of industries are some of the main strengths of the sector.

**Emilia Romagna Region**
- Two research organisations focused on agriculture CIRPA (animal production) and CRPV (plant production).
- The High Technological Network, which includes the agri-food platform, coordinated by ASTER.
- The Technopoles, infrastructures of research and technological transfer located near the main cities in the whole regional territory.
- The regional training system, specifically the polytechnical network of tertiary specialist training, centred on higher technical institutes, and the regional system of agricultural and forestry education.

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**Northern Great Plain**
- The GDP by the Hungarian national economy is €11,145.9 per capital. The share of Hungarian agriculture was 3.5% of the total GDP. GDP per person employed is 18,9 thousand euros in agriculture, 14,8 thousand euros per person in food production, and 26 thousand euros per person at national level.
- At regional level, there are 6303 enterprises in agriculture.
- There are 203,2 thousand employees in agriculture, and 140,3 thousand in food production, while 420,5 thousand people work in total in the country.
- The production volume turnover of agriculture is € 2.489,8 million, the production of foods is € 913,6.
- In the Northern Great Plain food production turnover is € 2.67 billion, produced by 10000 food industry workers, which is 1.7% of total regional employment.
- Main agricultural production: sweet corn, poultry and apple. 

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**Provinces and regions in the map:**
- **Province of North Brabant**
- **Central Denmark Region**
- **Castilla y León**
- **Covasna County**
- **Aria Alsace**
- **Emilia Romagna Region**
- **Northern Great Plain**