



## Action Plan ARIA ALSACE

v.3

10.10.2019



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The Action Plan V1 has been adopted by the Executive committee  
and the General Assembly  
on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2019

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« Savourez l'Alsace »  
La marque bannière des industries alimentaires d'Alsace  
En savoir plus : [www.aria-alsace.com/savourez-alsace](http://www.aria-alsace.com/savourez-alsace)



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## ~ Part I. ~ General information ~

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**Project:**

Strategies for Regional INnovative Food Clusters (STRING)

**Partner organisation:**

ARIA Alsace

**Country, region:**

FRANCE, Grand Est region, Alsace

**Contact person:**

svix@aria-alsace.com

**Self-defined performance indicator:**

45 companies included in projects led by ARIA Alsace and financed from the OP

## ~ Part II. ~ Policy context ~

### II. 1. Which policy instrument did you dedicate?

The policy instrument addressed within the STRING project for the Alsace Region by the ARIA Alsace is the **Operational Programme ERDF Alsace 2014-2020**.

This operational programme which covers the NUTS area FR42 Alsace was validated by the European Commission on 11th December 2014.

It is managed by the Alsace Region (now Region Grand Est following French territorial reform in 2016) in partnership with the 2 Alsatian agglomerations of Strasbourg and Mulhouse.

From an EU point of view, the region is classified as a “most developed region” and benefits from a **limited amount of ERDF** for the 2014-2020 period: only 87,2 Mio €.

It must also be noted that the **EU-cofinancing rate is low**: max. 50%, and 33% on average.

The number of supported projects will therefore be limited, but the **leverage effect of EU funds** will be important.

Because of this limited amount of EU funds, the ERDF programme is **focused on a low number of major challenges** translated into 4 intervention themes that each make up an axe to the programme:

- Research, Development and Innovation supporting strategic activity areas identified within the Alsatian S3: Smart, Specialisation Strategy (Health and well-being; Green economy) and horizontal measures to support the development of the research and innovation environment.
- Development of the digital economy, offering broadband access to enterprises, stimulating the emergence of new digital products and services by and for SME, and the development of new applications with a strong link to ITC.
- Strengthening the competitiveness of enterprises through supporting newly created or taken over companies, strengthening their financial structure, support towards internationalisation and specific targeted actions for specific sectors, generators of economic activity and growth.
- Energy transition towards a low carbon economy, supporting the emergence of new forms of energy production and stimulating energy efficiency in housing, enterprises and public buildings.

A detailed description of the policy instrument has been made in the Alsace Engines for Change analysis document, but the main features of the policy instrument and their relevance to the STRING project are summarised below.

The partner ARIA Alsace has identified the

- Axe 1 “Strengthening research, technological development and innovation”,
- Priority 1b “projects strengthening technology transfer and skills towards SME and SMI will be supported through in particular the development of new products and services”

as the most relevant instrument for stimulating innovation within the Agrofood sector and in particular the following specific objectives:

- “OS3 – Increase the Research, the Development and the Innovation carried out by or for the benefit of regional enterprises” and its 4 actions

and the

- “OS4 - Develop new innovative products and services, in order to generate added value within Alsatian enterprises” and its 3 actions,

i. e. 7 actions.

The Operational Programme ERDF Alsace 2014-2020 is a small programme with a limited amount of finance for projects concerning innovation (23.8 M€). The actions of the axe 1 of the programme and the specific objectives are general and do not focus on any sector in particular. Therefore there is no particular focus on the agri-food sector.

However, through the Alsatian S3 strategy two main domains have been selected: Health and well-being, Green economy. Within these domains, several key sectors have been identified and for a project to be eligible for financing it must contribute to one of these sectors which can either be classified as structured, non-mature or contributes to the predefined structured or non-mature topics.

Therefore for innovation in the agrofood sector to be taken into account within this operational programme it must fit into the S3 thematic « Nutritional prevention ». All actions of specific objective 1b OS-3 are eligible for this domain as is action 2 of OS-4.

Up to September 2018, no project from the agro-food sector has been supported by the Operational Programme ERDF Alsace 2014-2020.

## II.2. Which indicators did you dedicate?

### II.2.1. What are the indicators?

The ARIA Alsace defined two indicators to measure the degree of influence of the STRING project on the level of innovation of the Agrofood sector in Alsace through the Operational Programme ERDF Alsace 2014-2020:

- 45 companies included in projects led by ARIA Alsace and financed from the OP
- Estimated amount of Structural Funds (from Growth & Jobs) influenced by the project: 800.000 €

### II.2.2. Can you reach this indicator?

Through the Action Plan developed below, the ARIA Alsace aims to achieve the indicator of 45 companies through developing 2 specific projects:

- A programme of awareness raising actions on innovation (for all SME)
- A Food Lab: a dedicated infrastructure for innovation

Each of these 2 projects would involve at least 45 different SMEs, potentially 35 during 2020, and 15 in the first half of 2021 (end of the STRING project).

At the time of drafting the Action Plan the estimated amount of Structural Funds influenced by STRING is 100 000€. This is much low however than the initial indicator due to the difficulty of obtaining co-funding for the ERDF projects. This figure also excludes any potential projects from Agrofood stakeholders requesting ERDF funding directly as a result of participating in the two Action plan activities developed by ARIA Alsace.

## ~ Part III. ~ Details of the actions envisaged ~

### III.1. Summarize the basic situation at the beginning of the project

At the beginning of the project, the observation of ARIA Alsace was that many SME have the potential to improve their companies through innovation, but they have to be able to understand and structure their innovation approach and strategy. The whole innovation ecosystem for Agrofood, as well as the ERDF Alsace policy was consequently analysed through the STRING project Engines for Change. In collaboration with the local stakeholders, ARIA Alsace defined the following learning needs as a result:

- **Agrofood is not directly addressed by the OP ERDF Alsace:** despite its economic importance, the agrofood sector is not considered as structured enough to be taken into account in the RIS3. There is a lack of resources due to a very small amount of ERDF.
- **Innovation in Agrofood industry is addressed only within the S3 “Nutritional prevention” thematic:** the RIS3 is mainly focused on Health, therefore the Agrofood sector is addressed through this approach. There is a lack of resources due to a very small amount of ERDF.
- **There is no support to human resources in RD for SMEs** (financial support for consulting resources or for a specific RD time-limited contract): the RIS3 and more generally the regional innovation policy is not addressing the human resources topic. There is a lack of resources due to a very small amount of ERDF.
- **There is no support directly targeted to cross-sectoral cooperation between the RD actors in Alsace:** This is a policy choice. There is a lack of resources due to a very small amount of ERDF.
- **The Alsatian agrofood sector stakeholders are not working together enough in order to develop a common innovation strategy from farmers to consumers:** the agrofood industry and the other agrofood players (producers, distributors, ...) have developed separately for historical and socio-cultural reasons.
- **Regional managing authorities of ERDF and EARDF are not working together enough to facilitate the emergence of structural innovation projects covering the whole agrofood sector from farmers to consumers:** in the regional administration, agriculture and agrofood (and economic sectors, more generally) are not followed by the same directorates, which has an impact on the ERDF programme too.
- **The Accelerator programmes concern only the “mature” S3 topics, therefore the agrofood sector (targeted by the non-mature topic “nutritional prevention”) is not concerned:** Agrofood sector is not a mature thematic in the RIS3. There is a lack of resources due to a very small amount of ERDF.
- **The programme “Savourez l’Alsace” (Enjoy the taste of Alsace), aiming to promote the Alsatian agrofood products and industries among the Alsatian people, is not supported by the regional ERDF programme** – not even through indirect support to ARIA Alsace, which leads the programme, although it is a consumer need (local productions / short commercialisation lines). Agrofood sector is not a mature thematic in the RIS3. There is a lack of resources due to a very small amount of ERDF.

The ambitious target of 45 companies included in projects led by ARIA Alsace and financed from the OP was defined to be reached over the STRING project second phase, as through organising and developing several structural projects, the ARIA Alsace cluster believes that it can mobilise a third of its members (currently 120 agrofood) to start including innovation in their business planning.

As a result of the knowledge exchange phase in the STRING project, the ARIA Alsace has listed 6-7 clear answers to learning needs drawn from the good practices of the project partners. In consultation with the regional stakeholders and the ERDF managing authority, this list will be reduced to 2 clear actions that can both be achieved during the STRING project lifetime (up to June 2021) and will have a clear impact on the self-defined performance indicators.

Therefore as a consequence, and due to the short-time frame the ARIA Alsace action plan will concentrate on developing the means to help SME innovate through providing them with:

- Support in human resources (learning need: there is no support to human resources in RD for SMEs)
- An infrastructure to facilitate innovation (learning need: there is no support to human resources in RD for SMEs)
- Strengthening the position of agrofood innovation in the ERDF Alsace programme (learning need: Agrofood is not directly addressed by the OP ERDF Alsace)
- Strengthening links to the health and biotech sectors (There is no support directly targeted to cross-sectoral cooperation between the RD actors in Alsace)

## III.2. Reaching the objectives

### **III.2.1. What were the objectives?**

The ARIA Alsace objective is to support Agrofood SME to develop innovation within their businesses through the creation of shared tools and services. In particular through strengthening the role of the cluster in this area, ARIA Alsace expects the development of cross-sectoral collaboration, the stimulation of innovation initiatives within companies, and the positive promotion of Alsatian products to consumers.

### **III.2.2. How and with whom can you reach the objective?**

As a cluster (an intermediary), ARIA Alsace can play a direct role in supporting the take-up of innovation in Alsatian agro-food SME if it offers them the right tools and services.

Based on the observations and good practices of the STRING partners, and the regular feedback and advice from the stakeholder network, ARIA Alsace will therefore develop specific actions that they will implement directly to support agrofood SME innovation. The ARIA Alsace has been in contact with the Operational programme since the beginning of 2018 concerning the funding of this action plan. Only projects that can be funded through this programme will be retained.

### **III.2.3. What assets did you collect and learn to reach the objectives?**

As a result of the Knowledge learning phase of the STRING project, the ARIA Alsace has learnt from the project partner good practices which show that:

- Innovation needs time to emerge (all regions)
- SME's don't have the resources (esp. human) to innovate, they need help through clusters or equivalent structures (all regions).
- Innovation comes when the usual models are challenged (by a new comer, by a crisis, by a society change, ...). When the business is going good, you don't need to change anything; on the contrary, you try to protect your model through law, label, etc. = innovation comes when people from different sectors, different processes, different cultures, ... meet and talk (Staff exchange in Alsace).

- A dedicated building for RDI projects in agro-food needs staff to succeed, but it doesn't necessarily mean a big number of salaried staff (lean management). When cross fertilisation is encouraged through clusters, there is a good background to foster innovation (Foodtech Brain port, NB).
- A dedicated space needs time to be really opened (Debrecen).
- Innovation centres are essential to bring technological support to innovative SME's (all regions).
- Clusters are not always public-financed (Covasna).
- Innovation can reside in primary products (corn, water) because they are (re)considered under a new light (Covasna, Debrecen).
- Packaging and production processes can bring innovation (CyL, ERR) even in "old" - traditional products.
- In the agrofood sector, the innovation potential stays more in the existing companies and products than in start-ups (what does "start-up" mean in the agro-food sector?). The clusters should focus on existing companies and help them innovate, rather than on an attempt to create completely new enterprises. However, the new foodtech start'ups need to be included in the food innovation ecosystem to favour new cooperation (Staff exchange in Alsace).

#### ***III.2.4. Do you have any influence on your stakeholders or business environment?***

Through the Aria Alsace action plan, the cluster intends to have a direct impact on the agrofood business environment in Alsace and more widely in the Grand Est region. Through the promotion and awareness raising around innovation strategies, companies and in particular SMEs will be able to start defining strategies. Moreover, these strategies can be further developed and implemented through the services available in the Food lab (creativity room, test kitchen, digital tools (photo station, 3D printer and photo editing software). The implementation of these new strategies should help the economic development of the agrofood SME in Alsace.

### **III.3. Actions**

Action 1: Programme of awareness raising actions on innovation

Action 2: Set-up of a food-lab to support SME innovation

## ~ Action1 ~

### Programme of awareness raising actions on innovation

#### Background

The perception of activities carried out by STRING agrofood clusters and the exchanges with the other regions have confirmed the importance to organise general awareness raising operations on innovation towards company managers, who do not have the time to look in detail at the new trends.

It has been noticed in all STRING partner regions where such awareness raising actions are the core of all innovation programmes.

In the same way, it is understood that innovation occurs when usual ways of thinking and doing are challenged (by a new market player, a crisis, changes in consumer needs, regulatory modifications, etc.).

This conclusion came out from all visits and staff exchanges in all partner regions and in particular from the Staff Exchange in Emilia-Romagna that was organised from 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018. During this visit the good practices on PDO/PGI policy mix and the ERR ERDF Strategic projects and Operational groups for innovation were developed in detail. ARIA Alsace was inspired by the way the Emilia-Romagna region impulses the development of innovation in traditional products to respond to new consumer needs (less salt, less fat, more local products, ... and also sustainable, less polluting packaging). The region heavily invests in human and financial resources in this area. It deploys actions such as awareness raising on the need for innovation through conferences, presentations, visits, etc. of enterprises having already innovated in the area and they also stimulate interaction between companies and researchers.

One approach to innovation, is therefore to organise events/ meetings between people coming from different sectors, different companies, etc., so that the usual models are discussed, questioned, without having to be forced.

No structured programme currently exists within the ARIA Alsace dedicated to awareness raising on innovation for the agro-food sector. Such a programme could be financed by the ERDF Alsace programme if it covers the “nutritional prevention” theme and the number of individual companies participating in the events would directly help reach both the action plan objectives and the self-defined indicator. Through stimulating the innovation capacity of the SME the aim of this programme is to nurture the companies’ innovative projects that could be supported by the ERDF Alsace programme.

#### Action

This action aims to develop and implement a 12 month test-programme of 4 awareness raising events, limited to the theme nutritional prevention/ food quality (eligible topic for the OP ERDF Alsace).

Based on the STRING experiences and feedback from the experts several event formats type will be tested and evaluated for their impact on stimulating agrofood SME innovation. They will include:

- A top-down approach based on events with scientific experts
- A bottom-up approach through events that encourage the sharing of operational problems from companies with scientists who are often members of scientific regulatory committees.
- Presentations of the existing NOVIAA programme (next step of the innovation programme of ARIA Alsace: specific support for voluntary SMEs)

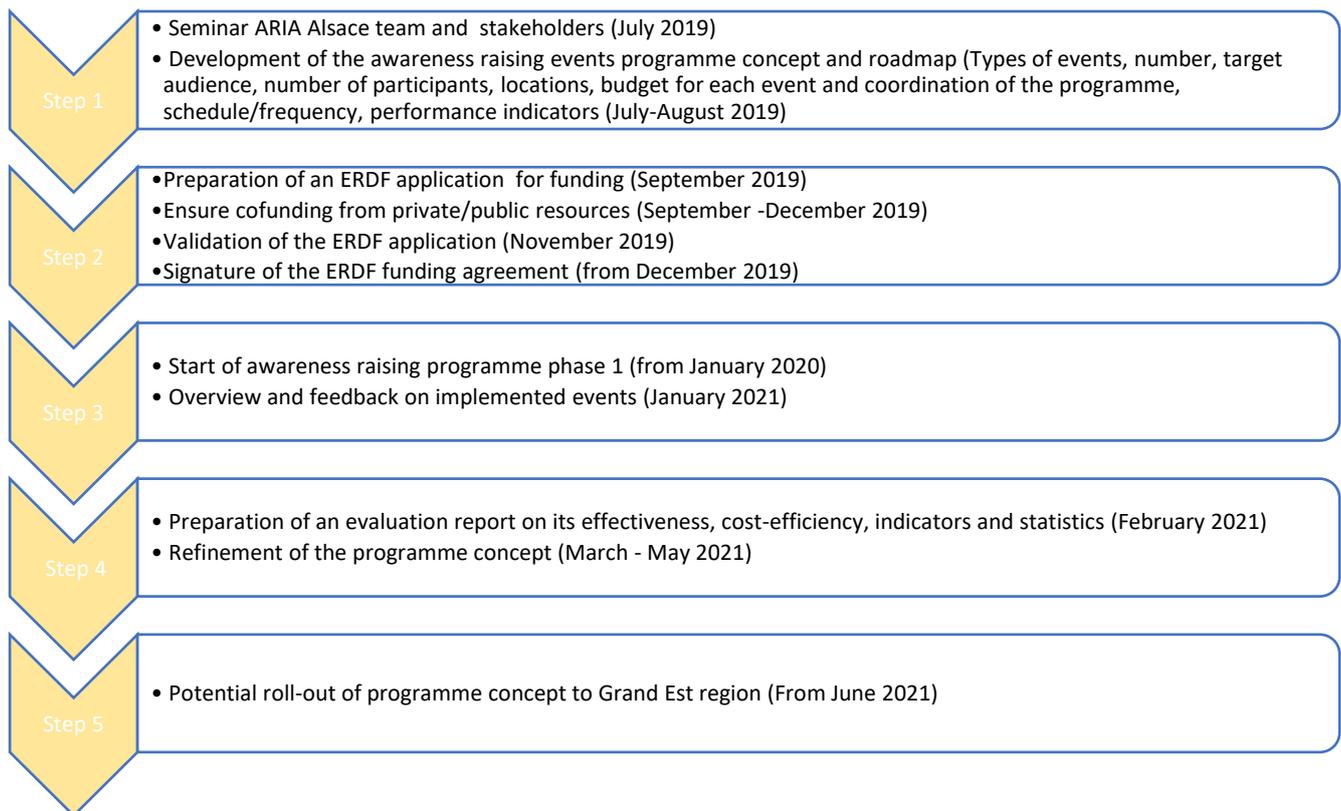
An important effort will be placed on mixing publics (companies, scientific experts, policy-makers, consumers, members of the eco-system, cross-sector).

***Indicators:***

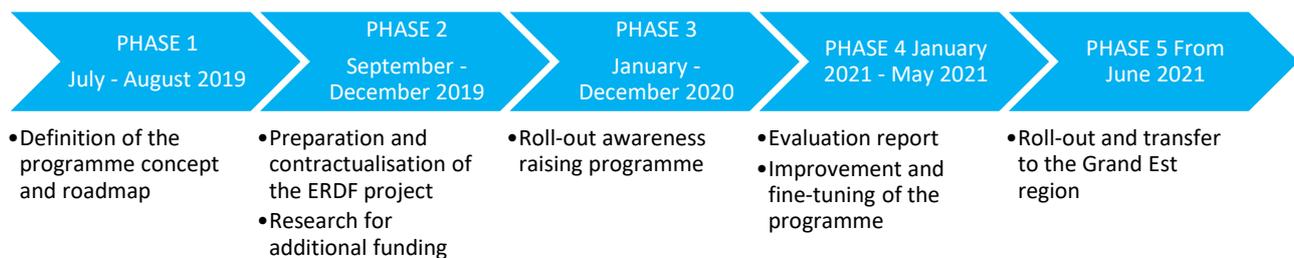
35 agrofood SME are expected to take part in the different awareness-raising actions, with the objective to encourage and support the most advanced SME projects in the submission of an ERDF funded project.

It will improve the OP ERDF Alsace by creating the conditions for the development of new innovation projects, to be funded by the OP and therefore it will help the OP to reach its objectives of fostering innovation in particular in SME.

### **Provisional planning of the action:**



### **Timeframe + cost**



### **Milestones for the action:**

- Seminar to define the concept and the roadmap for the awareness raising programme (July 2019)
- Programme concept roadmap report (August 2019)
- Securing ERDF funding for the action (December 2019)
- Evaluation report (February 2021)

### **Funding of the action**

Through the ERDF Alsace programme at 40% and private financing.

**Resources needed to implement the action:**

- Fixed staff costs: 20% 1 person ETP during 15 months
- Variable event costs (room hire, catering, communication) : 30 000 € for 4 events
- Variable external expertise (preparation of concept, drafting ERDF application, evaluation...): 10 000 €

**Responsibilities**

Catherine Munch, Promotion and events manager at ARIA Alsace. Coordination of the events programme

**Risk factors identified and solutions****Risk 1: External risk**

Difficulty in finding co-financing. The ERDF can only finance 40% of this measure and the maximum level of public funding is 50%.

Solution 1: Limitation of the number of events in the test phase and reallocation of internal resources and budget to cover the costs.

**Risk 2: External risk**

Lack of participation from the SME and organisations from cross-sectors in the event.

Solution 2: Careful and targeted communication in advance. Specific planning at the conception stage in order not to over-estimate participation. Connecting to existing events in the domain.

**Risk 3: Internal risk**

Limited political and strategic visibility within the ARIA Alsace due to the current merger of the ARIAs within the Grand Est region.

Solution 3: Implement a test concept for an awareness raising programme in a limited territory (Alsace) that can be scaled up to the Grand Est region in a second phase.

**Risk 4: Internal risk**

Limited operational visibility within the ARIA Alsace due to the current merger of the ARIAs within the Grand Est region and low level of available human resources.

Solution 4: Limitation of the number of events in the test phase.

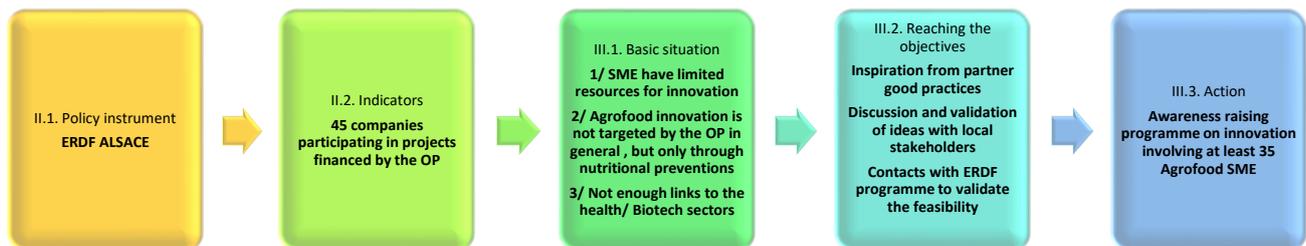
## Summary

Many SME have the potential to improve their companies through innovation, but they have to be able to understand and structure their innovation approach and strategy. The objective of the action “Programme of awareness raising actions on innovation” is to develop and implement a 12 month test-programme of 4 awareness raising events for agrofood SME in Alsace. It will be funded through the Operational Programme ERDF Alsace 2014-2020, however, for the action to be eligible it must be limited to the theme nutritional prevention/ food quality.

The programme of awareness raising actions on innovation is based on the importance given to general awareness raising operations on innovation towards company managers by the other STRING agrofood clusters and regions. Special attention will be made to explore how testing and evaluating several event format types have an impact on stimulating agrofood SME innovation. They will include top-down and bottom-up approaches with an important effort to mix publics (companies, scientific experts, policy-makers, consumers, members of the eco-system, cross-sector).

The programme will be developed in 5 steps over 2 years from July 2019 until June 2021 and will include a concept and programme design phase, a phase linked to obtaining funding through ERDF, a roll-out phase, an evaluation and stock-taking phase, and the validation of the concept and the final roll-out on a wider level.

In its test phase, the programme aims to involve 35 agrofood SME from the Alsace territory.



## ~ Action 2 ~

### Set-up of a food-lab to support SME innovation

#### Background

The Alsace region has strong ideas on how to develop innovation within its agrofood companies but it lacks basic infrastructures that can enable the SME to conceive, test and implement these strategies. Several other STRING regions have however developed such infrastructures which have been visited, analysed and discussed by the ARIA Alsace staff and stakeholders. These STRING partner good practices include: Debrecen Research & Company facility for innovation (equipment) with a part dedicated to production, a mini-restaurant for tasting/testing and sales point (visited in November 2017); in Castille y Leon the shared equipment (production) that the cluster companies can use for innovation (visited in February 2018); in North Brabant the shared innovation facility "Brainport" is a space managed by the companies themselves (lean management) with production machines, training room, creativity room and mentoring by other company managers (visited in June 2018).

A Food Lab, allowing agrofood companies to test new products before their commercialisation and allow their presentation, does not exist in Alsace. It corresponds to a specific need of Alsatian agrofood companies, who are often small SME that is they often do not have dedicated areas at their disposal for their innovation process or to present their products.

The ARIA Alsace has been inspired by the other STRING partner initiatives but it is difficult to transfer immediately these (good) practices, which often require the set-up of industrial like infrastructures, into the Alsatian context. While it is the intention to create such an infrastructure on the medium term (this second step would require a "new" specific building), as a first step ARIA Alsace aims to validate its feasibility and the conditions for the implementation through a "Food Lab" concept project linked to the ARIA learning need that a specific shared facility would allow SME to innovate more easily. This concept project would be implemented within the ARIA Alsace existing office space and would be focused on encouraging creativity, testing product concepts, facilitating digitalisation, and sharing specialised equipment.

In the second-half of 2018 ARIA Alsace submitted a project to the ERDF Alsace 2014-2020 programme for the testing of the prototype of an agrofood innovation lab for SME. According to the S3 adopted by Alsace in 2013, the ARIA Lab will be principally dedicated to innovation through nutritional prevention and digital innovation. These themes are part of agrofood industrial preoccupations as they respond to the consumer need for healthy eating, to find information about products and even buy them online.

#### Action

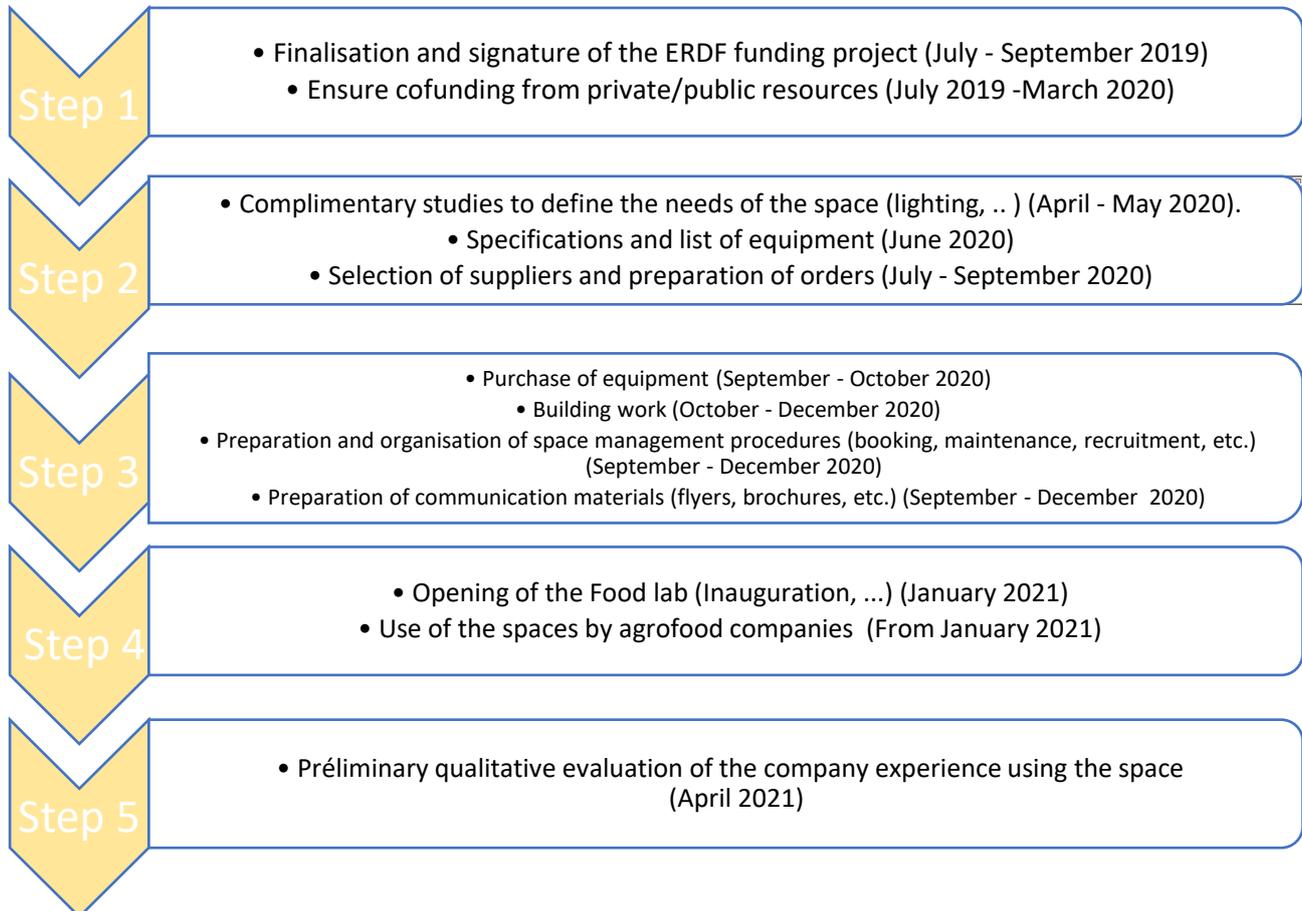
This action aims to test the feasibility of the concept of providing an innovation facility for Alsatian agrofood SME within the current ARIA Alsace premises. In this first phase, the office space will be reorganised with a professional kitchen to enable the creation of new recipes, a digital room with a 3D printer and a digital photo studio and software, a training – creativity room, and a showroom space to present products to industrials and distributors.

The action is divided into 3 principle phases:

- Complimentary studies to define and finalise the needs
- Refurbishments of the different spaces
- Opening and use of the Food lab by the SME

**Indicators:**

15 agrofood SME are expected to take part in the action before the end of the phase 2 of the STRING project.

**Provisional planning of the action:****Timeframe + cost****Milestones for the action:**

- Securing private financing for the action (March 2020)
- Opening of the Food Lab (January 2021)
- Preliminary evaluation report (April 2021)

### **Funding of the action**

A request for support from the ERDF Alsace 2014-2020 programme has already been submitted and accepted which covers 40% of the total project costs, the other 60% being covered by private financing.

### **Resources needed to implement the action:**

- Fixed staff costs: 20% 1 person ETP during first 18 months & 50% 1 person ETP following the opening of the Food Lab (staff costs for this action are not eligible for ERDF funding)
- Equipment and investments (for the reorganisation of the space): 160 000€ excl. VAT
- External expertise (complimentary studies and equipment identification): 40 000€ excl. VAT

### **Responsibilities**

- Sylvie Vix, director of ARIA Alsace. In charge of looking for/ securing private funding
- Fiona Del Pozo, Commercial assistant at ARIA Alsace. Coordination of phases 2 and 3.

### **Risk factors identified and solutions**

#### **Risk 1: External risk**

Difficulty in finding co-financing. The ERDF can only finance 40% of this measure and the maximum level of public funding is 50%.

Solution 1: Extensive search to find private funding or sponsors to support the action. Research into innovative forms of fundraising. However, this will take time and may require several co-financers and so almost 1 year is planned for this phase.

#### **Risk 2: External risk**

Risk 2: Difficulty in recruiting the suppliers and building work companies or unexpected problems leading to delays in the realisation of the Food Lab installation.

Solution 2: The retro-planning has been made to accommodate these eventual delays and several tasks can be carried out in parallel in order to avoid the accumulation of delays.

#### **Risk 3: Internal risk**

Change of the ARIA Alsace offices/premises due to the current merger of the ARIAs within the Grand Est region.

Solution 3: The Food Lab concept is not linked to a specific building and can be adapted. The period of time necessary for finding the private funding means that this issue should be clarified before the preparation of the studies.

#### **Risk 4: Internal risk**

Limited political and strategic visibility within the ARIA Alsace due to the current merger of the ARIAs within the Grand Est region.

Solution 4: Implement a test concept for a Food studio in a limited territory (Alsace) that can be transferred to the other areas of the Grand Est region in a second phase.

### Summary

Many SME have the potential to improve their companies through innovation, but they have to be able to understand and structure their innovation approach and strategy. The objective of the action “Set up of a Food lab to support innovation” is to test the feasibility of the concept of providing an innovation facility for Alsatian agrofood SME within the current ARIA Alsace premises. It will be funded through the Operational Programme ERDF Alsace 2014-2020, however, for the action to be eligible it must focus on the theme nutritional prevention/ food quality and/or encompass digitalisation such as the emergence of new digital products and services by and for SME.

Several other STRING regions have developed such infrastructures which have been visited, analysed and discussed by the ARIA Alsace staff and stakeholders (Debrecen, Castille y Leon, North Brabant). However, a Food Lab, allowing agrofood companies the possibility to test new products before their commercialisation and allow their presentation, does not exist in Alsace. The action therefore corresponds to a specific need of Alsatian agrofood companies, who are often small SME, to have dedicated areas at their disposal for their innovation process or to present their products.

The action “Set up of a Food lab to support innovation” will therefore develop a shared innovation facility for agrofood SME through reorganising the office space of the current ARIA Alsace premises. The available spaces will be reorganised into a professional kitchen to enable the creation of new recipes, a digital room with a 3D printer and a digital photo studio and software, a training – creativity room, and a showroom space to present products to industrials and distributors. The main activities of this action will concern:

- Complimentary studies to define and finalise the needs
- Refurbishment of the different spaces
- Opening and use of the Food lab by the agrofood SMEs

The project will be developed in 5 steps over 2 years from July 2019 until June 2021 although the evaluation of the main impact of the action will only be possible from 2022. A request for support from the ERDF Alsace 2014-2020 programme has already been submitted and accepted which covers 40% of the total project costs.

Due to the provisional schedule for this action, the Food Lab will only be open and available for use for 6 months during the second phase of the STRING project. Its aim is therefore to allow 15 agrofood SME from the Alsace territory to benefit from the facility. However, the potential impact is much more important over a longer period of time, both in terms of the number of SME involved and the actual influence on the companies’ innovation approach and strategy.

