

Interreg  
Europe



Co-funded by  
the European Union

SMEOrigin

# SMEOrigin

## Newsletter

Issue 4 / February 2025



Dear reader,

Welcome to the fourth edition of the newsletter series of the [SMEOrigin project](#), which aims to make a difference in one of the most special industries in the European Union and worldwide – the food industry.

The 4th semester of the project **marked the start of policy improvement actions. They will include new funding opportunities for food SMEs to support their competitiveness.**

In this newsletter you will find more helpful information and inspiration about **Innovation and Digitalization in the food sector**. It is full of good practices presented during the 4<sup>th</sup> Interregional meeting in Savonlinna, Finland, as well as out-of-the-box solutions learned from other Interreg Europe projects. Moreover, some partnering regions have already launched open calls for funding SMEs in the food sector.

Have a good time reading!

The SMEOrigin project team

*SMEOrigin aims to improve  
regional development policies  
to increase the  
competitiveness of food  
SMEs specialized in  
geographical indication.*



### IN THIS ISSUE:

- The Finnish way to support local food – 4<sup>th</sup> interregional event in Savonlinna, Finland
- Policy improvement: latest solutions developed by the Policy Transfer Working group
- New Initiatives: open calls for SMEs
- Join the community: 5<sup>th</sup> Interregional online event for stakeholders
- Regional stakeholder groups news and good practices



## Fourth interregional meeting – Savonlinna, Finland



The unique food heritage of Lake Saimaa region in Finland was in the focus of project [SMEOrigin's 4th Interregional meeting in Savonlinna in September 2024](#). The event took place between 3 - 5.9.2024 to explore the endeavours related to the promotion of local food in the region that has been awarded European Region of Gastronomy 2024.

During the visit to this remote and sparsely populated region of Finland, partners from the SMEOrigin project explored some unexpected aspects of food production and food culture.

**One of the major food producers in the region (though not an SME) turned out to be ... Mother Nature!** Finnish lakes, forest and seas supply a huge amount of wild-growing food to local people's table. Like the muikku fish, a favourite delicacy. And the tens of different mushroom varieties that bring unvaluable (an immensely tasteful) nutrition to the table.

Not to forget the superfood – the various wild berries growing in the forest and used in almost every dish.

When it comes to meat, reindeer sometimes appears on the table and this is perfectly normal – in Finland Santa's helpers are quite common and not endangered at all.



### Policy Learning

The topic of preserving regional food heritage was addressed by multiple projects in the Lake Saimaa region in the past years. They focus on building awareness, gastronomy culture, sustainability of value chain. Check this article on the SMEOrigin website to discover them:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/smeorigin/news-and-events/news/preserving-the-food-heritage-via-building-gastronomy-culture>



# POLICY IMPROVEMENT

Policy Improvement and Transfer methodology to be presented



The Policy Improvement and Transfer Working Group was formed during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Interregional event, where it held its first workshop in the opportunities for Good Practice transfer. The core group consists of one expert of each project partner and also stakeholders and external experts.

In Sem 4 the group met several times to discuss and finalize the methodology of the exchange of experience process. The group developed a matrix with the best practices shared so far and the core topics from the Strategic Toolkit they are addressing. This allowed to identify the gaps where policy improvement actions are most needed and address them with the relevant means for each region. Further, the partners developed a matrix with core indicators about the main GIs in each region that will help to identify the main challenges and opportunities in the sector. The final methodology for good practice transfer will be presented during the **5<sup>th</sup> Online Interregional event on 28 March 2025**.



## POLICY IMPROVEMENT AT REGIONAL LEVEL



In semester 4 most partners were actively engaged in regional policy improvement activities and active communication with stakeholders and all audiences. Although most of them are still ongoing and the final results are yet to be achieved, it is worth sharing them as they bring a lot of inspiration to everyone.

# WORK AT REGIONAL LEVEL

## SFG - Styrian Food Hub Showcases Regional Excellence at Gulfood Dubai 2025

The Styrian Food Hub (SFG) presented Styria's finest regional food products to a global audience at the world's largest food and beverage trade show, Gulfood Dubai 2025. From February 17 to 21, more than 5,500 exhibitors from over 190 countries convened at this premier industry event, offering unmatched networking opportunities, insights into global food trends, and access to new markets.

Among the highlights of the Styrian delegation are Styria's renowned geographical indication products, including Hay Milk and Styrian Pumpkin Seed Oil. These products, deeply rooted in regional tradition and craftsmanship, are not just culinary delights but a representation of Styria's heritage. Through their participation, the SFG aims to strengthen the market presence of these authentic and high-quality regional goods.

### Connecting Tradition with Innovation – SMEOrigin

The delegation's presence at Gulfood Dubai aligns seamlessly with the objectives of SMEOrigin, an Interreg Europe initiative dedicated to enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs in the food sector by supporting geographical indication (GI) products. The project underscores the cultural and economic significance of regional food, fostering intersectoral collaboration between agriculture, tourism, and trade.

By participating in Gulfood, SFG not only promotes its own regional specialties but also contributes to the broader SMEOrigin mission: raising awareness of the importance of GI products, improving quality standards, and driving digital transformation among small and medium-sized enterprises. As many regional policy frameworks overlook the potential of GI food products, the SMEOrigin initiative strives to reshape policies through knowledge-sharing and interregional cooperation.

[Read in full on the SMEOrigin website.](#)





# WORK AT REGIONAL LEVEL

## SZ REDA - Stara Zagora signs Local Green Deals to promote regional food products



Inspiration from the 4<sup>th</sup> Interregional Meeting in Savonlinna, Finland, materialized in Local Green Deals in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria.

Project partner Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency (SZ REDA) developed and signed two deals aimed at promoting regional food products and supporting SMEs in the food sector, particularly those producing traditional specialties.

### Zero-Kilometer Food

The first Local Green Deal is between SZ - REDA and the "Na Ulicata" Creative Collective Association. Its primary goal is to reduce the environmental footprint of one of the city's largest festivals, "Na Zeleno." The Green Deal also promotes the consumption of local and regional food, embracing the "zero-kilometer" concept. Plans include establishing a dining area featuring regional foods and a distinctive mark for local producers.

### Opera and Restaurant go together

The second Local Green Deal combines opera art with culinary experiences. Inspired by SZREDA's team's visit to Savonlinna, Finland. The deal sets a pilot collaboration between State Opera Stara Zagora and one of the restaurants in the city – Green Hill. Together they will develop thematic dishes and events inspired by opera art, based on seasonal regional products. A loyalty and discount program for patrons attending both the opera and the restaurant will also be launched.

### Policy Improvement Ongoing

#### An open call for funding SMEs in Stara Zagora Region launched

On 29.1.2025 the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of Bulgaria, which is an Associated Policy Authority in the SMEOrigin project, launched an open call for funding SMEs in the region through the Just Transition mechanism. The call aims to support the economic diversification of the region which is experiencing a transition from coal-powered energy to greener industries. One of the prioritized sectors is the food sector and companies producing regional food products and specialties.

SZ REDA is working closely and actively with local SMEs to provide guidance for the application procedure.

# WORK AT REGIONAL LEVEL

## INTERBIO Nouvelle-Aquitaine develops a pilot partnership



**A first collaboration with Carrefour Bègles: the “Good, Organic & Local” operation under the Bio Sud Ouest trade mark was among the highlights of the activities of Interbio Nouvelle-Aquitaine.** For two weeks, from October 21 to November 2, organic products from 16 INTERBIO Nouvelle-Aquitaine member companies were featured on the store's shelves.

On the program were meetings with regional producers and processors, tastings, activities in the central aisle of the store. Consumers responded, curious to discover these local organic brands. At the same time, this operation enabled the listing of new local products in stores, thus strengthening the regional offering.

## Two new GI applications from Savonlinna

The In the region of Savonlinna, Finland, local SME's have applied for two new PGI labels.

The first one is for “lörtsy” the local “thin, half-moon shaped pastry, with variety of different fillings: most common ones are either a savoury meat filling or a sweet apple filling.” The second product for which the local fisherman applied the PGI label, is roe of the Puruvesi vendace. (Puruvesi vendace already has the PGI label. ). The applications were supported by SMEOrigin project partner Savonlinna Development Services, together with expert from Helsinki University, Ruralia Institute.

Further, during the regional stakeholder meeting local entrepreneurs and experts discussed which could be the top 10 dishes of the Savonlinna region, aiming to better utilize them in future regional and tourism marketing.



## WORK AT REGIONAL LEVEL

### Opolskie plans support for new GI registrations

In Opole, representatives of government offices, universities, and institutions responsible for overseeing traditional product quality met to discuss and promote the SMEOrigin project. Specific plans to support local producers were presented.

The first SMEOrigin-based improvements for Opolskie policy instrument were introduced to strengthen specific support needed small and medium-sized enterprises, allowing them integration into local and global markets. In the Opole province, known for its culinary and agricultural heritage, this initiative played a crucial role in promoting traditional products.

Only two products from the list of traditional products are certified as regional products so far: Kołocz śląski (PGI) and Krupnioki śląskie (PGI). Other traditional products such as śląski żur, pańczkraut, Opole poppy seeds, various honeys and many more are still waiting for the SMEs to act. The certification process, though lengthy is proved beneficial for entrepreneurs. Using international cooperation with partners from Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Spain, and France and exchange of Good practices Opolskie region is closer to improve support for SMEs in food.

Opolskie is preparing a specific support program allowing SMEs to apply for up to PLN 150,000 for vouchers for proinnovative services that will support SMEs in promotion new registration of regional products (PDO, PGI and TSG). Through these efforts, the competitiveness of Opole's traditional products should be strengthened, increasing their visibility both nationally and internationally.

Certification is promoted as a first strategic step for businesses, enhancing product value and attracting customers seeking guaranteed authenticity and quality. By joining the new voucher program, SMEs will gain financial and expert support, positioning themselves as leaders in regional food production.



# JOIN THE COMMUNITY

## Platform for exchange of experience

**Platform for exchange of experience aiming at helping SMEs in the food sector** was developed and launched by SMEOrigin project partners in Sem 2. The platform is bringing together European companies, state agencies, NGOs, professional associations, educational institutions and individual experts working in the sector. The main goal of the platform is to facilitate the exchange of experience and feedback (both good practices but also bad practices) between all involved in the sector and contribute both to solving individual and local challenges and developing a better environment for the SMEs across Europe.

### How it works:

1. Stakeholders are invited to fill a template with their BIO, specialization and interests.
2. The information is fed to a database, open to the participants so that they can easily browse and find new contacts of interest. This database will also serve for matchmaking with potential partners and markets in the future.
3. Stakeholders are also invited to participate in the Google group [SMEOrigin - Networking and cooperation](#) and actively exchange experience real-time with other stakeholders
4. A [LinkedIn group](#) is created to serve those active users of LinkedIn who prefer use the network.

### Benefits of joining:

- **Get access to** tens of colleagues, fellow companies, potential partners and administration officials from all parts of Europe and **find helpful know-how and new connections**
- Find **new partners and new markets**
- **Find solutions for your challenges** – someone on the other side of Europe may already have them.
- **Suggest and participate in developing new policies and initiatives for increasing SME competitiveness**

### Start networking now:

- [Fill in the form](#) and share your details, field of work and interests. You will be automatically added to the database of contacts
- [Check the database](#) for relevant contacts, potential partners or clients you want to get in touch
- [Join the Google Group](#) to ask a question or share a proposal with the whole community. If you use LinkedIn, you can join the [LinkedIn group](#) as well
- Or **write directly** to the ones you wish to connect to.

**Participation in the platform is entirely voluntarily and free of any charge. You are free to invite other professionals that may be interested in joining the community.**



*Join the community by  
scanning the QR code*

# FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

## 5<sup>th</sup> Online Interregional Stakeholder Meeting

***Save the Date:***

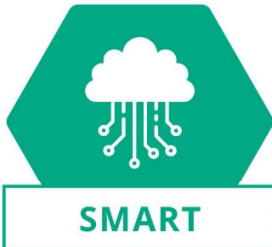
**28.5.2025**

On 28 March 2025 project SMEOrigin will organize a large-scale interregional stakeholder event. This specific event will bring together the stakeholder community and will bring valuable knowledge about:

- More best practices, particularly helpful for businesses
- The finalized Methodology for Policy Learning and Transfer
- Analysis to check the potential transferability of each good practice into each region
- Online networking

Follow the SMEOrigin website for the latest news and developments about it!

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/smeorigin>



## GET INVOLVED:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/smeorigin>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/SMEOrigin>

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/smeorigin/>

**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/smeorigin/>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/SMEOrigin>

## PROJECT PARTNERS:

[Steirische Wirtschaftsförderungsges.m.b.H. \(AT\)](#)

[Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency \(BG\)](#)

[Opolskie Centre for Economy Development/ Opolskie Voivodeship \(PL\)](#)

[Savonlinna Development Services \(FI\)](#)

[University of Patras \(EL\)](#)

[Municipality of Calasparra \(ES\)](#)

[INTERBIO Aquitaine/ Limousin/ Poitou-Charentes \(FR\)](#)