



# Scaling up European SMEs

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**Interreg  
Europe**



European Union | European Regional Development Fund

- **VIEXPO was established 1970 as the first regional non-profit organisation for promoting export in Finland**
- **Our main function is to advise companies from different fields with their export activities both regionally and nationally**

**10**  
Experts

**50+**  
Events

**50+**  
Years

**100+**  
Companies  
to international  
markets

**1500+**  
Company contacts



# FOOD SECTOR SME DEVELOPMENT PROJECT –

Accelerating growth and internationalisation among Ostrobothnian food industry SMEs

- **Four partners:**

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Vaasa University,  
Viexpo and Profict Partners Ltd

- **Budget and schedule:**

207 568 € (80 %) funding from EAFRD  
1.1.2019-31.12.2020



The European Agricultural Fund  
for Rural Development:  
Europe investing in rural areas

- **Project operation area:**

Three small neighbor regions in same situation (South Ostrobothnia,  
Ostrobothnia and Central Ostrobothnia)

- 20 % of the funding must come from SME´s (private money); entry fee in order to increase and assure participation

# Project structure

## Four work packages

### 1. Survey of present state of the SMEs

Resources, products, interest to internationalization and export, TOP 3 target countries, future educational/knowhow needs about different themes

### 2. Seminar series based on the needs found in WP 1 (totally 14 seminars/webinars)

**Themes:** domestic distribution channels, social media, branding and product development, online food selling and distribution channels, specific export and operation information about TOP 3 target countries (Sweden, Germany and China), true life exporting experiences of food industry SMEs

**Expert speakers;** CEO or export managers from food industry from other regions

**Field visits to TOP 2 interesting target countries:** Germany and Sweden (Sweden cancelled due to COVID)

### 3. Production of online training material / guides

TOP 3 target countries specific guides: Sweden, Germany and China, Branding, Social media, Packaging as part of marketing, Food SME financing, Merchandising and exhibitions in Finland, Online distribution channels, REKO - starter's guide

### 4. Building up an expert and mentor network

A network of + 30 mentors who can help SMEs in internationalization and export  
Utilizing mentors as speakers in WP 2 and content producers in WP3

# Lessons learned?

- **Focus on SME survey and make it personal by calling by phone or meeting CEOs F2F**

You'll learn "who" the companies are, what do they produce, what is their interest in growing their business and future plans concerning investments and internationalization, what are the educational needs etc.

After you know your regional companies, you can offer activities that the companies really need.

- **It is not easy to develop companies with different starting points, experience levels and needs at the same time!**

Divide companies in different groups based on their knowhow and experience level as entrepreneurs. Offer both joint and individual activities to support the growth of each group.

- **Beginners**; startups, newly started companies, companies with low interest in growing, minor domestic market coverage, product or packaging is not ready yet, no brand
- **Intermediates**; companies with some business experience, average domestic market coverage, interest in growing their business, product and packaging needs fixing, there is an existing brand
- **Advanced**; very skilled entrepreneur/company with experiences of exporting and internationalization, product and packaging is ready and well known, there is an existing brand, company is eager to grow its business



# Lessons learned?

- **Try to implement as concrete actions as possible together with the companies! Practical actions are the ones that companies really want to do and participate!**

For example we organized a workshop where we had buyers from different sales channels explaining to companies what they need to do and take into consideration when trying to get their products up for sale

- **Utilize the expertise and experiences of exporting companies in your region/ country as much as possible, they serve as mentors and examples for the others**

We had workshops where exporting companies told about their experiences, mistakes and successes.



# Outcomes from the project

- **New connections** between food SMEs and domestic and international **distributors**.
- **New cooperation** between SMEs in the region; new products e.g. "*Well-being shot; Black Garlic and Finnish organic birch sap*" or new local food products available on regional/national/international Food Online Shops.
- SME's **increased know-how** in branding, product development, exporting/internationalization and cooperation related to it.
- Development organizations **summed up relations** to regional food industry SMEs; especially SeAMK and Viexpo.
- A group of companies participate in a **joint export project** organized by Viexpo. Target market is Germany.

# Outcomes from the project – case Finnish Superberries Ltd

- Finnish Superberries Ltd is a company established year 2019 growing and processing aronia berries
- During the project they got:
  - help with building up their brand including packages etc.
  - advice how to open up sales in retail chains in Finland
  - knowledge about the market opportunities in Sweden and Germany
- Discussions began during the project about joint export project to German market for group of SME's
  - seven companies applying for financing for an export project managed by Viexpo



[www.finnishsuperberries.com](http://www.finnishsuperberries.com)





# Thank you!

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