

The Inno-FOOD SEE project - Setting up the innovation support mechanisms and increasing awareness on the potential of Food Innovation and RTD in the South- East Europe area

The Food Industry, a major and financially important sector for the SEE area faces significant challenges from global commercial competition. Changing attitudes and emerging consumer trends necessitate constant update of food products, personalisation of nutrition and introduction of innovation in processes. The Inno-Food SEE objective is to set up the appropriate mechanisms that will facilitate the exchange and coordination of innovation approaches and policies for the food sector and to increase awareness on the importance of food innovation for the wider SEE area. The partnership from Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Hungary, Ukraine and Moldova comprises key players of the RTD and Innovation Cycle (RTD entities, industry and SME support entities, regional authorities, etc.) which have the capacity to influence the development of support mechanisms and raise awareness on the potential of food innovation.

During its implementation, the main activities of the project were to: map and benchmark the food innovation environment; identify key RTD players and food SMEs; prepare SWOT analyses and policy recommendations; develop a network of stakeholders and agreements on Operation Plans; prepare for investments and set up a monitoring mechanism; organize workshops and trainings for research personnel; networking, organize info-days and a European Conference; media releases and actions targeting researchers and students, etc.

Despite the non homogeneous market and innovation penetrance in the different participating regions, Inno-FOOD SEE performed well on training the researchers, update student curricula and educate stakeholders on the adoption of policies to boost innovation in the food chain. Moreover, regional actions for a permanent Innovation Monitor System have been taken into consideration and will be active after the closure of the project.

Inno-Food SEE main target was to become a catalyst for innovation and to create a success story that other sectors will follow, and secondary to improve the attractiveness of the involved regions for investments. The key message, from the Inno-FOOD SEE project experience, is cooperate, innovate and grow.

In a period where economic resources are limited, actions that create solid interregional networks able to focus on local economic growth targeting the global area of paramount importance especially in the beginning of the new programmatic period 2014-2020 where new funding tools and schemes have to be adopted.

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