



Report on Stakeholder Consultation: Understanding the Circular Economy

Synopsis of Replies

Maura Toner and Michael Tunney, PP6
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02	Authors' Note (See below)
03	Objective
05	Summary Of Questions
06	Identity
08	Responses
14	Needs Assessment
19	Subjective Conclusions
21	Final Conclusions

CONTENTS



AUTHORS' NOTE

This report only reflects the Authors'/ Partners' views. The programme authorities are not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

OBJECTIVE



The objective of this exercise was to assess the level of awareness and knowledge of the theory and practice of the **Circular Economy (CE)** within the Project Partners (PPs).

A questionnaire was developed by PP6 and distributed in April 2020 to all nine SinCE-AFC Partners to assess the levels of awareness, knowledge, engagement and development needs of the PPs and their local Stakeholders with regards to regional policies for the support of SMEs in the agri-food Circular Economy (CE) and the development of the Action Plan. A deadline of 30th of June 2020 was set for receipt of replies.

The results of this summary assessment will:

1. Enable the PPs to consider the level of knowledge in the area of CE in their respective countries, and
2. Identify challenges that can be addressed in the respective Action Plans of the PPs.

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS

 ***IDENTITY***

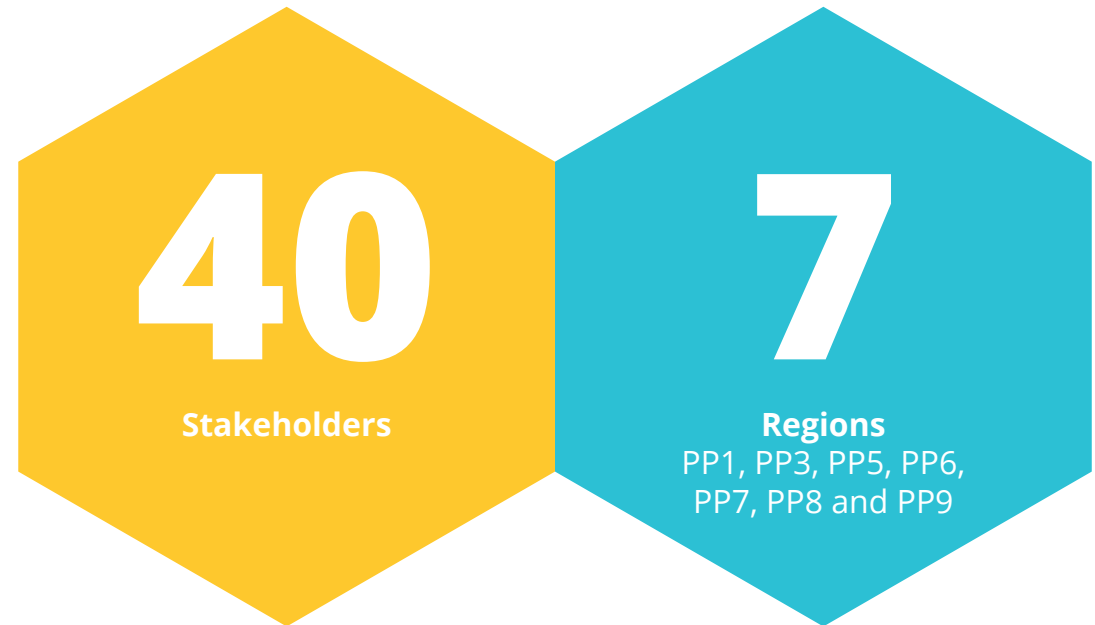
 ***RESPONSES***

 ***NEEDS ASSESSMENT***

Who replied to the questionnaire?

During the summer of 2020, a total of 40 Stakeholders from 7 regions - PP1, PP3, PP5, PP6, PP7, PP8 and PP9 - replied to the Questionnaire. It should be noted that PP2 and PP4 collaborated with PP1 and PP3 respectively in collecting answers from their regions.

The Respondents were from diverse backgrounds including representatives from research bodies, co-operatives, local authorities, local development authorities, waste management bodies, businesses and food producers.

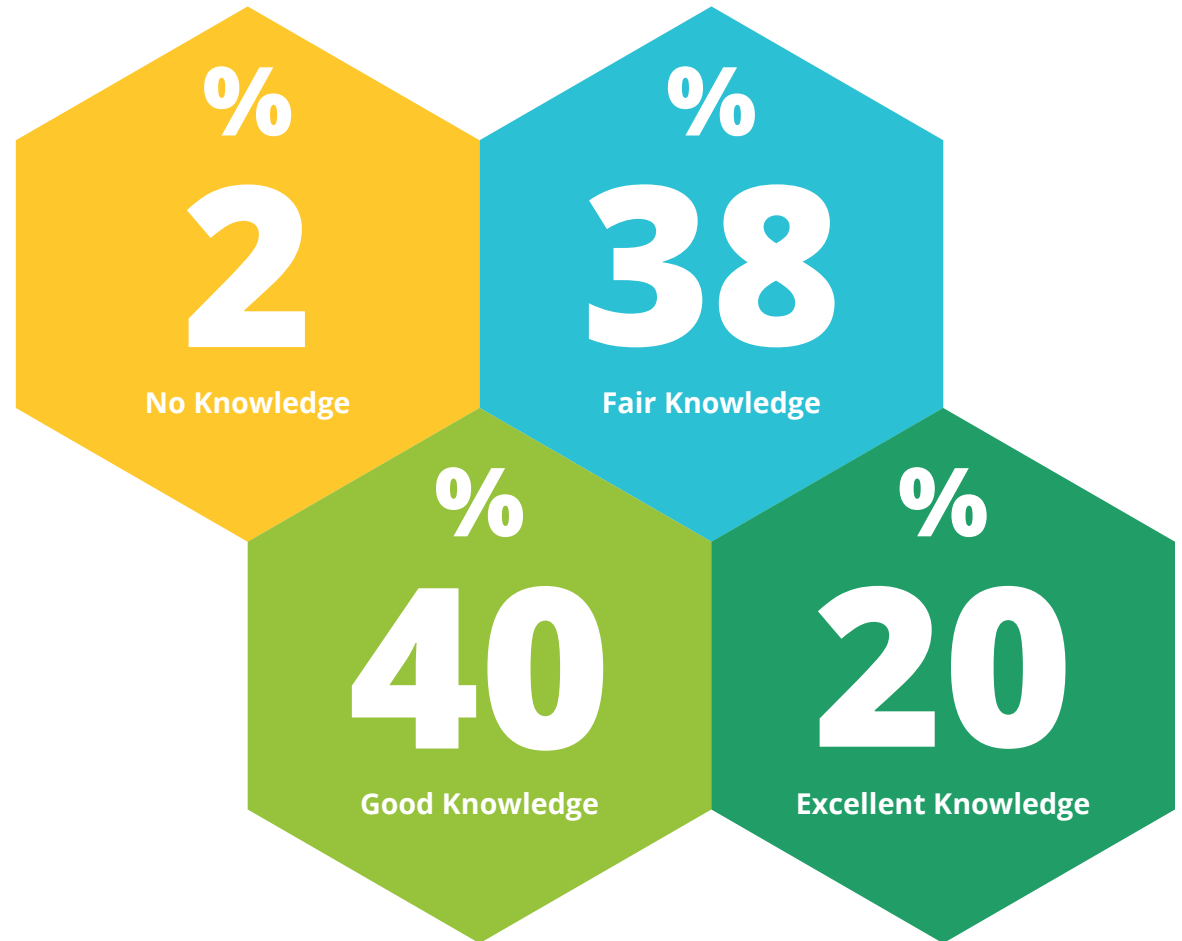




What is your understanding of the Circular Economy (CE)?

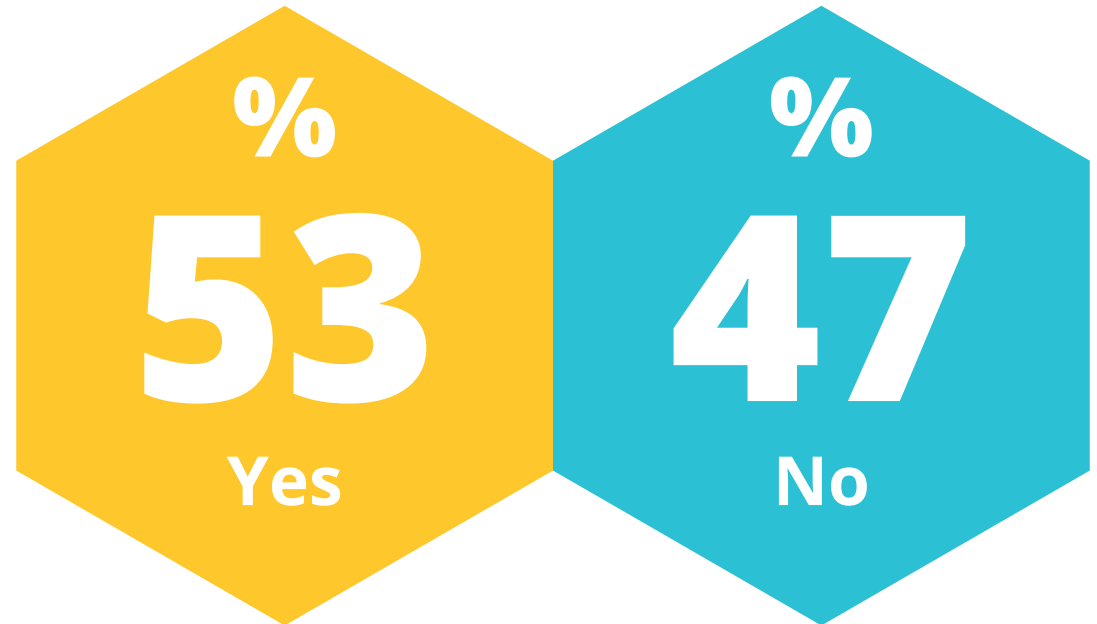
There was mixed response to this question with the majority of Respondents having a general knowledge of what the CE is but replies varied from 2% with no knowledge, 38% with a fair knowledge, 40% with good knowledge to 20% with excellent knowledge of the CE.

However, overall 60% of the Respondents expressed a good to excellent knowledge of the Circular Economy - although most of these were from PP3 and PP8 regions.



Are you aware of the current policies/strategies in your region/country regarding the CE? Yes/No.

Whilst 53% of the Respondents stated that they were aware of current policies/strategies in their region/country, with most of these once again being within PP3 and PP8 regions, worryingly 47% did not.



Are you aware of the current policies/strategies in support of the food/agri-food sectors in the region/country? Yes/No.

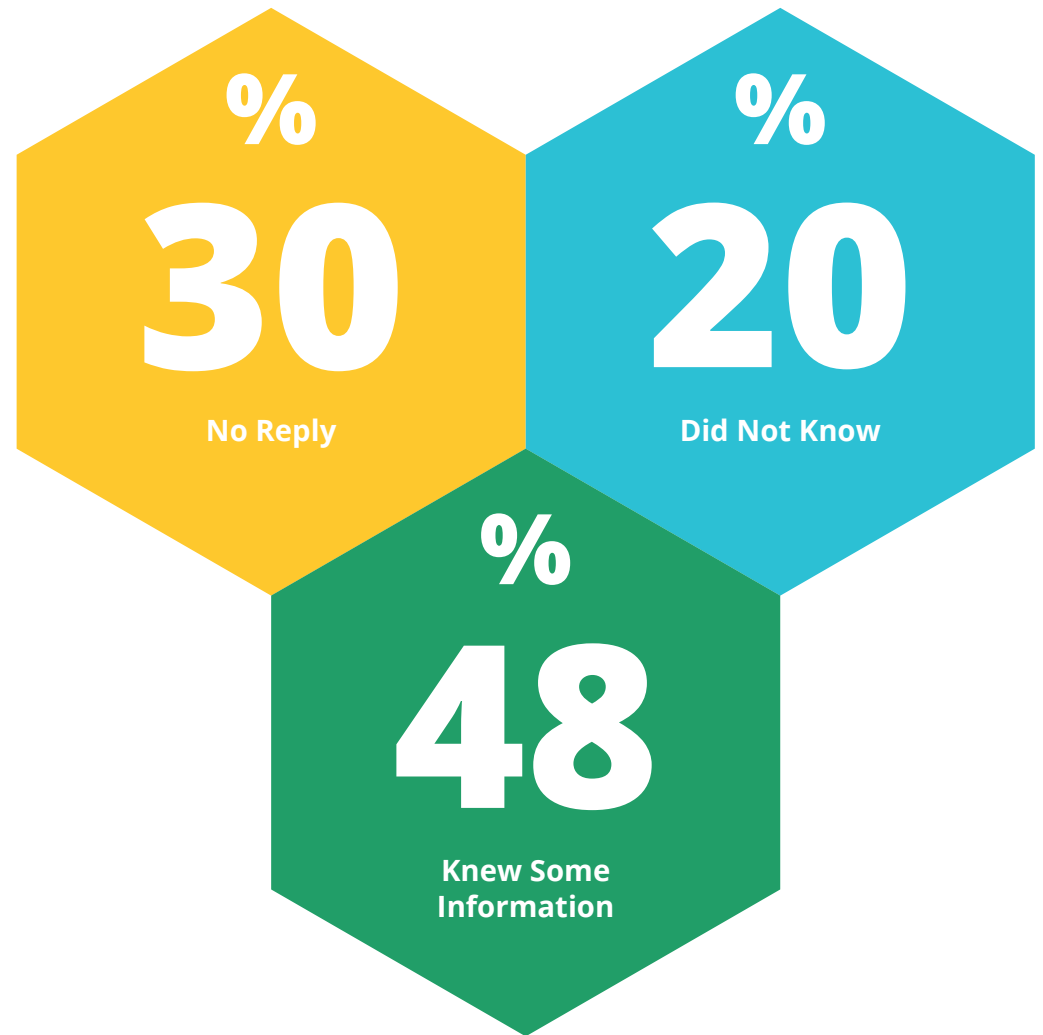
More than half (60%) of Respondents were aware of current policies/strategies in support of the food/agri-food sectors in their respective regions/countries.



What specific reference do those food/agri-food policies/strategies make to the CE?

Again there was a varied response to this question. One reply was irrelevant, 30% did not give a reply, 20% of Respondents did not know what reference those policies/strategies make to the CE and 48% gave replies which varied between giving detailed policy information to referring to sustainable farming/food production, emission reduction, prevention/reduction of waste and the production of secondary products or energy.

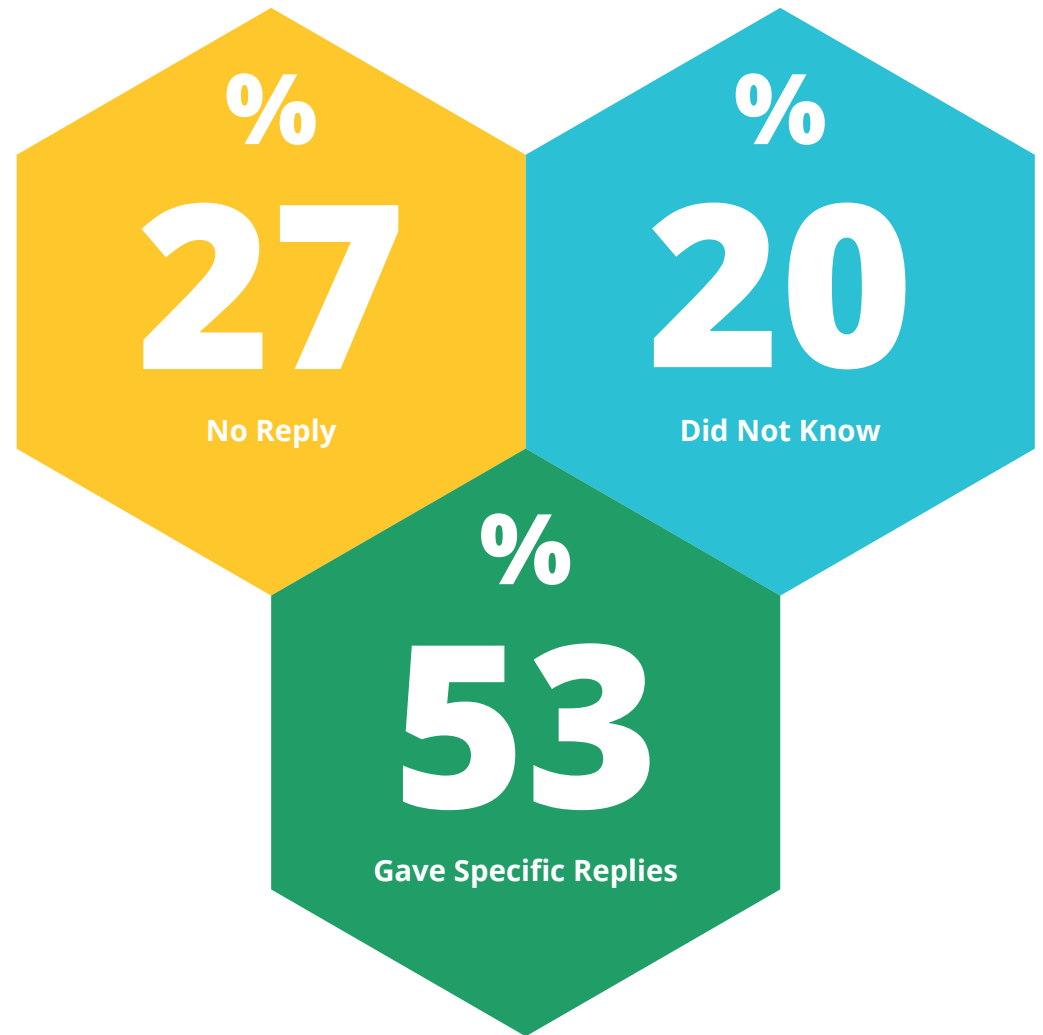
These responses would indicate that whilst there is awareness among of 60% of the Respondents of the concept and policies relating to the CE among project regions that there is limited detailed knowledge of the current policies. This is quite understandable as many of the Stakeholders may not be directly involved in the CE and the concept is still in its relative infancy.



Outline the specific driving/enabling forces in your region/country to support the CE.

Unfortunately there was high level of no replies to this question with 27% of the Respondents not answering it. A further 20% replied “don’t know” and the remaining 53% gave specific replies, with 2 of PP2’s Stakeholders specifically referring to SinCE-AFC, whilst others referred to their local authorities, ministries and universities.

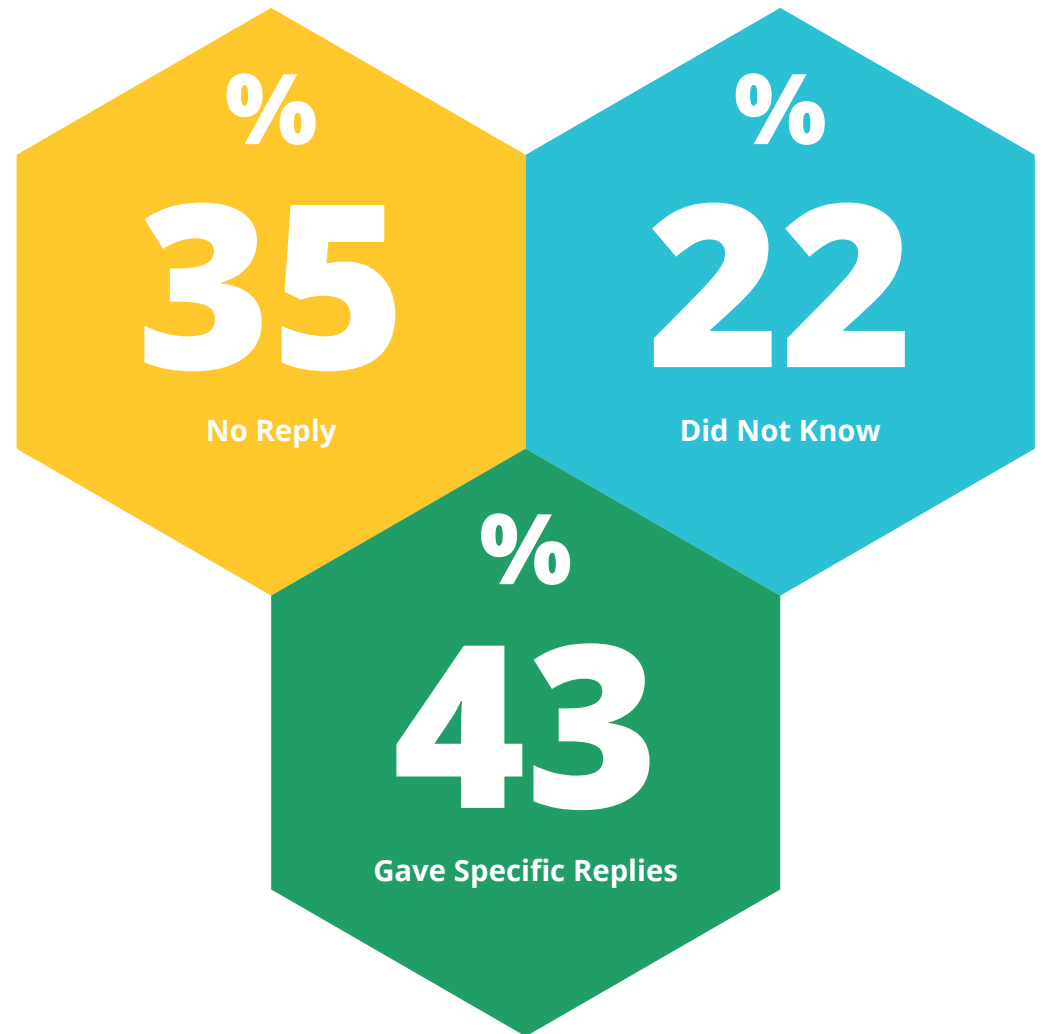
Again these responses would indicate an understanding of the concept but very limited knowledge or experience of the practices involved in the CE.



Please outline the details of any specific CE model or project currently operating in your region/country.

Responses to this question would indicate either a low level of knowledge of CE models or an actual lack of CE models on the ground within partner regions. There is thus an opportunity for the SinCE-AFC to be significant driver of awareness and good practice dissemination of the CE.

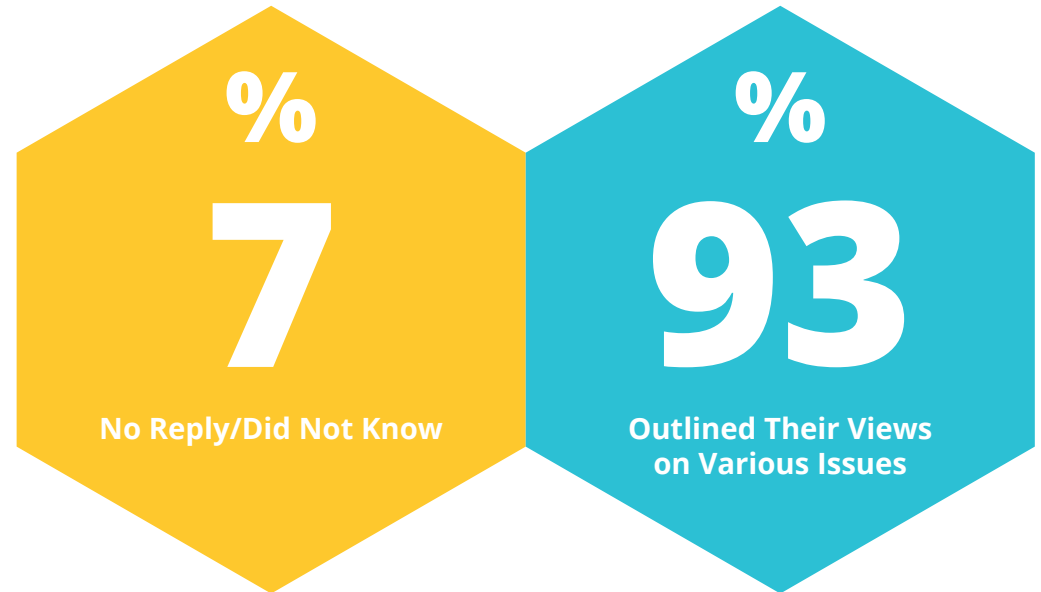
35% of Respondents did not reply to this question, 22% replied that they did not know and 43% gave specific details of CE models or projects in their region with 1 of PP8's Stakeholders specifically referring to SinCE-AFC whilst other Stakeholders referred to other Interreg Europe projects.



In your opinion, what policies or strategies should be developed in your region to support and drive the CE in the agri-food sector?

7% of Respondents to this question replied “don’t know” or did not reply. The remaining 93% outlined their views on various issues including changes to production processes, waste management practices, support businesses, including SMEs that innovate and implement CE good practices, information/communication, financial incentives/stimuli.

A lack of awareness and understanding were cited in all responding regions and points to the need for these fundamental challenges to be addressed at an early stage.



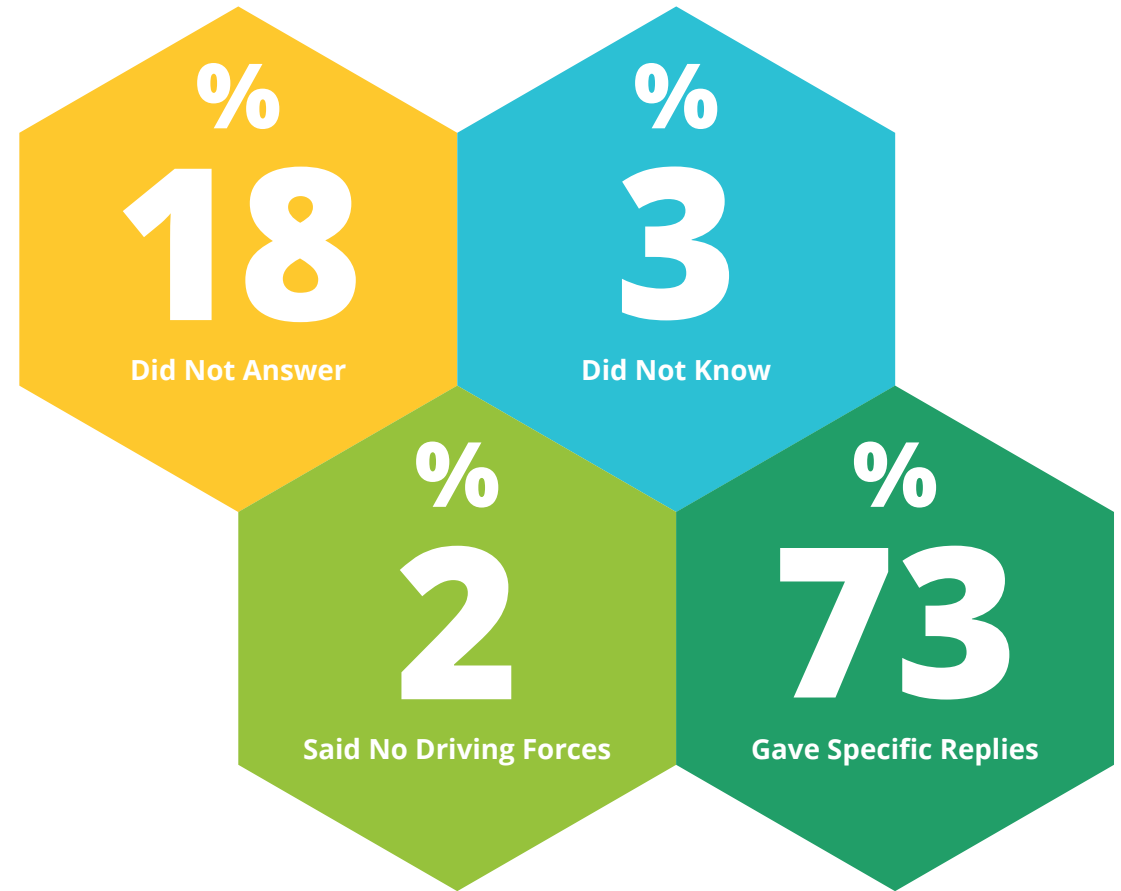
Outline 3 inhibitors in your region, limiting the development of the CE in the agri-food sector.

18% did not give any reply to this question, whilst 2% stated they didn't know. The remaining 80% of replies ranged from lack of knowledge/information/awareness, lack of policy/legislation, strategy/political will, lack of co-operation with other companies, unwillingness to make changes to processes, difficulties networking, bureaucracy, lack of support, aging and impoverished population.



What are the main driving forces/or potential driving forces in your region of the CE as a significant policy/strategic initiative?

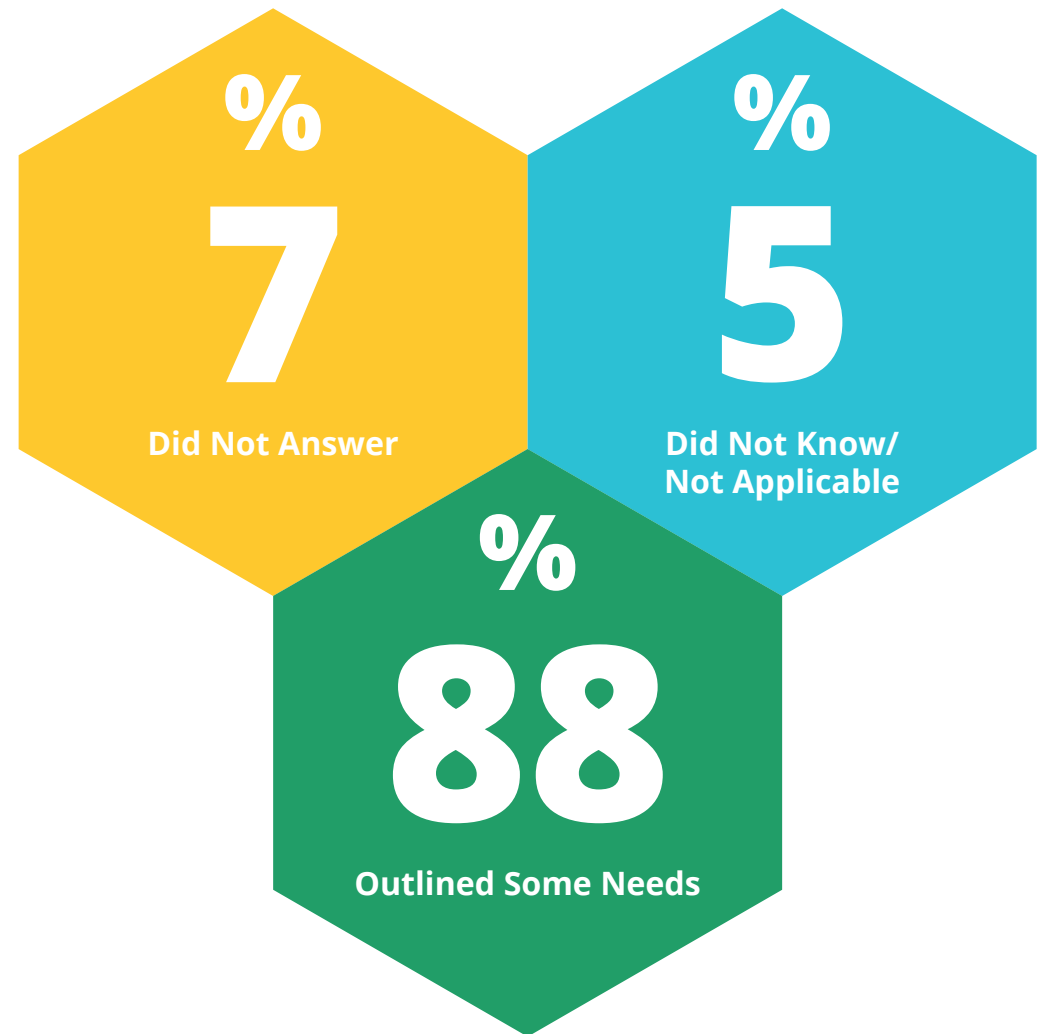
2% of Respondents replied that there were no driving forces, 3% stated they “don’t know”, 18% did not answer the question, whilst 73% of the replies varied from knowledge/awareness regarding CE advantages, environmental protection, reduction in landfill waste, energy production from residues, promotion of EU policy, funding support tools, the need to stabilise local production systems. Political initiatives for the transition to CE, funding motivation, technical help and support, sharing of experiences, regional & municipal action plans/policies/strategies or initiatives. The overall response to this question would indicate that there is a lack of any significant champions of the CE within the project partner regions and that the concept has a significant way to go before becoming part of the main stream policies and practices.



NEEDS ASSESSMENT

What supports do you think are necessary to encourage and drive the CE within SMEs in the agri-food sector?

Whilst 5% of Respondents thought this question was either “not applicable” or replied “don’t know”, a further 7% did not answer it. The remaining 88% of replies outlined the need for, inter alia, information/promotion, funding as well as targeted implementation of investment policies in agri-food businesses, national strategies in the CE, actions related to the limitation of problems , financial & tax incentives, co-ordination of public funding, collective branding/promotion and training/research/education.



Are there any good practices from another region or at EU level that you consider interesting and could be applied in your region?

70% of Respondents said that there were either no good practices, or that they were unaware of any good practices. 30% gave details of good practices that they were aware of. Full details of which are available from the individual replies.

These figures again show that here is a significant opportunity for projects such as SinCE-AFC to identify and raise awareness of good practices in the CE and to use these as means of creating awareness, improving understanding and affecting future policies.



SUBJECTIVE CONCLUSIONS

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The level of knowledge about the CE and CE policies/ strategies varies greatly, even among representatives from the same regions. There would appear to be a lack of strong and meaningful policies and measures to support the CE within most partner regions.

The responses would indicate that while there is an awareness of between 55-60% of the concept and policies relating to the CE among project regions, there is limited knowledge. This is, as previously indicated, quite understandable as many of the Partners are not directly involved in the Circular Economy and in particular its broad implementation is still in its relative infancy in most of the regions.

These responses would indicate that while there is an understanding of the concept of the Circular Economy among participating Partners and regions

that there is very limited knowledge or experience of the practices involved in the CE. This would seem to indicate a significant gap between policy and practice within the partner regions, with the consequent challenge in translating the policies and associated opportunities with the needs of businesses.

The lack of awareness and understanding within the partner regions points to the need for this fundamental challenge to be addressed at an early stage and to be an essential part of partner Action Plans. It is also suggested that the Project Partners and public agencies need to

have a much better knowledge of the real market opportunities within the Circular Economy and of the commercial models that can be applied to the sector.

The responses with regard to good practices and in particular the significant lack of knowledge relating to good practice in the sector indicates that there is a significant opportunity for projects such as SinCE-AFC to identify and raise awareness of good practices in the CE and to use these as means of creating awareness, improving understanding and affecting future policies.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

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SinCE-AFC has an important role to play in developing and implementing policies, surrounding Circular Economy principals, and involving SMEs of the Agri-food chain. Clearly there is a large body of work to be done to raise awareness about the CE concept and its benefits to all. This project will, through its Good Practice identification and shared learning, seek to promote much needed innovation, derive knowledge and develop collaboration.

