



FRIDGE HANDBOOK

SOLUTIONS FOR SUPPORTING
GROWTH OF FOOD INDUSTRY SMES



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MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD PARTNER

The food and drink sector is the biggest employer in the EU and the largest sector in manufacturing while 99% (285,000 businesses) of the companies are SMEs accounting for 62,8% of the total employment in the sector but only 48,1% of the value added and 49,4% of the total turnover.

Our goal was to support the sector through the improvement of public policies. SMEs are not only a key element in employment, but also the backbone of society, moreover they have a key role to play in the uptake of short supply chains. Not all are ready for the challenges set up in today's environment.

We witnessed two very serious crises during the lifetime of the project. First came the COVID-19 pandemic, and thanks to the flexibility of the Interreg Europe the partnership had the chance to address this issue to some extent. We have learned that countries responded in a vastly different manner, but the spotlight definitely shifted to local products. That is also definitely the case with the Russian Invasion of Ukraine.

Therefore, our mission is more important than ever. While maintaining the supply chains as they are, we have to focus on strengthening food companies at a local level. While short supply chains do not lean so heavily on international trade, exchange of experience and sharing Good Practices across borders certainly support local companies in improving their businesses.

We have discussed local products reaching local, national and international markets, companies investing in new machinery and finally, how to increase productivity. Capitalizing on several different methods for understanding the current situation, we understood that SMEs go through a similar set of challenges which will be explained in the following sections.

The Interreg Europe Programme offers a great deal of tools providing opportunities to exchange experience, grow interregional networks and learn from other projects and Good Practices. The learning events, policy brief and other additional services prepared by the Policy Learning Platform greatly helped us in this endeavour, and we can only hope that our findings can reach other who might find them useful.

Good Practices offering solutions to certain issues or presenting something done well might help others seeking to solve their headaches as well. We have built on the results of the projects ourselves, which also will be discussed, so you, the reader will be able to learn more about how to exploit our results yourself.

**YOURS SINCERELY,
BALÁZS KISS**

Lead Partner
Tolna County Development Agency
Nonprofit Ltd.

FRIDGE PROJECT

Objective

The FRIDGE partnership seeks to improve relevant operational programmes and regional policies to support the food and drink sector SMEs keep their position in the world market by interregional policy learning, promotion of good practices and leveraging interregional experience exchange.

Three thematic topics

1. Improved productivity
2. Improved market reach
3. Capacity building

Priority objective: SME competitiveness

Budget: EUR 1.00 million ERDF

Timescale: AUG 2019 - JUL 2023

Partnership

Lead partner:

- » Tolna County Development Agency
Nonprofit Public Benefit Ltd., HU

Partners:

- » Harghita County Council, RO
- » KErn - Competence Center for Nutrition, DE
- » Reginal Council of South Ostrobothnia, FI
- » University of Western Macedonia, GR
- » Economic Council of East-Flanders, BE



RESULTS AND OUTPUTS OF THE PROJECT

During three years of active work and collaboration, many things have been achieved in the project. The partners have gained a better understanding of the state of the Food Industry SMEs in their regions via three (3) thematic studies and two (2) speciality group studies. In addition, our partners have identified altogether nineteen Good Practices that offer solutions for improving the competitiveness of Food Industry SMEs. Transfer of knowledge and lessons learned have been achieved via eight (8) interregional learning events and over thirty local learning events. In the end, all six partners have created their Regional Action Plans that include new development activities based on the lesson learned from the project and lead to improved regional policies.

- » **3 Thematic Studies carried out in each region**
 - » Analysis of Regional Food Sectors
 - » Policy Assessment of Regional Policies and Support System
 - » SME Survey on Productivity and Market Innovation
- » **2 Speciality Group Studies for each region**
 - » SG1: Market Reach
 - » SG2: Productivity
- » **19 Good Practices**
- » **8 Interregional Learning Events**
- » **Over 30 Local Learning Events**
- » **6 Action Plans leading to policy change**

THREE STUDIES - KEY FINDINGS

One of the crucial goals of the FRIDGE project was to develop a better understanding of the food sector in the six partnering regions. Three key studies highlighting general and region-specific challenges have been carried out, focusing on the state of the art of regional food industries (Analysis of Regional Food and Drink Industries), understanding public policies supporting the sector in each region (Policy Assessment) and exploring what SMEs perceive as barriers and drivers in their businesses (SME Survey).

Analysis of Regional Food Sectors

Six regions from six different countries cooperate in the FRIDGE project. To gain a better understanding, the characteristics of each region's food sector were analysed in the Analysis of Regional Food Industries study. The comparison of the studies shows that despite the unique features, there are many common factors that define food industry and how food SMEs operate in these regions. In the following, we display the distinctive aspects of each region.



Tolna County, Hungary

Tolna (Hungary; 3,706 km²; 219,000 inhabitants) – located on the bank of the Danube River, has long agricultural traditions. This is one of the smallest counties in Hungary, both in size and population. Crucial products of the local food industry are wheat, corn, flour mill products, breadstuff, wine, meat, dairy products, fruits, and vegetables. The majority of regional producers are micro-, small, and medium-sized businesses. According to national data, they produce only 30 % of the food industry production value, with the other 70 % dominated by big foreign-owned companies.

Considering recent events in the food industry (like the global pandemic), the most important goal for the region is to promote healthy, reliable local food to support our economy and our producers. Tolna County has all the makings to provide that, but cooperation needs to be extended to all relevant actors. Not only that, the region needs to support their SMEs to reach new markets and to develop themselves, which is something the region is still struggling with.

Harghita County, Romania

Harghita (Romania; 6,639 km²; 304,969 inhabitants) – A mountainous region in central Romania known for its local specialities, such as honey, jams, syrups, and brandy, as well as for its picturesque landscapes and its unique traditional lifestyle.

Harghita County joined the FRIDGE project to learn from the best and support local producers. It is a mostly rural area and its economy is in most part based on agriculture. Harghita County's food industry is not extensively developed yet in order to have export capacity, but it surely represents an example of sustainable food policy on a local level.



Upper Franconia, Germany

Upper Franconia (Bavaria, Germany; 7,230.19 km²; 1,067,482 inhabitants) is a governmental district in Bavaria, especially known for its centuries-long traditions in bakery and confectionery products as well as meat products. This region has the highest density of bakeries, confectioneries, butchers, and breweries per capita in the world! The food industry in Upper Franconia is very well developed and of a significant size – 20 % of the total food produced in Germany comes from Bavaria, and almost 25 % of businesses in Upper Franconia are in the food industry.

Despite good level of development, the Food SMEs in the region also face challenges. Effects of climate change have been seen in the region as extreme weather conditions have caused problems with harvests earnings and rising raw material prices. The aging population is also causing difficulties for traditional food SMEs with lack of workforce as well as challenges in finding new entrepreneurs to run the traditional businesses. There is thus a need to improve the risk and crisis management structures and enhance collaboration between the small Food SMEs to find a better competitive edge in the markets.

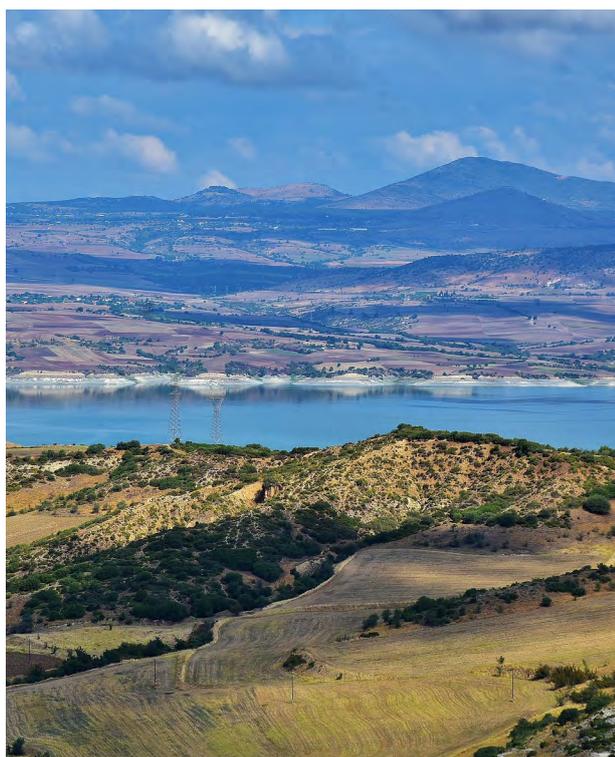


OLLI HIETAKANGAS 10/2019

South Ostrobothnia, Finland

South Ostrobothnia (Finland; 13,999.63 km²; 188,685 inhabitants) is the largest by area of all project partners. Fertile plains with numerous rivers made this region perfect for farming, which lead to its high importance for Finnish food production & processing industries (over 15 % of country's food production comes from the region) as good quality farming land is scarce in Finland. Bakery products, meat, dairy, beverages, berries and vegetables are the main local products. Few major food and drink companies

in Finland are located here, however, most of the companies are micro or small enterprises. Due to a very small size, many of the Food SMEs in South Ostrobothnia lack resources, knowledge and ability to improve their productivity as well as develop and grow their businesses strategically. On a wider scale, all the food competence and know-how that lies in the region's RDI-sector should be better utilised for the use of SMEs.



Western Macedonia, Greece

Western Macedonia (Greece; 9,451 km²; 283,689 inhabitants) is a mountainous and foothill land in western Greece, where continental climate and specific terrain conditions dictated what food and drinks can be made here. Wine, tsipouro (alcoholic beverage) and Krokos Kozanis (Greek Saffron) are local specialities. The food industry consists here almost exclusively of micro and small enterprises. It is not surprising then that only 2,44 % of the entire region's workforce works in this sector.

Western Macedonia, Greece has some food producers that manufacture products of high quality & nutritional value, often certified as organic. These enterprises that rely on traditional long-time experience and quality raw materials face the challenges of globalization by applying modern marketing methods to scale up.

East-Flanders, Belgium

East-Flanders (Belgium; 3,007 km²; 1,515,064 inhabitants) is a rather small but densely populated and agriculturally fertile region. The food industry has a very strong position in this region, as it is the second biggest sector in terms of absolute value and employment. East-Flemish food sector represents 22.6 % of the Belgian food sector turnover and 26.6 % of export. Chocolate, confectionery products, dairy, beverages and meat are the main regional products.

The support and promotion of local producers and food SMEs is one of the strengths of the Economic Council of East-Flanders (ECEf). But there is a need for a new branding of local products based on (sustainable) storytelling. An additional challenge is that product and process innovation evolve rather slowly and hardly focuses on sustainability. The market is also changing. There is the influence of Brexit, climate change and the pandemic. Together with the new and evolving customer needs and the mismatch of research with real market needs, these are important challenges for the food sector in East Flanders/Belgium.



COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Each of the partner regions have distinctive strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities that they are facing, but common characteristics could be found in the reports.

Some of the found common characteristics were:

- » **Importance for the Economy.** Food production and agriculture in the Partner Regions play an important role in the regional and some cases in national economy. This is supported by public policies, see the next chapter for more details.
- » **Size and markets.** Majority of the companies are micro and small enterprises, whose products address mainly to local and regional markets, and exporting hardly exists.

- » **The main distribution channels** are retail and wholesale trade, local markets and supermarkets, e-Commerce & online sales, direct sales (from producer to consumer), fairs & events (local, national, international) and agrotourism.
- » **Strengths.** Strong and diverse local traditions, quality raw-materials and rather active RDI-support systems are reported as strengths in most regions.
- » **Challenges and needs.** The SMEs face a number of similar challenges and need diverse support in order to strengthen their capacities. For most regions the main problems impacting the condition of food and drink SMEs are aging society and brain drain. Many regions also report low-level of RDI-investments hindering growth. You can read more about these challenges in the chapter on the SME survey results.

Further info

- » You can find each partners' regional report on our project websites: [Analysis of Regional Food Sectors](#).



ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL POLICIES AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The second study focused on the assessment of the regional policies supporting Food Industry SMEs in growth. All project partners shared a detailed analysis of their policies and the current situation of their regional development.

Policy framework

Without well designed financial instruments not much could be done to improve the situation of partner regions quickly, and most importantly, effectively. The three most important policies derived from European Funds supporting food and drink SMEs in Partners' Regions are:

- » ERDF Operational Programmes 2014 – 2020
- » Rural Development Programme funded by EAFRD (RDP) 2014 – 2020
- » Community Led Local Development – CLLD/LEADER (ERDF/EAFRD)

All of them present high or, in the worst case, medium utilisation in FRIDGE project partner regions. Other European Programmes used by partner regions are Horizon 2020 and Interreg Programmes. Most partners also reported various local and national level funding programmes which aim at empowering local communities and food sector companies.

Key actors

To properly assess how efficient and effective regional policies are, it is crucial to identify key actors and how they interact with the support system, how relevant is the subject of the support project in the region and if it answers specific regional needs. Key actors' role is to help SMEs increase their competitiveness by offering help in areas such as commercialisation, branding, consulting, networking or information gathering both for the needs of national and international market expansion.

During our study, across all partner regions, we have identified ten key actors, namely:

- » Managing Authorities
- » Ministries
- » Regional and County Councils
- » Chambers of Industry and Commerce
- » RDI and education organisations
- » Local Action Groups
- » Networks and partnerships
- » Business support and non-profit organisations
- » Professional associations, such as Food and Drink Federations etc.

Self-assessment on five variables

In the final step, five variables were established to effectively measure how regional policies are dealing with supporting SMEs.

- 1. Structure** - All actors, networks and institutions that make up a support system
- 2. Functions** - All activities of actors, networks and institutions within the support system that assist food and drink businesses including their internationalization
- 3. Dynamic Tailoring** - The ability to customise support activities to the changing needs of specific groups and contexts.
- 4. Navigation** - The relative accessibility to the support system and the availability of clear guidance to manoeuvre the system.
- 5. Assessment and monitoring of effectiveness** - Assessment of the support system to identify good practices, learning opportunities and measure impacts for continuous improvements.

Based on the self-assessments from all partner regions, it was possible to recognize in which areas partners have developed well, and where advice and guidance from international partners would help to catch up with higher standards.

Territorial needs

From reading the reports submitted by all the regions, territorial needs could be divided into four distinctive categories:

- 1. Socio-economic and environmental factors.**
- 2. Finance:** Factors related to financial instruments that are intended for food and drink SMEs.
- 3. Entrepreneurial issues:** Factors such as productivity, competition, price pressure, cost volatility, workforce, cooperation and networks, export, general business skills etc.
- 4. RTDI:** Research, Technology, Development, Innovation in food and drink SMEs

Socio-economic factors that are mentioned the most often across all regions are the ageing population and brain drain. As partners from Bavaria mention, in their region sometimes there is nobody to overtake a company when the original owner retires. Other problems in many of the regions are complicated procedures and overgrown bureaucracy for start-ups and a non-stable tax system, that does not allow for long-term strategic planning. One of the success stories, developed across all regions is the regional branding that has become an important indicator of product quality and helps to promote regional products both at the national and international level.

In the case of **Financing**, across all regions EU-funds are available, however not without drawbacks. Project partners from Hungary pointed out some of them, like unfavourable financial institution conditions or calls for tenders that address the entire processing industry, leaving the food industry in the background resulting in small and medium-sized enterprises being short of capital.

Entrepreneurial issues vary between regions, but some concepts repeat in at least a few partner regions. Here are a few of them listed:

1. Lack of skilled workforce caused often by brain drain
2. Lack of ambition and business skills, especially a low entrepreneurial mindset and motivation
3. Missing cooperation culture, unwillingness to network and involve external partners in the company's processes.
4. Difficulties in export trading

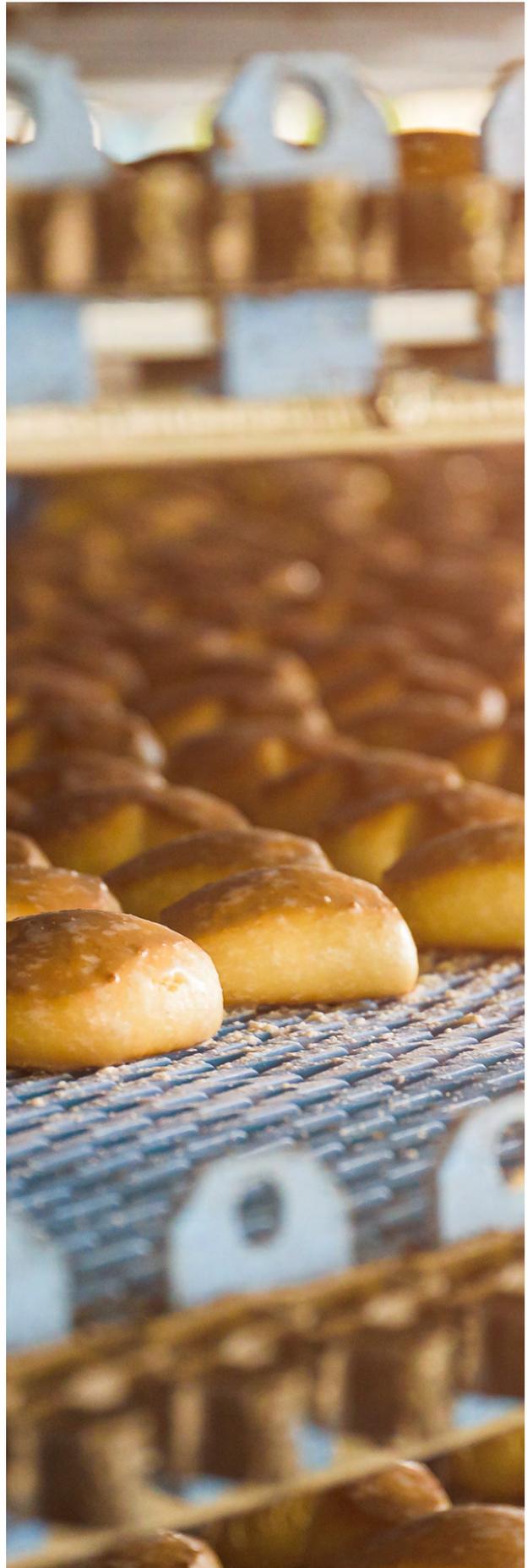
Frequently occurring problems on a business level such as high competition, price pressure, low productivity, high production costs, cost volatility and other related bottlenecks, are reported by almost all the partners as obstacles preventing food and drink SMEs to develop and grow.

The **RTDI** factors are definitely finding their foundation in all obstacles mentioned above. Almost every partner reports a lack of innovation, low level of R&D investments and a significant deficit of knowledge and training in the area of new technologies, leading to missing out on things like automatization, digitalisation and others.

Further info

We highly recommend you to read the results of the assessments in the Comparative Analysis we have created. Both the regional reports and the comparative analysis can be found on our project websites.

- » [Comparative Analysis on Regional policies, territorial needs and the actual state of the food industry.](#)
- » [Policy Assessments of each partner region.](#)



SME SURVEY ON PRODUCTIVITY AND MARKET INNOVATION

The third study carried out in our project focused on productivity and market innovation in the food and drink SMEs. It focused on searching for shared challenges, considering the interregional character of the FRIDGE project. The study was conducted as an online survey for SMEs, consisting of four sections of questions about company profiling, productivity drivers, governmental support for innovation and the market innovation itself. Our six project partners took care of distributing it between the SMEs from their regions - 20 from each of the regions to a total of 120. This allowed for an equally balanced result.

Profile of the SMEs

The majority of our respondents (73 %) were running a family businesses, having 12 employees on average (but 69 % of companies have less than 10 employees) and a yearly turnover of less than 500 000 € (58 %). Their main customers are the consumers (33 %), followed by wholesalers (24 %) and local distributors (22 %). The average age of the interviewed companies is a stunning 26 years. Roughly one third (32,5 %) of the respondents have experience with export activities. Foreign sales contribute to 24 % of their turnover on average.

Bottlenecks and barriers

The biggest bottlenecks of productivity shared between all regions are (in order of importance): access to financial resources, pricing & payment conditions, the scale of production and workforce skills.

As for barriers to market innovation, the most significant ones across all regions were financial, institutional, and industry-related barriers. Companies were also asked what regional governments could do to stimulate innovation. In their opinion, the provision of subsidies is the most important, however marketing support towards the retail/distribution sector and towards consumers/customers is perceived as almost equally important. Thanks to these answers, local authorities could develop a plan for how to best answer the needs of local entrepreneurs.

Recommendations for SME support

Bottlenecks and barriers should be mitigated in order of their importance to make sure that help can come quickly exactly where it is needed the most. Therefore, local governments of partnering regions should focus on providing subsidies aimed at the development of R&D, staff training and investments in infrastructure to lower costs of production.

Second, local chambers of commerce and regional institutions should provide marketing support, especially towards the retail/distribution sector, which could help small food manufacturers to gain momentum and increase production levels.

Third, as a culture of cooperation is missing in many of the partner regions, these local institutions should put the utmost effort to stimulate networking between food companies and knowledge institutions, as well as providing training in related areas to local entrepreneurs.

Further info

- » You can find the full PDF-report about the study here: [FRIDGE SME Survey - Challenges in the food industry.](#)



SPECIALITY GROUP STUDIES - KEY FINDINGS

Our Speciality Group research helped us to better understand specific aspects of partner regions' markets. Through a questionnaire distributed among partners, we collected answers and tried to help SMEs from these regions to look at certain areas of business development and market growth in a new way. Two studies were conducted and now we would like to share their highlights in this paper.

SG1: Market reach

Speciality Group Study 1 (SGS1) focused on figuring out how local products from partnering regions are reaching national and international markets. As well as what kind of support these companies can expect from their local and national institutions in promoting their products. It turned out that most of the partner regions do have and promote a local label. However, with exception of Germany, the national labelling schemes are generally much more developed compared to local branding and they are available for all products that fit official requirements. It was proved in all regions that using labelling increased customers' trust in the quality of the product. In most of the regions, local producers can count on legal and promotional support both on the national and local level.

Local chambers of commerce make sure that entrepreneurs receive support, but its extent varies greatly between regions. The situation is similar when talking about promoting local

products on international markets - each region has a different approach to this issue. In some countries - Hungary, Belgium and Finland, businesses can receive education in market research and marketing to help them conquer the market at home and abroad.

To close the SGS1, entrepreneurs were asked about the impact of COVID19 on their operations. In countries like Romania and Hungary, where a significant portion of goods was sold on local markets and fairs, the impact was greater than in other regions. Others argued that the pandemic potentially helped them, as the appreciation of local food producers increased during the crisis. However, these are just exceptions to the rule, and in general for many SMEs the turnover decreased, and they have to simply fight for survival.

To summarise, customers do values labels and local branding because they allow them to make a fast choice. Regions without their labels should develop one. Another important takeaway is that companies in every surveyed region are supported by local organisations both on the national and international level. However, the quality and extent of that support differs between regions and to improve it, implementing good practices is advised.

Further info

- » Full summary of the study on FRIDGE websites: [Summary of Speciality Group 1 Study](#).
- » A Policy Brief on Regional Branding by Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform on SME Competitiveness: [Policy Brief on Regional Branding](#).

SG2: Investments into new machinery, increasing productivity

Speciality Group Study 2 (SGS2) focused on the business development side of things. SMEs from all six partnering regions were asked about their approach to investment priorities, investment tools and opportunities their companies face, as well as to learn more regarding the effect that the pandemic had on food industry SMEs.

Thanks to the questionnaire, we learned that in the last 5 years, almost all interviewed companies invested in new machinery. The main motivation was a want to increase productivity and profitability, but also a want to be more eco-friendly. Three of the most popular ways of financing these upgrades were company's own funds, bank loans and tax support.

The majority of businesses also invested in their facilities – constructing new and refurbishing old ones. Again, increasing productivity and profitability were listed as the top reasons for such investments. Interviewees claimed that investments concluded in improved work satisfaction through better working conditions. Several answers highlighted that these investments allowed them to survive through the pandemic and preserve the number of employees. Extending on human resource policies, we asked about

additional training and development workshops offered to employees, and only bigger companies offer such services to their staff members.

Coronavirus has caused disruption in operations of all interviewed parties. The most common impacts were the reorganisation of work routine, downsizing, reduced working hours. It also created unsold inventories and forced the rescheduling of some investments. Thankfully, none of the interviewed companies went bankrupt.

As a result of the study, we can make a conclusion that investments in new machinery and facilities are indeed positively affecting the productivity and competitiveness of a company. They not only affect the customer/consumer side but also human resources. Employees are significantly happier to work with newer, more efficient, and usually safer machinery, as well as, to perform their work in a renovated and more environmentally friendly space.

Further info

- » Full summary of the study on FRIDGE websites: [Summary of Speciality Group 2 Study](#).



GOOD PRACTICES

During the project, the partners identified altogether nineteen (19) Good Practices that inspired each other to further improve the regional policies and activities supporting Food Industry SMEs in growth. The Good Practices offer solutions for better market reach via networking, cooperation, and local branding as well as for productivity via better financing, product development and education.

Good Practices from

TOLNA COUNTY, HUNGARY

Völgység Kincse Social Cooperative: promoting employment and short supply chains in rural areas

The Völgység Kincse Social Cooperative was established with support from the Social Renewal Operational Programme (2007-2013) funded by ERDF. This allowed the newly formed social cooperative to start the production of fruit juice from locally grown raw materials.

The Cooperative collaborates with 2 other local Cooperatives. Völgység Kincse contributed to the employment of 7 locals and its activities also include trainings, cultural events, operation of a local food store and can be extended with additional features. The Social Cooperative operates a local product store, a webshop, and provides 46 schools with fresh fruit or fruit juice. They have received the "Excellent product" award in 2017.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Völgység Kincse Social Cooperative](#).

HASHTAGS: #cooperation #localbranding

The EDIOP 1.2.6-8.3.4-16 call for application for food industry SMEs

The EDIOP 1.2.6-8.3.4-16 ("Support for complex investments of medium-sized companies in the food industry with a combined loan product") call for applications was specifically designed for medium-size food industry companies. The purpose of the call is to promote the development, role and market position of medium-sized food SME, to support investments leading to job retention, and to reduce regional disparities by supporting complex investments, providing a combination of a non-repayable grant and a soft loan.

The amount of a non-refundable grant was 50-750 million HUF, with a loan of 50-2000 million HUF. So far 60 applications were supported accounting for a total of 19,5 billion HUF, or roughly 56 million EUR.

More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [The EDIOP 1.2.6-8.3.4-16 call for application for food industry SMEs](#).

HASHTAGS: #funding #productivity

Good Practices from HARGHITA COUNTY, ROMANIA

Szekler Product Brand

Harghita County is a predominantly agricultural, rural region due to the economic activity among the county's rural population being agriculture and food production. It is hard to compete with big global food producers when you are a small farmer. That is why a Szekler Product community trademark has been developed, to protect the interests of local producers. It is given to all products produced at a local level. More than 150 producers with more than 1000 products have the right to use the trademark. Customers are happy to know that the choice they make is supporting local communities and helps them to grow.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Szekler Product Brand](#).

HASHTAGS: #cooperation #localbranding

Szépvízi Brand

Harghita county has its population spread over a vast rural area. There are a lot of farms with only 5-10 cows, which leads to low milk production level and difficulty to sell it. To overcome this issue, the Agricultural Cooperative "Csengő" has been established, with 72 members, which currently increased to 144.

The main objectives of the cooperative include: the collection, processing and sale of milk, produced by local farmers. 5000 litres of milk are processed daily. The cooperative ensures the living of 200 families. Products can be purchased in different marketplaces of the county sold under the brand name Szépvízi.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Szépvízi Brand](#).

HASHTAGS: #cooperation #localbranding

Association Fenyőalja Egyesület

Teamwork helps to achieve things that otherwise would be impossible. In Ciumani, Harghita County, nine small local producers combined their forces to form the Association Fenyőalja Egyesület which helped them to meet official requirements, authorise their products to reach a countrywide market, share the costs of production and be internationally recognized thanks to visiting at least 10 different international food fairs every year.



Each on their own local producers did not have enough resources to cope with complicated legal issues that were standing between them and being able to sell their products in regular stores. Thanks to working together and forming the Association Fenyőalja Egyesület, now all nine members record the highest production levels ever and their products gained international recognition thanks to their quality and unforgettable taste.

More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Association Fenyőalja Egyesület](#).

HASHTAGS: #cooperation #localbranding #productivity

Good Practices from UPPER FRANCONIA, GERMANY

Food Startup Incubator Weihestephan FSIWS

Startup incubators are doing amazing things for the world of business and technology. Many big companies which services we take for granted nowadays would simply not exist if not for the assistance of such organisations. That is what Food Startup Incubator Weihestephan tries to do. Helps realise innovative ideas, promote sustainable food products and foster entrepreneurship among young people.

The FSIWS supports startups and founding teams through four main aspects:

- » Providing the infrastructure for the food production in laboratory and pilot-scale as well as co-working spaces
- » Teaching and training in the field of food technology, entrepreneurship, business administration and finance
- » Providing financing instruments for the startup, growth and scaling phase
- » Network to fellow startups, food technology and entrepreneurship experts, business angels, investors, retailers



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Food Startup Incubator Weihestephan](#).

HASHTAGS:

#networking #education #productivity

Genuss Akademie Bayern - Academy of Taste

There is a growing interest in nutrition and food quality among customers in many European markets. They want to know all ingredients used to prepare the food and be sure that what they eat will keep them healthy. This is why there is a growing demand for qualified educational programmes that provide specific knowledge in the field of nutrition to food industry professionals.

The Genuss Akademie Bayern offers a practice-orientated qualification in the areas of nutrition, sensory analysis, tasting, processing techniques, all it takes to improve the qualifications of food professionals. The target group includes chefs, restaurant experts, butchers, bakers, winegrowers, brewers and food, beverage, and spice retailers as well as cheese, meat and bakery retailers. Thanks to this training they can professionally answer the market needs and make their products/services more attractive to their customers.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Genuss Akademie Bayern](#).

HASHTAGS:

#cooperation #networking #education

Good Practices from UPPER FRANCONIA, GERMANY

Trilogy of Platforms

The free flow of information is what built the world we live in. This is why the Trilogy of Platforms created in the German state of Bavaria is so appealing. Three platforms supporting different B2B and B2C relations allow for fast, free, and effective communication between interested parties. The platforms provide an overview of the regional procurement situation in Bavaria and facilitate contacts for the purchase of regional foods.

More than 3000 regional suppliers and producers are now registered (status Nov. 2021) and offer more than 800 different products.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Trilogy of Platforms](#).

HASHTAGS:

#cooperation #networking #localbranding

World Food Heritage Bavaria

The aim of the project is to promote the sale of Bavarian specialities of protected origin (PGI and PDO) outside of Bavaria. The aim is to communicate the message that Bavarian specialities are part of the European culture of culinary delights that deserves to be protected. The world food heritage brand publishes brochures, creates advertising texts, updates its homepage, works closely with protection associations, bundles images, information and data, recipes and product information. Target groups are consumers, trade market and gastronomy. By cooperating with different trade networks, they aim to create new sales channels.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [World Food Heritage Bavaria](#).

HASHTAGS:

#networking #localbranding #export

Good Practices from SOUTH OSTROBOTHNIA, FINLAND

Food Forum and Food Team: Regional Food Innovation Cluster Networks in South Ostrobothnia

Food Forum and Food Team are food sector collaboration networks. The aim of the networks is to enhance the innovativeness and information sharing within the region's food sector and they both are outputs from a former development project funded by the ERDF. The team enhances local companies' exporting possibilities. Five to ten companies have actively taken part in the network. The team has also organised an export trip to China. Secondly the network aims to enhance the conspicuousness of the region as Food Province and its know-how in the food sector.

More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Food Forum and Food Team](#).

HASHTAGS:

#cooperation #networking #localbranding

Accelerating growth and internationalisation among Ostrobothnian Food Industry SMEs

Healthy, clean and safe food is a rising trend in the world food markets, creating opportunities for food SMEs also. Many SMEs, however, struggle taking advantage of the trend in the international food markets facing many challenges such as small scale of production, narrow product selection, lack of resources and knowledge. The aim of the project was to enhance the knowledge and know-how of small food sector SMEs on development and marketing of well-branded and high-added-value food products. By completing the online learning materials and training seminars SMEs have enhanced their skills and knowledge related to branding, marketing and exporting. As well as showed how to take their first steps towards internationalisation and exporting.

More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Accelerating growth and internationalisation among Ostrobothnian Food Industry SMEs](#).

HASHTAGS: #education #productivity #export

Development of the regional Food Province Label of South Ostrobothnia

Regional food brands offer great opportunities for food and drink industry SMEs to enhance visibility and communicate the origin of their products. In South Ostrobothnia the food sector actors have collaborated to promote the region as the Food Province of Finland for several years and many development activities have been directed to develop the concept. This led to the creation of the Food Province Label.

Two issues were important for the success:

1. Engagement of local actors. Over 25 members took actively part in the project.
2. Consumer studies. The studies offered very important insights for the brand development and how it is seen outside the region.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Food Province Label of South Ostrobothnia](#).

HASHTAGS:

#networking #localbranding #education

Good Practices from WESTERN MACEDONIA, GREECE

Enterprise Europe Network

When you run a small business support from experienced mentors can be invaluable for the speed of your company's development.

The Enterprise Europe Network helps businesses innovate and grow on an international scale. It is the world's largest support network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with international ambitions. The Network is active in more than 60 countries worldwide and brings together 3,000 experts from more than 600 member organisations.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Enterprise Europe Network](#).

HASHTAGS: #cooperation #networking #export

Amyndeon Oenos Wine Cluster

Amyndeon's wine producers having realized the increased winemaking needs of the area, founded a non-profit organization named 'Amyndeon Oenos Wine Cluster' in order to enhance their position on the global wine market. Amyndeon Oenos Wine Cluster operates in many different areas, its activities, among others, include studying, identification, preservation and promotion of the authorized vine varieties of prefecture of Florina, cooperation with academic community and national and international wine institutes. This is the first time that a wine cluster is developed in the region of Western Macedonia, including more than 20 wineries of Amyndeon area.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Amyndeon Oenos Wine Cluster](#).

HASHTAGS: #cooperation #localbranding

Agrifood Partnership of Western Macedonia

Agrifood Partnership of Western Macedonia is a civic non-profit-making organization that was established to support agri-food products of the region. Its main goal is to promote these regional specialities on national and international stage. Agricultural Partnership takes care, among others, of certification of local products, collaboration with research and academic community, looking for investors, helping with promotion and sharing a know-how. Partnership associates more than 28 local food producers.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Agrifood Partnership of Western Macedonia](#).

HASHTAGS:

#cooperation #networking #localbranding
#education #export



Sustainable Intensification in Dairy Sheep Farming

Sustainable Intensification offers a practical pathway towards the goal of producing more food with less impact on the environment, intensifying food production while ensuring the natural resource base on which agriculture depends is sustained, and indeed improved, for future generations.

Proud farm (PF) invested in a milk recording system, environmental sensors, a weighting system for the calculation of the Income over feed cost, and a weather station. These investments increased an average milk yield by more than 20 %, by milk recording. PF also reduced the animals' interventions by over 50 % and reduced mortality rates of adult sheep.

PF business model has a big learning potential for other regions, and it is also a flexible but very innovative transferable model, especially when the farms owners have strong belief in science and innovation.

More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Sustainable Intensification in Dairy Sheep Farming](#)

HASHTAGS: #cooperation #localbranding #productivity

Good Practices from EAST-FLANDERS, BELGIUM

Regional cooperatives connecting local food producers and consumers

In East-Flanders, three regional cooperatives unite regional food producers on a platform where they can sell their products B2B and B2C. The platform offers everything that fertile Belgian land has to offer, from dairy, through the meat to chocolate and fruits.

Customers want to buy locally and from local producers. They just need a comfortable way to do it, and this platform proves it. Evidence of success is a double-digit growth in sales compared year to year.

More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Regional cooperatives connecting local food producers and consumers.](#)

HASHTAGS:

#cooperation #networking #localbranding

Food Pilot: an application and analysis centre for the food processing industry

The Food Pilot helps companies, labs and policy makers with agri-food challenges. It offers a package of services ranging from the first innovative idea to a successful final product. A personal expert coordinates the specific steps, such as lab analyses, pilot tests, advisory support or the creation of a knowledge overview.

The Food Pilot shows that intensive cooperation between the government and the market can pay off. Its services are used by over 400 companies per year, and each year more than 20 000 food analyses are conducted.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Food Pilot.](#)

HASHTAGS:

#cooperation #education #productivity

Tasteful East-Flanders: promoting local gastronomy

Tasteful East-Flanders promotes local products from East Flanders together with 250 regional and farm producers. Organisation is based on 4 pillars:

- » Professionalisation and new management techniques
- » Promotion of regional products
- » Sales & Distribution
- » Experience & Tourism

Promotion activities bring marvellous results. Before COVID-19 hit, over 80 000 people a year would visit the promotion centre (Butcher's Hall), and in 2020, over 95 000 visited the Tasteful East-Flanders website.



More info about the Good Practice on FRIDGE websites: [Tasteful East-Flanders.](#)

HASHTAGS: #networking #localbranding





CONCLUDING REMARKS

All of the carried-out studies and identified good practices described in this Handbook have guided the FRIDGE project partners in their regions towards improved regional policies supporting competitiveness of Food industry SMEs. The key steps towards improved policies are the regional action plans, developed by each partner region. In this last chapter we want to share short descriptions of each partners' action plan.

Tolna County, Hungary

In our region, shortage of labour and lacking management skills are important issues according to our SME survey. The Food Pilot GP inspired us to consult with our Managing Authority and suggest including advisory and training services in a call supporting food SMEs that might help fill the gap.

Harghita County, Romania

Taking into account the local needs and the discussions held with our stakeholders our action plan focuses on two main activities: 1. establishment of a product brand system quality assurance system, 2. preparation of the milk production chain cooperation with the involvement of product chain actors. Both activities are inspired by the Good Practices identified in the project.

Upper Franconia, Germany

Through the many discussions and Good Practices, we learned the importance of different approaches to accessing and using existing resources. We further develop Premium Products and foster the Project Genuss Schätze Bayern, our Policy Instrument. The various approaches from the FRIDGE partners to promote regional products were inspiring for an improvement of our marketing measures through direct dialogue with consumers and other stakeholders. Public events and training courses, participation in markets and trade fairs will be part of the marketing strategy in the future.

South Ostrobothnia, Finland

During the project we have identified certain territorial needs in our region, that should be answered in order to improve the competitiveness of our local Food SMEs. Our action plan focuses on two development themes. First, supporting the development of the regional Food Innovation Ecosystem and second, the development of the regional food business environment. Under these two themes, we are initiating five concrete actions that support the competitiveness of our Food SMEs and that are all based on the lessons learned and especially the Good Practices identified in the project.

Western Macedonia, Greece

In Western Macedonia Region, a lack of specific actions to promote the agricultural SMEs is recorded. Based on lessons learned from the project including many useful Good Practices the FRIDGE Action Plan will be a tool for us to boost extraversion, supporting the Agrifood Partnership of Western Macedonia, the Regional Food Cluster.

East-Flanders, Belgium

Our Action Plan is based on two main actions. First, creating a mentoring network for consumers: inspired by the Szekler Product Trademark, the Food Province Label and the Völgység Kincse Social Cooperative, we want to set up a communication campaign to further develop and strengthen our pride towards and knowledge about East Flanders and East Flemish gastronomic specialities. Second, we aim at creating a mentoring network for producers: there is little collaboration between food SMEs in our region. A lot of good practices prove that for small SMEs, this could be the key to strengthening export, promotion, sales and distribution. To build on this, we want to build a network between SMEs in the food industry and knowledge centres.





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