



## I-CON PROJECT NEWSLETTER N° 2, MAY 2017



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## IMPROVING COMPETENCES AND SKILLS THROUGH FOOD SECTOR INNOVATIONS

### NEWS

Welcome back to our I-CON newsletter, a half-yearly updating about what's going on at I-CON, upcoming events and activities.

#### **What happened?**

"...The great effort is to remain artisan in your head, in your products, but with two souls: one focused on history and tradition, the other accepting the fast changes of today and aiming to the search of a product exploiting technology, research and packaging to add services to the product itself..." (P. Franchini, Commercial manager of "Salumificio Vecchi" - EXPO MILANO 2015).

This quote, by one of the more than a hundred companies analyzed, could summarize the starting point of our story, a philosophy that becomes strategy. A recipe for food-related SMEs, a mix of skills, competences and synergies with food connected sectors - such as design, mechatronics, food safety - and innovation.

The protagonists of this story are ten partners. They met in Bologna to start creating an I-CON common attitude and an operational strategy, and successfully involve SMEs and local stakeholders, with the aim to implement a 'Transnational food mentor scheme' and a 'Crowd design platform', as a sustainable answer to the need of innovation in remote areas.

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme supports regional cooperation among central European countries: Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as parts of Germany and Italy. The programme aims to make central European cities and regions better places to live and work by implementing smart solutions answering to regional challenges in the fields of innovation, lowcarbon economy, environment, culture and transport.

A deep and intensive study of the innovation ecosystem food-related framework in each partner region enabled to map its state of the art in relation to four key sectors of the quadruple helix model.

The outputs show specific companies' needs and critical factors, SMEs good practices, Smart Specialization Strategies and public funding opportunities, education offer and intermediary support. Several ad hoc meetings have been organized to disseminate the first results achieved.

Everyone interested could be part of the on-going I-CON story through meetings and events, but especially, day by day, through virtual channels, in particular our website and Facebook community.

## Major Food safety challenges at European level

Although Food safety is a major public health and economic issue for Europe, recent food safety crises have created a high degree of concern among consumers, and consumer perception has led to a generalized lack of confidence.



*Food safety by design (Source: ETP Food for Life, Strategic Research Agenda 2007-2020, 2007).*

The I-CON project has listed the major food safety challenges at European level: (1) predicting and monitoring the behaviour and fate of relevant known and emerging biological hazards; (2) predicting and monitoring the behaviour and fate of relevant known and emerging chemical hazards, including toxins of biological origin; (3) appropriate risk-benefit assessments and communication to the various stakeholders of the food chain; (4) tools to ensure security of the food chain; and (5) understanding and addressing consumers concerns with food safety issues.

Concerning these challenges, the I-CON project has also identified the scientific and technical needs related to food safety and quality for the innovation in the food industry including, among others: (1) managing safety hazards and risks in processing, distribution and sale; (2) maintaining and enhancing quality through effective process technology; (3) delivering products that are safe throughout shelf-life; (4) maintaining product quality throughout shelf-life; and (5) protecting consumers through an appropriate guidance.

## Solar-dried mushrooms - Naturally enriched with vitamin D

In the framework of the TRAF00N Project - "Traditional Food Network to improve the transfer of knowledge for innovation" and in close collaboration with Dr. Dimitrios Argyropoulos (University of Hohenheim, Germany), Dirfis Mushrooms successfully applied an energy-efficient, low-cost solar drying technology in order to develop dried mushroom products, rich in vitamin D, improved quality and extended shelf life.



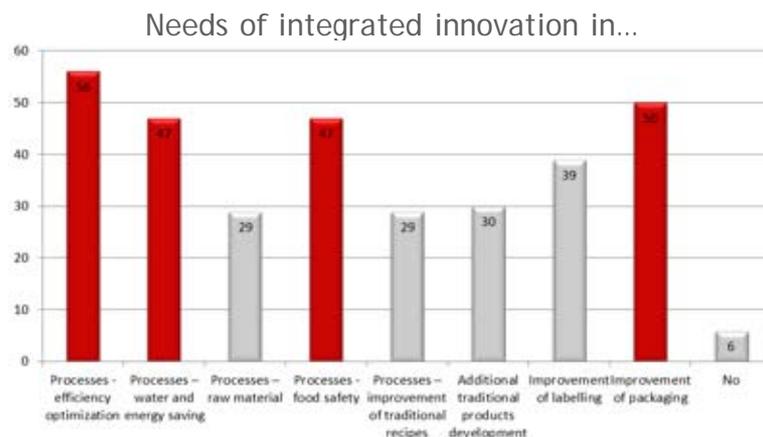
When harvested mushrooms are exposed to sunlight during the summer months they start producing vitamin D naturally in large quantities. The explanation for this is that the UV light converts mushroom's ergosterol - a naturally occurring substance in mushrooms - into ergocalciferol (vitamin D2). Solar drying delivers safe and high quality dried mushrooms with great taste and intensified flavour that can be used all year long. Therefore, dried mushrooms have the potential to become a great natural source of vitamin D in winter months.

Dirfis Mushrooms is the first company in Europe bringing to market dried mushrooms high in vitamin D. The solar-dried "My delicious OYSTER MIX" consists of golden and grey oyster mushrooms organically cultivated in a farm on the island of Euboea (Greece). They contain more than 2100 µg of Vitamin D2 per 100 g, which means that one or two mushroom slices can fulfil the recommended daily intake of vitamin D. Solar-dried mushrooms represent the only source of vitamin D for vegans!

## Innovation needs of SMEs food producers in Europe

The I-CON project has sent 710 European SMEs from the food sector a questionnaire to elaborate a SMEs critical factor diagnosis report. Finally, a total of 98 filled-in questionnaires were obtained.

Regarding needs for innovation, all respondents except six were "interested in integrating innovations" in their companies. Answers dispersion can be seen in the figure below, being "Processes - efficiency optimization" and "Improvement of packaging" the main priorities.



The report showed that companies are aware of the fact that innovation brings benefits to their processes, especially when referring to “the growth of sales” and “reduction of the costs” and, in general, the information regarding regional regulatory laws is quite inaccessible.

Although some companies were “not interested in receiving free consultancy”, the I-CON project will enhance the cooperation with targeted SMEs by using new and innovative approaches where satisfaction/quality is constantly monitored to really improve SME’s entrepreneurial competences and skills through food innovation potentials.

## Who we are

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Partners from seven central European countries join their forces to improve entrepreneurial competences and skills in remote areas through food innovation potentials, led by the Pomurje Technology Park (Slovenia).

### Slovenia

- Pomurje Technology Park
- Chamber of Agricultural and food enterprises

### Austria

- Business Upper Austria

### Hungary

- Campden BRI Hungary Ltd
- South Transdanubian Regional Innovation Agency

### Italy

- CNA National Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium Sized businesses - Regional Association of Emilia Romagna
- UNISEF - Industry Association Service & Training of Treviso and Pordenone

### Germany

- Hohenheim University

### Poland

- Polish Chamber of Food Industry and Packaging

### Slovakia

- Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry

## Who funds us

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Our project is funded by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, which encourages cooperation on shared challenges in Central Europe. With 246 million Euros of funding from the European Regional Development Fund, this programme supports institutions to work together beyond borders to improve cities and regions in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.



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