

Food4CE



Strengthening Innovation Capacities Among Central European Alternative Food Networks

ALIGNING INNOVATION WITH EU STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Over the past months, important steps have been taken within the Food4CE project to lead Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) closer to a more **connected, resilient, and sustainable future**. With many project activities now entering their final phase, the project is entering a new chapter where local action and European policy are starting to meet.

After a period marked by the launch of a **Knowledge Transfer and Matchmaking Platforms**, as well as pilot activities within **Innovation Hubs**, the focus has now shifted toward preparing **policy recommendations and regional action plans** that will help ensure the long-term success and visibility of AFNs across Central Europe.

Regional needs have been carefully analysed, and discussions with stakeholders have been carried out in each partner country. Based on this groundwork, regional policy recommendations and action plans are now being drafted in Slovenia, Hungary, Austria, Poland and Italy.



These strategic documents will reflect the specific characteristics and priorities of each territory while staying closely aligned with broader EU frameworks — **Macro-regional Strategies (MRS)** and **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)**. The aim of these activities is to strengthen local food systems by ensuring that **AFNs are recognised in strategic documents and supported through future funding, innovation policies, and regional development plans**.

At the same time, **joint policy recommendations** are being prepared at the **transnational level**. These will serve as a bridge between regional initiatives and higher-level planning, making sure that the lessons learned within Food4CE can be **transferred, scaled up**, and used to **influence decision-making** beyond the project's immediate network. Special attention is being paid to how sustainable food logistics and mutual cooperation can be better integrated into regional and EU policies.

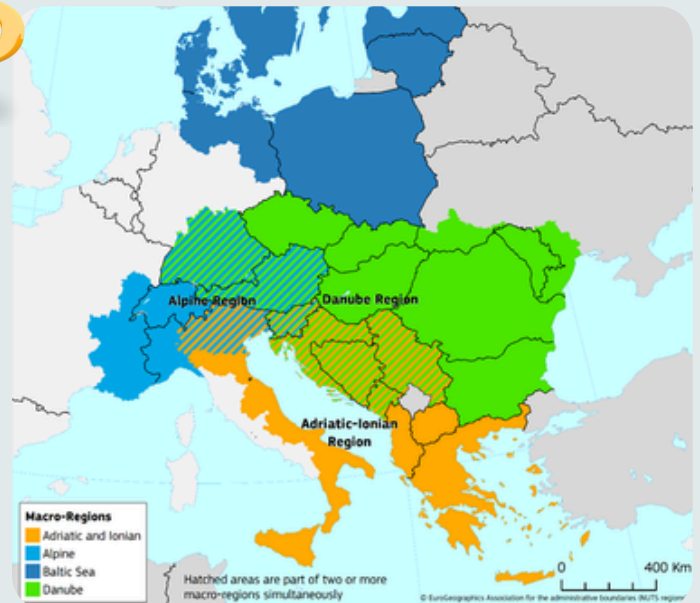


As the project moves closer to its conclusion, the integrated approach — linking practice, technology, and policy — is helping to build a **stronger future for local food systems**. The coming months will see the finalisation of all regional action plans, establishment of Transnational Innovation Hub (TIH), and the release of policy recommendations that will carry the voice of AFNs into the broader debate on sustainable and smart food systems in Europe.

FOOD4CE AND THE EU MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES: LOCAL ACTION, SHARED VISION

What are Macro-Regional Strategies?

Macro-regional Strategies are **EU cooperation frameworks** that bring together countries in the same geographical area – Alpine (EUSALP), Danube (EUSDR), Baltic Sea (EUSBSR), Adriatic-Ionian (EUSAIR) region – to tackle shared challenges in areas such as **transport, innovation, and sustainable development**, using existing EU programmes rather than new funding. They also serve as open and **flexible platforms for strategic networking**, where diverse actors work together to shape concrete plans and actions that strengthen cooperation on the ground. By doing so, they make regions more **resilient, connected, and attractive places to live – for everyone.**

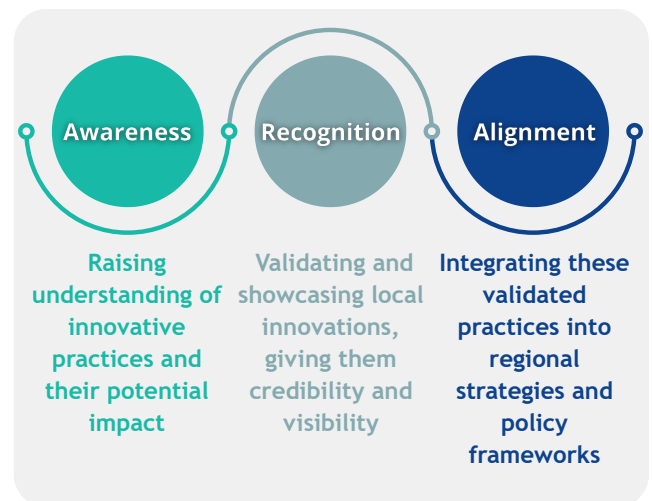


Within Food4CE, we've taken a close look at how Macro-regional Strategies (MRS) support Alternative Food Networks and Short Food Supply Chains. What we found is encouraging: many of core priorities overlap with what Food4CE is trying to achieve – a more sustainable and reliable short food supply system.

The EUSALP and EUSDR strategies, for example, place a strong focus on **sustainable land use, biodiversity, digitalisation, green mobility, and the circular economy** – all themes that resonate deeply with project goals. Clear synergies can also be seen in EUSAIR, especially in the areas of **sustainable agriculture, tourism, and environmental quality**. Even the EUSBSR, which is more geared towards regional cohesion, innovation, and climate action, shares a number of touchpoints with Food4CE's work.

These connections open up **opportunities** to link Food4CE's results with larger policy frameworks, particularly when it comes to **improving food logistics, strengthening producer networks, and making food systems across Central Europe more territorial, resilient and circular.**

Building on these insights, policy recommendations and regional action plans are being shaped that align with MRS priorities and can be folded into future funding instruments or Action Plan updates. This process follows a **progressive pathway**:



By moving through these stages, local innovations – whether in logistics or circular practices – gain the strategic visibility and institutional support needed to influence long-term planning, policy design, and investment decisions across the region.

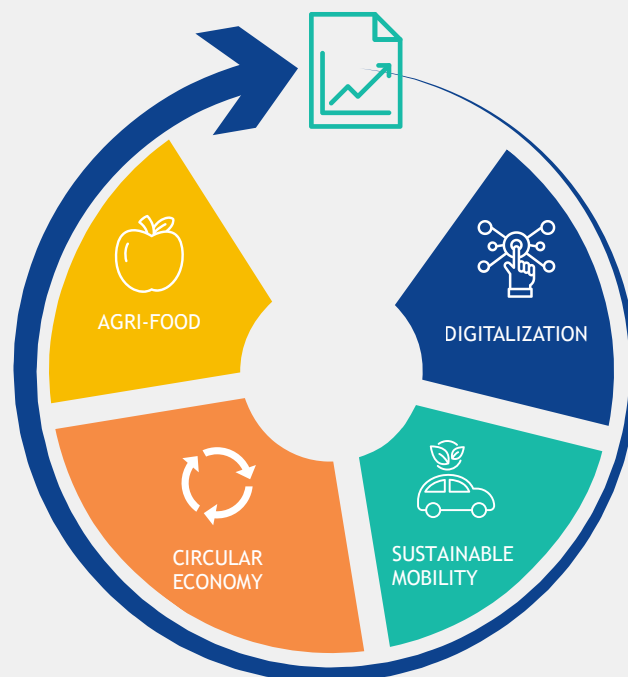
FOOD4CE AND SMART SPECIALISATION STRATEGIES: DRIVING INNOVATIONS FROM REGIONS

What are Smart Specialisation Strategies?



Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) are **innovation-driven policy frameworks** developed by EU regions to focus investments on areas where they have the most potential to grow and compete. Based on local strengths, knowledge, and resources, these strategies **help regions support priority sectors** – like sustainable food, green technologies, or digital solutions.

S3 strategies also act as **dynamic platforms for collaboration** across sectors and regions. They bring together businesses, researchers, public authorities, and communities to co-design innovation policies that make sense locally but connect to wider European goals. In this way, they **strengthen regional identity, boost economic resilience, and support more targeted, meaningful innovation across Europe.**

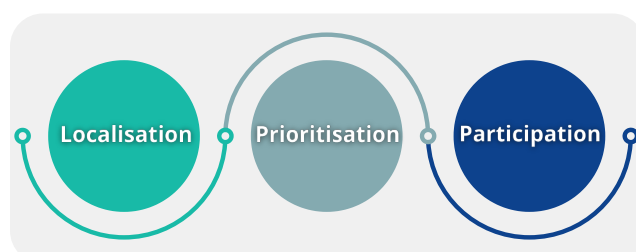


Food4CE's deep dive into Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) showed that **regional innovation roadmaps can be powerful allies for Alternative Food Systems.** While S3 frameworks do not explicitly target AFNs, they offer strong synergies with Food4CE priorities – especially through specialisations in **agri-food, digitalisation, sustainable mobility, and circular economy.** Regions such as Emilia-Romagna, Slovenia, and Hungary emphasize digital transformation, precision agriculture, and resource efficiency, all of which align closely with Food4CE's focus on smart logistics, ICT tools, and localised food distribution models.

These overlaps create **clear opportunities for integrating Food4CE's outputs into existing S3 frameworks,** ensuring that innovations in logistics and digitalisation for AFNs are not only regionally embedded but also supported by **future funding and policy instruments.** Food4CE is building on these findings to propose policy recommendations and action plans that align with S3 priorities, such as fostering digital tools for planning, warehousing, and e-commerce tailored to small

food producers, as well as encouraging circular, low-carbon approaches to food logistics.

By putting forward policy recommendations aimed at influencing Smart Specialisation Strategies (SSS), **Food4CE is working to ensure that AFNs and SFSCs are recognized in discussions where regional innovation priorities are shaped.** These networks should no longer be seen merely as small-scale alternatives, but as key drivers of smarter logistics, greener economies, and stronger local communities. Through these efforts, future policies and investments are more likely to acknowledge and support circular, localized food systems designed to thrive in Central Europe.



LOOKING AHEAD



From Regional Voices to European Impact

As Food4CE moves into its final phase, the project is no longer just about developing platforms, it's about **shaping the future of food systems across Central Europe**. The groundwork laid through innovation hubs, digital platforms, and stakeholder dialogues is now evolving into **actionable strategies** that **connect local realities with European priorities**.

The coming months will focus on turning regional insights into action. By aligning our recommendations with both Macro-Regional strategies and Smart Specialisation Strategies, Food4CE is ensuring that the challenges and opportunities faced by local producers and communities are heard where it matters most - at the policy level. This means **embedding AFNs into the frameworks that guide innovation funding, logistics planning, and the transition to low-carbon, circular economies**.

As the project nears completion, the focus is shifting from experimentation to lasting impact – scaling up successful models while remaining grounded in local needs. Regional action plans will be finalised and shared with decision-makers, while joint policy recommendations will provide a blueprint for integrating AFNs into Europe's long-term vision for sustainable food systems.



FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Slovenian Innovation Hub ORbITaLA

The ORbITaLA Innovation Hub recently brought together 100 local food suppliers, public institutions, and decision-makers to reshape the future of food self-reliance in Podravje. The event sparked conversations about shorter supply chains, stronger partnerships, and smarter ways to connect farms with tables. Surveys and discussions revealed fresh insights and forged valuable new links between key players. These connections are now driving a bold shift toward a sustainable, resilient, and truly local food system.



IH ORbITaLA

Regional Development Agency
for Podravje - Maribor

Location:

Virtual & physical
RDAPM, Pobreška cesta 20, 2000 Maribor

Operating hours:

On-line: every day
Live: Wednesday, 8:00-13:00

Contact point:

mag. Danijela Kocuvan,
danijela.kocuvan@rra-podravje.si

CONTACT US

Austrian Innovation Hub Future Food Connective

The Austrian Innovation Hub Future Food Connective has been actively engaging diverse audiences. At the Future Fit Festival, the hub reached a broad and curious public, raising awareness about sustainable food initiatives. Through presentations at the Research Forum 2025 and the Congress of the Alliance for Sustainable Universities, the hub highlighted its research and strategic vision, sparking dialogue with academic and policy communities. A standout appearance at the BVL Logistics Dialogue provided a unique platform to connect with logistics professionals, advancing conversations on sustainable food supply chains.



IH Future Food Connective

BFI University of Applied
Sciences in Vienna

Location:

Virtual
UAS BFI Vienna, Wohlmutstraße 22, 1020 Wien

Operating hours:

On-line, via mail
Monday – Thursday, 10:00-16:00

Contact point:

David Strauß,
David.Strauss@fh-vie.ac.at

CONTACT US

FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Polish Innovation Hub PULS

PULS Innovation Hub recently participated in two major events involving local food suppliers, entrepreneurs, public institutions, decision-makers, and consumers. These events provided an opportunity to discuss about short food supply chains through better logistics, transport, storage, and digital tools. Interviews and surveys were conducted with entrepreneurs, which contributed to the promotion of the project's tools: the MP and the KTP. These conferences offered a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas, explore collaborations, and raise awareness of Food4CE's mission to build a more resilient and locally rooted food system in Central Europe. IH also took part in the Fruit Growers' Society meeting of the Wielkopolska Horticultural Association in Poznań, where participants learned about modern horticultural solutions and innovative tools for Alternative Food Networks.



IH PULS

Poznan University of Life Science

Location:

Virtual & physical

60-637 Poznań, ul. Wojska Polskiego 28/823

Operating hours:

On-line: every day

Live: Monday, 12:00-14:00

Wednesday, 10:00-12:00

Contact point:

Alina Nowotarska,

alina.nowotarska@up.poznan.pl

CONTACT US



Italian Innovation Hub Localog



Localog

PIATTAFORMA PER LA LOGISTICA CONTADINA

Localog has recently organized capacity-building workshops on digitalization for AFNs and shared transportation. Furthermore, the IH has engaged with the Solidarity Economy Forum, an entity recognized and funded by the Emilia-Romagna Region. Given the alignment with the Forum goals and its influence on local processes, Localog has joined the ongoing activities of this platform, actively participating in their monthly meetings, conducting interviews, and holding one-on-one meetings. This collaboration ultimately aims to form a working group that stays active after the project Food4CE ends and contributes to rethinking how food systems and AFN logistics are organized.



IH Localog

ITL - Institute for Transport and Logistics Foundation

Location:

Virtual

Viale Aldo Moro 38, Bologna

Operating hours:

On-line, via mail

Monday – Friday, 10:00-17:00

Contact point:

Lorenzo Cello,

lorenzo.cello@fondazioneitl.org

CONTACT US

FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Hungarian Innovation Hub Food4Health

In the past six months, the Hungarian Food4Health Innovation Hub has actively contributed to several national and international events through presentations and participation in panel discussions. These engagements ranged from high-profile, nationwide conferences to smaller, community-focused gatherings and focused on digitalization, robotics, and postharvest technologies, including fruit storage, logistics, and sales processes. In addition to these presentations, the hub took part in a co-creation session involving more than 50 small-scale producers. The main goal of this interactive workshop was to identify the key challenges smallholders face in the sales process, particularly in the context of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). Legal and regulatory barriers were also closely examined, with the intention of formulating practical solutions and policy recommendations to support producers and strengthen local food systems. These activities reflect our ongoing commitment to fostering innovation, supporting sustainable agriculture, and bridging the gap between technology and everyday practices.



IH Food4Health

Hungarian University of
Agriculture and Life Science

Location:

Virtual & physical

H-1118 Budapest, Villányi út 29-43, Building D

Operating hours:

On-line, via mail

Live: Friday, 8:00-13:00

Contact point:

Géza Hitka,

hitka.geza@uni-mate.hu

CONTACT US



Food4CE local Innovation Hubs bring together actors from various sectors – researchers, business experts, food producers, logistics operators and policy makers – to advance AFNs in Central Europe and enable knowledge transfer, creating a unique mutual transnational support network.

With the support of Innovation Hubs better conditions for **supporting SMEs with logistics knowledge, solutions and best practices** will be addressed. Involvement of AFNs actors will create and stimulate conditions for exchange of needs and ideas and therefore create **opportunities for improvement of their services**.

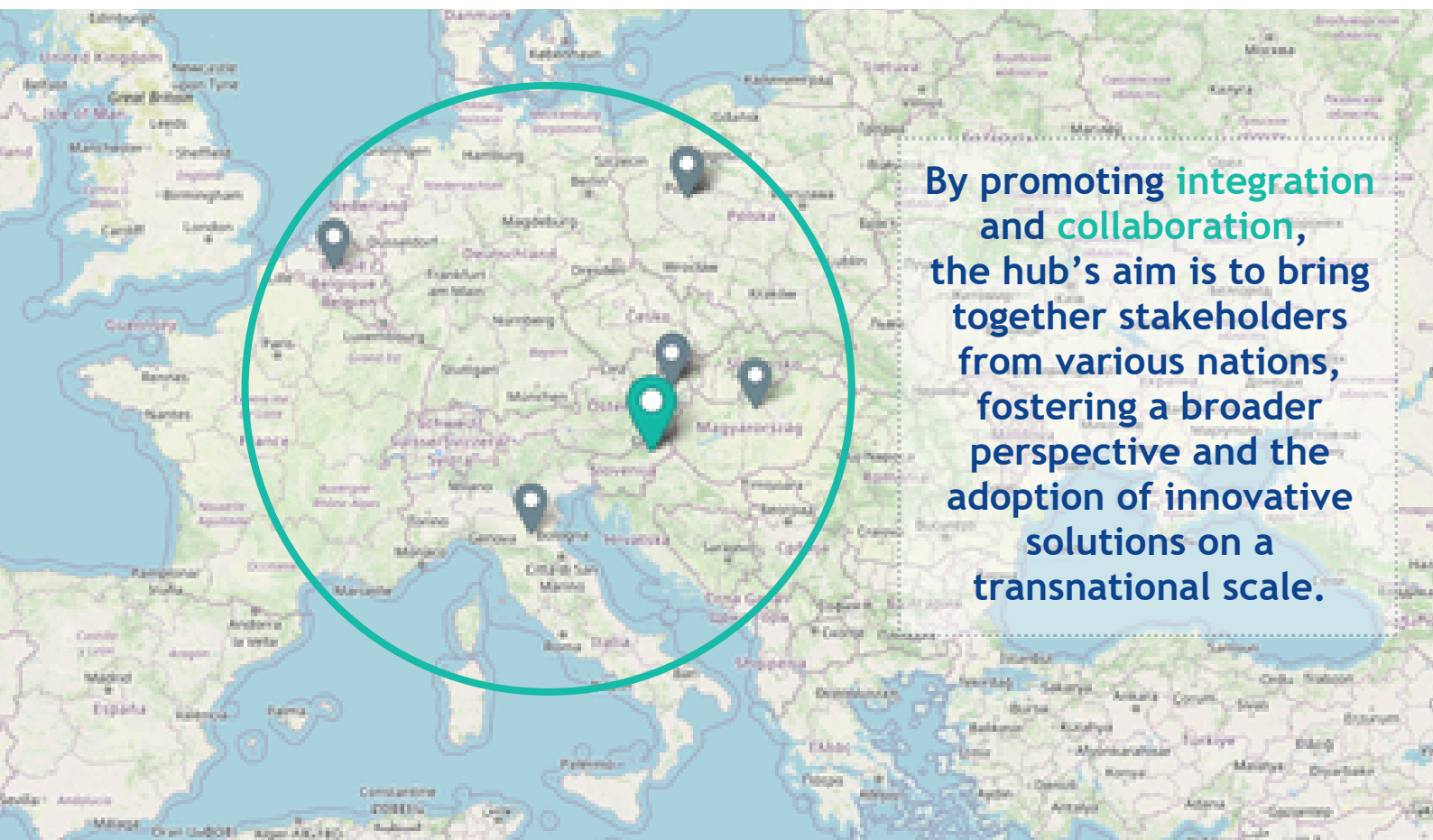
FOSTERING CROSS-BORDER SYNERGIES: THE ROLE OF THE TRANSNATIONAL INNOVATION HUB

While local Innovation Hubs remain the core pillars of Food4CE, the Transnational Innovation Hub (TIH) will act as the project's **strategic platform for cross-border collaboration**. Its role is not to duplicate local activities but to amplify them – connecting the five regional hubs, **enabling mutual learning**, and **ensuring that innovation efforts are aligned across Central Europe**.

The TIH shall collect and showcase insights from all regional hubs, making it possible to compare approaches, identify transferable solutions, and tackle shared challenges in AFNs logistics and management. By offering this transnational perspective, the hub will strengthen cohesion among partner regions and ensure that knowledge generated locally contributes to a broader European agenda.

Designed as a collaborative environment, the TIH will facilitate **peer exchange**, **strategic coordination**, and **EU-level visibility**. It will also support the implementation of Macro-Regional strategies and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), acting as a space where policy dialogue, innovation practices, and practical tools meet.

In the upcoming months, the TIH will be formally launched. As Food4CE moves towards its final phase, this hub will become the **central driver for sharing, scaling, and sustaining project results** – ensuring that the impact of AFNs and smart logistics continues to grow well beyond regional borders.



EXPLORE THE FOOD4CE DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Knowledge Transfer Platform

To support smarter, greener, and more connected short food supply chains, Food4CE has launched the **Knowledge Transfer Platform (KTP)** – a dynamic digital space that serves as a hands-on hub for innovation and knowledge exchange.

The KTP collects and shares practical tools, showcases business models, and successful solutions that help AFNs overcome common challenges – especially in the areas of **logistics**, **digitalization**, and **sustainable distribution**.

Whether it's a small-scale farmer looking to optimise delivery routes, a cooperative aiming to cut emissions, or a platform developer seeking new service ideas, the KTP offers **real-world knowledge tailored to real-life needs**.

The platform is designed for a wide range of users:

- **Local food producers** looking for concrete ways to improve logistics, reduce costs, and increase efficiency.
- **Logistics operators** and **marketplaces** developing flexible, low-impact distribution models.
- **Policy actors** and researchers monitoring trends and exploring ways to support AFNs through better regulation and innovation.

With the KTP, knowledge is being made practical, shareable, and ready to use – helping local food systems grow stronger, more efficient, and more sustainable. As the project progresses, the platform will continue to evolve, reflecting new insights and feeding into regional strategies across Central Europe.

Matchmaking Platform

As AFNs continue to grow, finding the right partners and streamlining logistics has never been more important. That's why Food4CE developed the **Matchmaking Platform (MP)** – a digital hub designed to connect actors in the food supply chains across Central Europe.

The MP is not just a directory: it's a **practical tool for collaboration**. It helps users **find new partners**, **coordinate transport**, and **develop shared services** that make food supply chains more sustainable, flexible, and cost-effective.

Whether it's a farmer looking for a transport provider, a logistics company offering eco-friendly delivery, or a digital platform expanding its network, **the MP brings the right people together**.

The platform is tailored for:

- **Producers and cooperatives** searching for reliable distribution solutions or new sales channels.
- **Logistics operators** looking to collaborate with AFNs or offer greener transport options.
- **Marketplaces** and **online platforms** aiming to expand their network of suppliers and services.
- **Consumers and community food groups** seeking direct access to local producers.

With the MP, Food4CE is helping alternative food networks grow – not just in size, but in efficiency, cooperation, and environmental responsibility. It's a step toward a more connected and future-ready food system for Central Europe.

Visit the KTP



Visit the MP



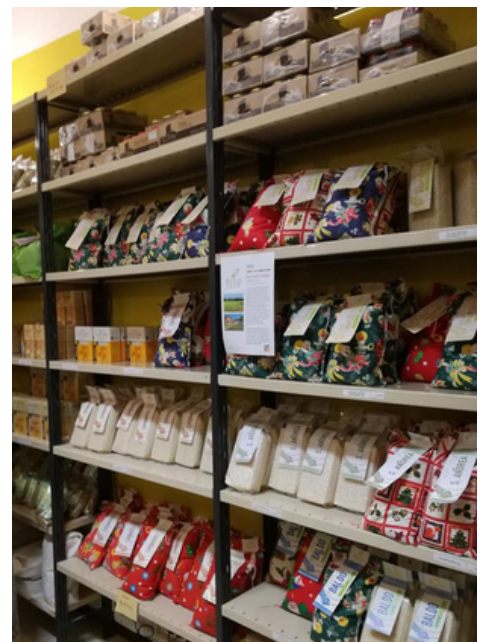
Food4CE project meeting in Bologna (Italy)



On April 2nd and 3rd, the Food4CE Consortium gathered in Bologna, Italy, for a project meeting hosted by ITL — Istituto sui Trasporti e la Logistica. Partners discussed the project's progress and mapped out the next crucial steps toward strengthening local Innovation Hubs and enhancing the tools developed within the project.



A highlight of the meeting was the visit to **Camilla**, Italy's first community cooperative, offering partners a firsthand look at an innovative model of cooperative and sustainable food distribution.



[Click for more](#)

[Watch the video](#)

Breaking Ground in Sustainable Food Supply Chains: interview with ROSY'S Founder, Thomas Huber



The Austrian Future Food Connective Innovation Hub, set up by Fachhochschule des BFI Wien, organized a truly insightful interview with **Thomas Huber, founder of ROSY'S**. The interview took place during a co-creation session focused on the topic: "ROSY'S Approach to Last-Mile Logistics, Food Logistics, and Parcel Locker Delivery".

Click for more



EU Vision for Agriculture and Food: a key step toward sustainable transformation

The European Commission has recently introduced its new **Vision for Agriculture and Food**, an ambitious roadmap on the future of farming and food in Europe. This strategy is designed to promote sustainable, resilient, and innovative agriculture within the EU, setting clear objectives to ensure that the European food system can tackle current and future challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and the need for more inclusive and fair food systems.



Click for more



Towards the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): Flexibility, targeted support and synergies for a more sustainable agriculture



On 17 July, the European Commission presented its proposal for the **future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2028-2034**, which will define the EU's strategic framework for the agricultural sector beyond 2027. The proposal is part of the EU's long-term budget and marks an evolution towards simplification, greater flexibility for Member States, and targeted support for farmers, aiming to better respond to local needs and global challenges.

Click for more



LATEST EVENTS

Food4CE at the “Economy First” Conference in Poznań (Poland)



On June 23-24, 2025, the Faculty of Economics at the University of Life Sciences in Poznań (PULS) took part in the national scientific conference “Po pierwsze gospodarka” (Economy First), organized by the Office of the SME Ombudsman. The event brought together academics, entrepreneurs, and policymakers to discuss key economic challenges and opportunities, with a strong focus on innovation, sustainability, and the role of SMEs.

[Click for more](#)



Sustainability meets digitalisation: Food4CE at the Alliance for Sustainable Universities Annual Congress

On 13 and 14 May, the Austrian Future Food Connective Innovation Hub took part in the third annual congress of the Alliance for Sustainable Universities, held at the Wieselburg campus of the University of Applied Sciences Wiener Neustadt. The theme of this year's congress – “Sustainability meets digitalisation: Ways for our Universities” – invited participants to explore how digital transformation can support sustainable development across academic institutions, research networks, and practical innovation ecosystems.



[Click for more](#)



Food4CE at the European Congress for Rural Renewal and Development



During the European Congress for Rural Renewal and Development, organized by the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development as part of Poland's Presidency of the EU Council, Polish partner PULS had the opportunity to promote Food4CE project and the Polish Innovation Hub implemented by the Faculty of Economics, Poznań University of Life Sciences.

[Click for more](#)



LATEST EVENTS

The Austrian Innovation Hub takes the stage at the 2025 Research Forum of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences



On 7 and 8 May, the Food4CE project took centre stage at the 18th Research Forum of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences, hosted at FH Campus Wien, with a contribution from **David Strauß** of the University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna. In his talk titled “Sustainable local food supply through Alternative Food Networks – comparing business models in five European countries”, Strauß presented the findings of a comprehensive comparative analysis of business models within AFNs across Central Europe.

[Click for more](#)



Food4CE connects public institutions and local food producers

On 7th of April, the Cultural Centre in Hoče hosted a regional meeting that brought together food service coordinators from public institutions and local food producers from the Podravje region. The event was organized by the Regional Development Agency for Podravje - Maribor. The main goal was to promote short food supply chains and strengthen collaboration between key players in local food systems.



[Click for more](#)



Empowering digitalization in AFNs: highlights from LOCALOG's third capacity-building event



On Tuesday, March 11, Localog – Piattaforma per la Logistica Contadina, the Italian Innovation Hub created within the Food4CE project, hosted its third capacity-building event, focusing on digitalization in Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). The online session gathered experts, practitioners, and stakeholders to explore innovative digital solutions aimed at strengthening local food systems.

[Click for more](#)



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Food4CE Consortium prepares for the next project meeting in Poznań, Poland



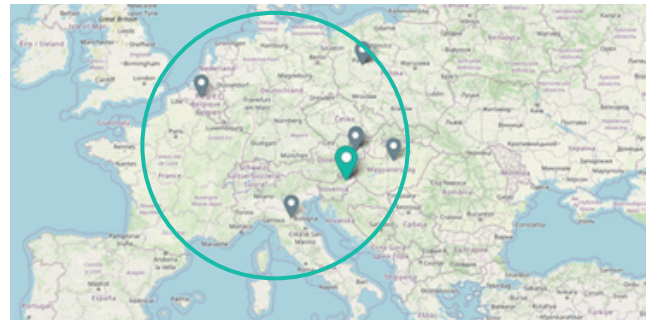
On September 24th and 25th, 2025, the next project meeting will be held in Poznań, Poland, hosted by the Polish partner University of Life Sciences in Poznań (PULS).

At the plenary meeting project progress will be reviewed, as well as planned activities for the upcoming period. As customary, the meeting will include a study visit, offering partners valuable insights and hands-on experience into logistics practices.

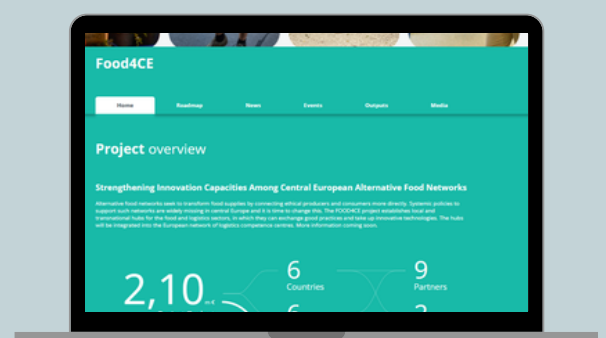


Food4CE establishes the Transnational Innovation Hub

Preparatory activities are well under way for the launch of the Transnational Innovation Hub. The national Innovation Hubs, incorporated in the transnational one will contribute to the overall goal of promoting knowledge transfer, co-creation of innovations, and fostering improved Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) throughout Central Europe. Stay tuned for further updates and announcements!



Check out our website
to stay updated
on the latest
Food4CE
events!



PROJECT CONSORTIUM



University of Maribor

University of Maribor
(Lead partner)
Maribor - Slovenia (SI)
www.um.si



Regional
Development Agency
Podravje
Maribor - Slovenia (SI)
www.rra-podravje.si



Institute for Transport
and Logistics
Foundation
Bologna - Italy (IT)
www.fondazioneitl.org



HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF
AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES

Hungarian University of
Agriculture and Life
Sciences - Institute of
Food Science and
Technology
Gödöllő - Hungary (HU)
www.uni-mate.hu



Łukasiewicz
PIT

Łukasiewicz Research
Network - Institute of
Technology
Poznań - Poland (PL)
pit.lukasiewicz.gov.pl



POZNAŃ
UNIVERSITY
OF LIFE SCIENCES

Poznań University of
Life Sciences
Poznań - Poland (PL)
www.up.poznan.pl



ECONSULT
Vienna - Austria (AT)
www.econsult.at



University
of Applied Sciences
BFI Vienna

UAS BFI Vienna
Vienna - Austria (AT)
www.fh-vie.ac.at



European Network of
Logistics Competence
Centres
Bruxelles - Belgium (BE)
www.openenlocc.net/



Alternative Food Networks seek to transform food supplies by connecting ethical producers and consumers more directly. Systematic policies to support such networks are widely missing in central Europe and it is time to change this.

The Food4CE project will establish local and transnational hubs for the food and logistics sectors, for stakeholders to exchange good practices and take up innovative technologies. The hubs will be integrated into the European network of logistics competence centres.

STAY UP TO DATE!

Visit our website



Follow us on social media



@Food4Ce



@Food4CE