

Food4CE



Strengthening Innovation Capacities Among Central European Alternative Food Networks

A JOURNEY COMPLETED, AN IMPACT THAT CONTINUES

After three years of collaboration, experimentation, dialogue and innovation, the Food4CE project has officially reached its conclusion. On 26 February 2026, partners, stakeholders, policy-makers and AFNs representatives gathered at the University of Maribor for the **project's final conference**, marking the closing step of an ambitious transnational journey.

But while the project lifecycle ends here,
its impact moves further!

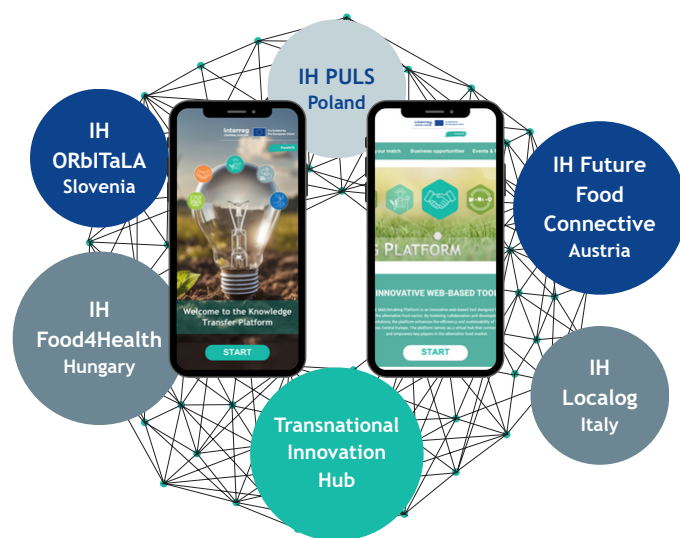


When Food4CE started in March 2023, the ambition was clear: **to strengthen Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) across Central Europe by improving logistics knowledge, fostering cooperation, and embedding innovation into regional and European strategies**. As small-scale producers and cooperatives often face structural challenges: fragmented logistics, limited digitalisation, insufficient policy recognition, Food4CE set out to address exactly those barriers.



Today, we can confidently say that the objectives have been achieved. Over the course of the project, we have:

- Established **5 Local Innovation Hubs** and **1 Transnational Innovation Hub**;
- Developed and launched 2 fully operational digital tools: the **Knowledge Transfer Platform (KTP)** and the **Matchmaking Platform (MP)**;
- Identified and mapped **more than 100 AFNs** across Central Europe;
- Analysed **more than 50 best practices** and logistics solutions;
- Drafted **5 regional action plans** and transnational policy recommendations, aligned with Macro-Regional and Smart Specialisation Strategies;
- **Strengthened dialogue** between producers, logistics providers, researchers and policy actors.



What began as research has evolved into a structured ecosystem of cooperation.

This final newsletter is not just an update on the current activities; it is a comprehensive recap of the entire Food4CE journey: what we built, what we learned, and what will continue beyond the project's formal end.

As the platforms remain active, the Innovation Hubs continue operating, the partnerships endure and the community we built keeps on growing!

THE ROAD TO TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Transnational Innovation Hub: from concept to cross-border action

The past six months marked an important step forward for Food4CE as the **Transnational Innovation Hub (TIH)**, the project's strategic platform for cross-border collaboration, was launched.

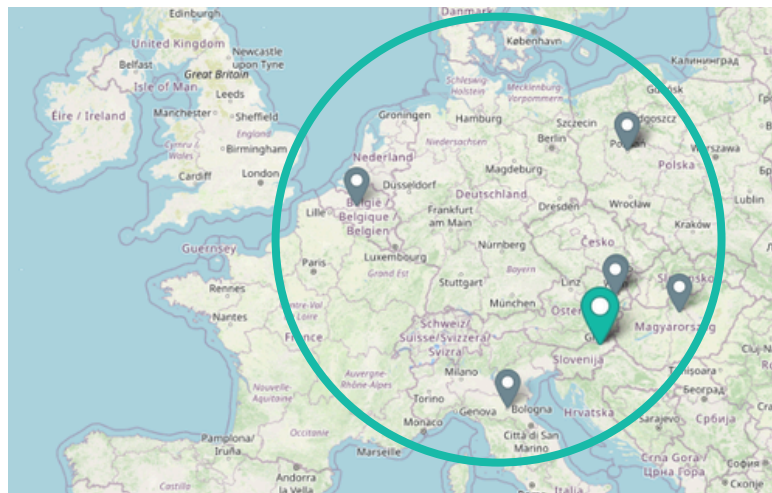
While local innovation hubs were designed to address regional needs through co-creation, stakeholder engagement and pilot testing, the TIH was designed as a **space**, where these **regional experiences could converge**, be compared, refined, and elevated to a transnational level. Its purpose goes beyond coordination: it **connects local innovation to European ambition**.

The official kick-off of the TIH

The **official launch** of the Transnational Innovation Hub took place on **19 November 2025** in an online setting that brought together representatives from all five regional Innovation Hubs – Slovenia (ORbITaLA), Austria (Austrian Food Connective), Italy (Localog), Poland (PULS) and Hungary (Food4Health Budapest), creating a structured setting for transnational exchange built on concrete local experiences for the first time. The objective was clear: **move from parallel national initiatives to coordinated transnational cooperation**.

The event focused on:

- **Establishing the strategic vision** and coordination mechanisms of the TIH;
- **Positioning the hub as a platform for knowledge exchange** and shared problem-solving;
- **Discussing logistical challenges** that intersect across regions;
- **Highlighting the roles of the Knowledge Transfer Platform and Matchmaking Platform** in supporting AFNs' cooperation and innovation.



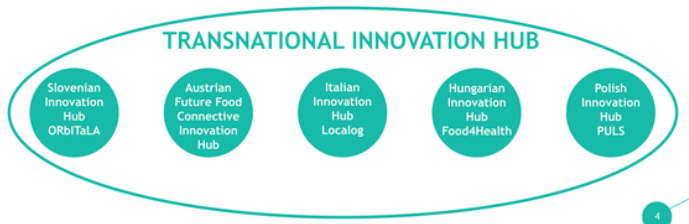
The TIH operates as a collaborative environment where logistics expertise, digital innovation and policy dialogue intersect. It ensures that knowledge generated in one region does not remain isolated, but becomes transferable and scalable across Central Europe.

Participants compared regional bottlenecks – from regulatory barriers to cost structures and infrastructure gaps – identifying common patterns and opportunities for mutual learning. Importantly, the TIH was established not as a parallel structure duplicating local activities, but as a coordination and amplification mechanism. Its role is to **synthesise insights, foster peer learning, and strengthen cohesion** among regions working toward shared goals.

TRANSNATIONAL INNOVATION HUB



Transnational Innovation Hub supports transnational exchange of knowledge, transfer and/or uptake of new practices, technologies and solutions among Regional Innovation Hubs (in participating countries) and create a unique mutual support network for CE AFNs.



Click for more



THE ROAD TO TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Digitalisation for AFNs

The second Transnational Innovation Hub event was held online on **19 January 2026**, with the aim of exploring **digitalisation as a key enabler for AFNs**.

The event emphasised that **digital tools** – from e-commerce platforms to data-driven logistics solutions – can significantly improve coordination, visibility and efficiency within short food supply chains.

Key themes discussed included:

- **ICT solutions** tailored to the specific needs of small-scale producers;
- **Data management and digital support** for collaborative logistics;
- Ways to integrate **digital functions into everyday AFN operations**;
- **Strengthening the uptake of the KTP and MP** as long-term digital infrastructures.

Participants shared insights on the potential of digitalisation to bridge gaps between producers, logistics providers and consumers, underscoring that **digital innovation must be accessible and relevant for small actors, not just large supply chains**. Discussions also highlighted how digital tools can help embed AFNs more effectively into broader regional food strategies.

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Last Mile Delivery for AFNs

The third Transnational Innovation Hub event took place online on **5 February 2026**, focusing on **last-mile delivery**, one of the most persistent logistical bottlenecks for AFNs.

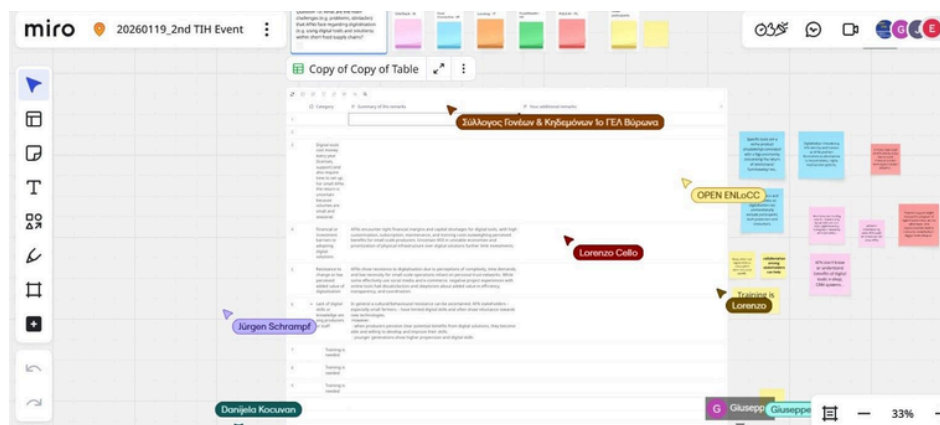
Last-mile delivery – the final stretch between food producers and consumers – remains a challenge due to high costs, fragmented routes and limited infrastructure.

At the event, partners and stakeholders exchanged practical insights and examples, including:

- **Urban micro-distribution models** designed for small-scale deliveries;
- **Consolidation solutions** to improve vehicle load efficiency;
- **Electric vehicles and low-emission logistics solutions**;
- **Collaborative delivery schemes** among producers, logistics operators and hubs.

The event demonstrated that **sustainable, cost-efficient last-mile logistics is not only crucial for environmental performance, but also for commercial viability**. It reinforced the idea that shared solutions and cross-regional learning can significantly improve local food distribution while reducing barriers to accessibility and sustainability.

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Participants mapped challenges and best practices of AFNs regarding digitalisation using Miro board.

THE ROAD TO TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

The TIH operating beyond the end of Food4CE Project From dialogue to structural cooperation

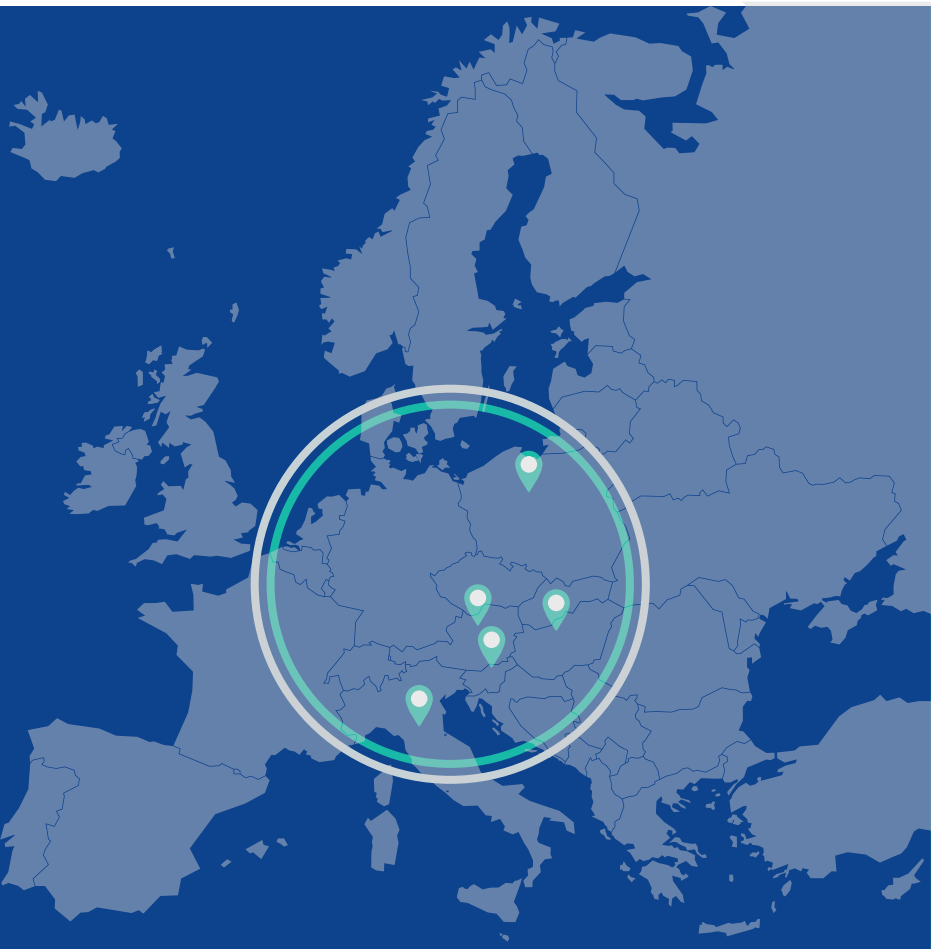
Across the three events, the Transnational Innovation Hub developed into a dynamic space, where regional experiences became shared knowledge assets.

The TIH forms:

- A structured platform for continuous transnational exchange;
- A mechanism to connect local and regional stakeholders with broader policy dialogues;
- A space for testing and adapting digital and logistics solutions;
- A basis for future cooperation beyond the formal project timeline.



By connecting producers, logistics operators, researchers and policy actors, the TIH has helped foster trust, identify shared priorities and build a coordinated agenda for strengthening AFNs across Central Europe.



Ensuring Long-Term Transnational Cooperation

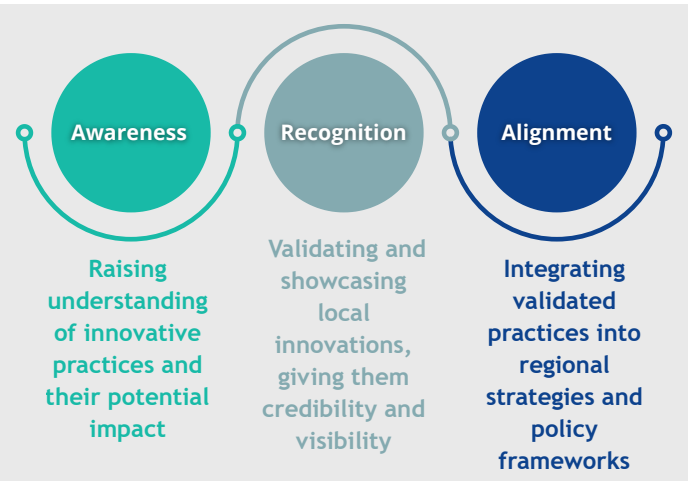
The Transnational Innovation Hub (TIH) will continue operating as a stable and structured platform for cooperation, strategic dialogue and mutual learning. It will ensure that the networks consolidated, the knowledge generated and the governance mechanisms tested throughout the project remain active and continue to evolve beyond its formal lifetime, fostering sustained collaboration and coordinated action across Central Europe.

THE ROAD TO TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) and Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS): from alignment to integration

As Food4CE approaches its end, one of its most strategic achievements lies in bridging local innovation with European policy frameworks. Over the past months, the project has moved beyond identifying synergies to actively embedding Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) within broader territorial development strategies.

The work on Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) and Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) has not been a theoretical exercise. It has been a deliberate effort to position AFNs – and especially their logistics dimension – within the policy instruments that shape investment priorities, innovation agendas, and long-term regional planning.



Across partner regions, AFNs priorities were carefully analysed in relation to key S3 domains such as agri-food innovation, digital transformation, sustainable mobility and circular economy.

What emerged clearly is that AFNs are not peripheral actors. Their needs and innovations intersect directly with regional priorities on digitalisation, low-carbon mobility, resource efficiency, and resilient food systems.

At the same time, strong connections were identified with EU Macro-Regional Strategies, particularly in areas related to sustainable land use, green logistics, territorial cohesion, and cross-border cooperation.

This alignment creates a powerful opportunity: integrating AFNs into existing strategic frameworks allows them to move from project-based experimentation to structurally supported development.

The past months therefore focused on transforming this alignment into concrete outputs:

- **Regional action plans** tailored to each territory, reflecting local AFN characteristics and policy environments.
- **Transnational policy recommendations** designed to provide a shared reference framework for decision-makers across Central Europe.
- **Strategic positioning of AFNs** within future funding discussions and innovation agendas.

Importantly, the process followed a progressive pathway. Firstly, innovative logistics practices were identified and validated within innovation hubs. Second, these practices were analysed in relation to regional and EU priorities. Finally, logistics practices were translated into actionable policy recommendations capable of influencing long-term planning.

The result is not simply a set of theoretical guidelines, but a structural shift: AFNs are increasingly recognised as contributors to regional innovation ecosystems, climate objectives, and territorial resilience strategies.

By embedding AFNs into S3 and MRS frameworks, Food4CE has helped ensure that local food networks are no longer seen merely as alternative initiatives, but as strategic components of smarter, greener, and more resilient European food systems.

FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Slovenian Innovation Hub ORbITaLA

In the final phase of the Food4CE project, the ORbITaLA Innovation Hub intensified its efforts to promote key project achievements and ensure their long-term impact.

By actively showcasing the Matchmaking Platform, the Knowledge Transfer Platform, and the Tool for Mapping Best Practices at major events, such as the **International Agricultural Fair in Gornja Radgona** and the **Rural Parliament of the Podravje region**, ORbITaLA strengthened awareness of innovative solutions supporting Alternative Food Networks (AFNs).



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:

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danijela.kocuvan@rra-podravje.si

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A highlight was the **final online workshop on digitalisation for AFNs**, held in October 2025, which gathered more than 45 participants and fostered dynamic exchange on practical digital tools for local food systems.

Insights generated through ORbITaLA workshops, Advisory Board meetings, and stakeholder discussions directly shaped the regional action plan and policy recommendations, reinforcing the hub's role as a key enabler for sustainable change.

Beyond dissemination, ORbITaLA focused on building momentum for the future – ensuring that Food4CE results continue to inspire innovation, collaboration, and resilient local food supply chains long after the project's conclusion.



FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Polish Innovation Hub PULS

PULS Innovation Hub actively participated in events involving agricultural advisory centers, scientists, public administration and local producers, focusing on innovations in the agri-food sector, the development of Alternative Food Networks (AFN) and urban-rural cooperation.

In November 2025, the third meeting of the IH PULS Advisory Board was held, dedicated to cooperation of AFNs, promotion of the Food4CE platform and strengthening relations with the transnational Innovation Hub and stakeholders.



IH PULS

Poznan University of Life Science

Location:

Virtual & physical

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

Operating hours:

On-line, via mail

Monday – Thursday, 9:00-15:00

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alina.nowotarska@up.poznan.pl

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IH PULS promoted Food4CE tools during the **Agricultural Innovation Forum**, a conference attended by agricultural advisory centres and the European Congress on Rural Renewal and Development as part of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The activities culminated in the **Food4CE round table on AFNs**, which discussed research results, cooperation models and the importance of alternative food chains for the Regional Innovation Strategy of Greater Poland, in particular smart specializations related to bio-raw materials, food for conscious consumers and logistics.

These events provided a valuable opportunity to exchange experiences, build partnerships and strengthen Food4CE's mission for resilient, Alternative Food Networks in Central Europe.



FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Austrian Innovation Hub Future Food Connective

The Austrian IH Future Food Connective continued to expand its impact through targeted innovation and uptake activities.

Contributions to City-Suburban Management initiatives, including expert inputs by **Andreas Hacker** and the **SUM Conference**, strengthened dialogue on urban-rural cooperation. Engagements with key stakeholders, such as BioNanoNet, Schachinger, LotzApp, Morgenrot and presentations at the **15th Lower Austrian Logistics Day** fostered exchange with logistics and industry partners.

International outreach was enhanced through promotional activities at the **UIREKA Research Days in Amsterdam** and strategic contributions to the Danube Region Strategy.



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

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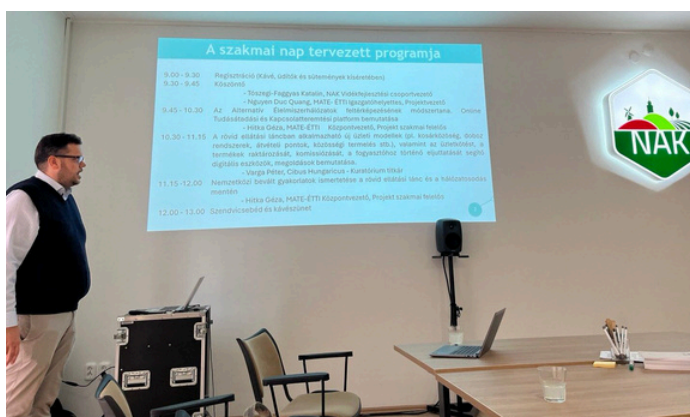


FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Hungarian Innovation Hub Food4Health

Over the past months, the Hungarian Food4HEALTH Innovation Hub has continued to actively disseminate the results of the Food4CE project through a wide range of national and cross-border professional events. Innovation hub representatives participated as speakers at **several conferences held in Budapest, Mosonmagyaróvár and Csíkszereda**, reaching audiences of 100-200 participants at each location. These events provided an opportunity to present the Food4CE project, its key outcomes, as well as the Knowledge Transfer Platform and the Matchmaking Platform to a broad professional audience.

In addition to conference activities, the hub took part in **multiple thematic workshops**, including events focusing on cross-border cooperation and regional collaboration in the agri-food sector. These engagements further strengthened networking between stakeholders and enhanced the visibility of AFNs at both national and regional levels.



IH Food4Health

Hungarian University of
Agriculture and Life Science

Location:

Virtual & physical

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

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On-line, via mail

Live: Friday, 8:00-13:00

Contact point:

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The Food4HEALTH Innovation Hub also organised **two dedicated workshops in cooperation with the Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture (NAK)**. These events brought together numerous AFN representatives and small-scale producers, providing an opportunity to present project's results, developed digital platforms, and the Tool for Mapping Best Practices. A key element of these workshops were the co-creation sessions, during which participants jointly explored the regulatory environment affecting AFNs through SWOT analysis of relevant legislation, CANVAS business modelling, and stakeholder analysis.

Overall, these activities reflect the Food4HEALTH Innovation Hub's continued commitment to knowledge sharing, stakeholder engagement and the practical translation of project results, supporting the development of resilient, innovative and sustainable local food systems.

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FOOD4CE INNOVATION HUBS AT A GLANCE

Italian Innovation Hub Localog

Localog has recently presented the Matchmaking Platform (MP) and the Knowledge Transfer Platform (KTP) to key stakeholders of the Italian Innovation Hub. During the event, the main sections of the platforms were showcased, followed by an open discussion on their potential to foster capacity-building activities, disseminate good practices, and support the digitalisation of AFNs.



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

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CONTACT US

Furthermore, the policy recommendations developed within the Italian innovation hub were presented to the **6th Regional Forum for Solidarity Economy**, bringing together leading actors of the regional AFN landscape. On this occasion, ITL had the opportunity to share the project's results with **Elena Mazzoni**, Regional Minister responsible for the Digital Agenda and the Solidarity Economy, strengthening the dialogue with regional institutions and reinforcing the project's long-term impact.

BEYOND THE PROJECT: Innovation Hubs remain operational

Even though Food4CE will come to an end, **the Local Innovation Hubs will remain active ecosystems**. They will continue supporting AFNs with logistics expertise, promoting digital tools adoption and facilitating dialogue between producers and policy-makers.

The Transnational Innovation Hub will continue acting as a coordination and knowledge-sharing platform, ensuring that cross-border cooperation remains alive.



THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY



Over the past three years, Food4CE has evolved from an initial research and mapping initiative into a structured ecosystem of cooperation, digital innovation, and policy integration.

This section presents the project's key stages, from early research and stakeholder consultations to the creation of digital tools, Innovation Hubs, and policy frameworks, emphasizing the results achieved and their relevance for the future of Alternative Food Networks in Central Europe.



Mapping and research: Understanding AFNs in Central Europe

The Food4CE journey began with an in-depth analytical phase aimed at building a solid **knowledge base on AFNs** across **Slovenia, Italy, Hungary, Austria and Poland**. Before proposing solutions, the consortium first sought to understand how AFNs operate in different regional contexts, the challenges they face, and which logistics models already exist.

A **comprehensive mapping exercise** was carried out in all partner countries, identifying and analysing **hundreds of AFNs**. These networks were systematically classified according to their organisational and distribution models, including direct models, intermediary-based systems, and more advanced distribution structures, allowing for a structured comparison across regions.

The research phase included:

- **Identification and classification of AFNs** based on governance, distribution channels and logistics structures;
- **Analysis of short food supply chain models** and their operational characteristics;
- **Collection of quantitative and qualitative data** on logistics processes;

- **Interviews and consultations** with producers and stakeholders;
- **Cross-regional comparison** of strengths, gaps and development levels.

One of the most visible outputs of this phase was the creation of a series of informative posters and visual summaries, which translated research findings into accessible formats. These posters presented key data on AFN typologies, distribution models, regional concentrations, and logistics characteristics in each country.

The mapping and research phase generated several critical insights:

- A clear **typology of AFNs** across Central Europe;
- Identification of **recurring logistics bottlenecks**, particularly in last-mile delivery, consolidation and cost optimisation;
- Recognition of **innovative and transferable best practices**;
- Evidence-based understanding of **regional disparities and development levels**;
- Better knowledge of **digitalisation gaps and collaboration barriers**.

This analytical groundwork was not an end in itself. It laid the foundation for what followed: the design of the **Knowledge Transfer Platform**, the development of the **Matchmaking Platform**, the creation of **Innovation Hubs**, and the drafting of **policy recommendations**. By starting with data, structured analysis, and stakeholder engagement, Food4CE ensured that its tools and policy outputs were rooted in real needs rather than assumptions: a crucial factor in building credible and scalable solutions for AFNs in Central Europe.

THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY



The Knowledge Transfer Platform (KTP)

The Knowledge Transfer Platform (KTP) represents one of the core digital legacies of Food4CE. Designed as an open-access, web-based tool, it was designed to centralize knowledge on logistics solutions for AFNs and make it usable for small-scale actors.

The KTP functions as an interactive learning and exchange environment. It brings together:

- Documented logistics best practices from across Central Europe;
- Best practices of successful short food supply chain models;
- Practical business models tailored to AFNs;
- Training materials and learning resources;
- Interactive tools and mapping features to visualise AFN initiatives;
- Logistic solutions, such as vehicle routing, consolidation, packaging, warehousing, energy use optimisation and digitalisation.

By structuring this knowledge in a user-friendly and searchable format, the KTP addresses one of the main structural gaps identified during the research phase: limited access to tailored logistics expertise for small producers and cooperatives.

Its impact has been tangible:

- Improved logistics awareness and literacy among AFNs;
- Increased visibility of innovative and transferable solutions;
- Easier benchmarking across regions;
- Stronger evidence base for policy discussions;
- Support for digital transition within local food systems.

Importantly, the KTP remains online and accessible beyond the project's lifetime, ensuring continuity of knowledge exchange and long-term support for AFNs across Central Europe.

FEATURES

Access a collection of best practices implemented across European countries to improve AFNs logistics, shown on an interactive map.

Explore a range of logistics solutions in areas, such as transport, warehousing, and packaging, and find the one that suits best to your needs.

Utilize training materials to deepen your understanding of local food supply chain management.

Discover innovative business models with a focus on digitalisation, sustainability, and transparency in food supply chains.



Watch
promo video:



Visit
the KTP:



THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY



Tool for Mapping Best Practices

Beyond digital platforms, Food4CE also developed a **structured methodology for mapping and categorising logistics best practices across AFNs**.

This tool emerged from the initial research and analytical phase and evolved into a **systematic approach for identifying, assessing and classifying innovative solutions based on 5 criteria**:



Advanced logistics, which refers to the level of organisation and maturity of logistics processes within the AFNs.



Digitalisation, which describes the integration of digital tools and information flows along the supply chain.



Local focus that highlights the extent to which the organisation is embedded in its regional context.



Sustainability, which addresses the environmental, economic and social dimensions of AFNs activities.



Transparency, which relates to openness in processes, communication and quality assurance.

Rather than simply collecting examples, the methodology enabled partners to evaluate replicability, economic viability, environmental performance and scalability of each solution.

The value of this tool lies in three dimensions:

- It helps to **identify strengths and weaknesses** of short food supply chains,
- It **highlights best practices** and foster knowledge exchange,
- It provides assessment and **benchmark** one's own organisation or other stakeholders.

By structuring innovation in this way, AFNs were repositioned from niche or informal initiatives to recognised actors capable of contributing to regional innovation ecosystems and policy frameworks.

The five criteria used to classify the AFNs in the Best Practices section of the Knowledge Transfer Platform



Visit the KTP



THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY



The Matchmaking Platform (MP)

If the Knowledge Transfer Platform (KTP) focuses on knowledge, the Matchmaking Platform (MP) focuses on **connections**.

Designed as a **digital marketplace and networking environment**, the MP was developed to **strengthen collaboration within the AFNs ecosystem** by directly connecting producers, logistics operators, marketplaces, researchers and institutional actors.

The platform offers:

- A “**Meet Your Match**” function to identify potential partners;
- A **bulletin board** for business opportunities and collaboration proposals;
- A **meeting and event space** to promote networking initiatives;
- **Opportunities to build B2B and B2C logistics partnerships**;
- Visibility tools for AFNs seeking to expand their market reach.

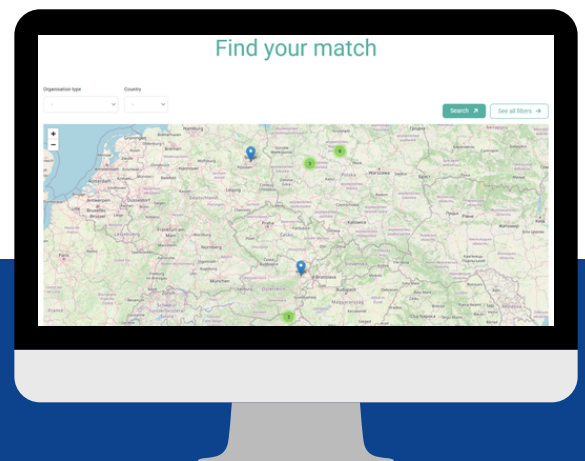
The MP addresses one of the recurring barriers identified in the mapping phase: **fragmentation**.

Many AFNs operate successfully at local level but struggle to scale or collaborate beyond their immediate networks. The MP reduces this fragmentation by **creating a structured digital space for cooperation**.

By facilitating direct connections between producers and logistics providers, supporting shared services and encouraging collaborative delivery models, the platform contributes to:

- **Improved operational efficiency**;
- **Reduced logistics costs** through cooperation;
- **Increased market visibility** for small-scale actors;
- **Strengthened cross-border collaboration**.

Like the KTP, **the MP remains active and operational beyond the project’s conclusion**, continuing to support innovation and partnership-building within Alternative Food Networks.



FEATURES

Meet your match provides options to connect with potential stakeholders across the alternative food sector, aiming to foster innovative partnerships and build a strong network.

Bulletin board provides access to new business opportunities within the alternative food industry either being investment opportunities, potential collaborations, or helping businesses grow and innovate.

Meeting and event space provides details on networking opportunities, conferences, and seminars, enabling users to stay engaged, share knowledge, and drive the sector forward.

Watch
the promo
video:



Visit the MP:



THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY



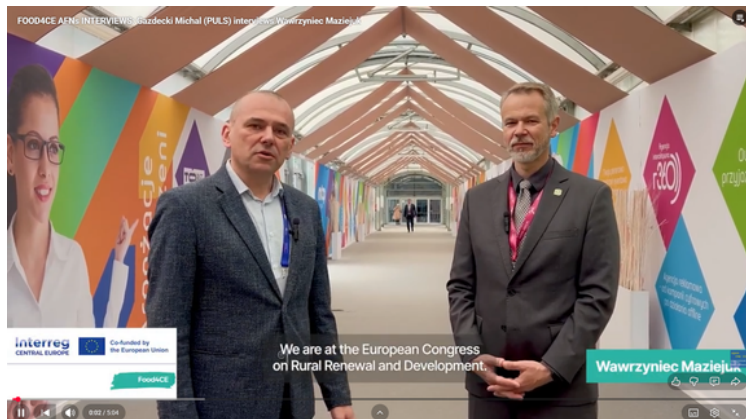
Video interviews with AFNs: giving voice to Best Practices

Alongside the activities of the local innovation hubs, Food4CE produced a series of video interviews showcasing selected Alternative Food Networks and best practices in each partner country, with the aim of highlighting real-life experiences and effective logistics solutions.

These interviews provided first-hand insights into how local food networks organize their distribution systems, overcome logistical challenges, adopt digital tools, and build collaborative models.

By highlighting concrete examples from the countries involved, the videos transformed theoretical discussions into tangible stories of innovation and resilience.

[Watch the interviews!](#)



Gazdecki Michal (PULS) interviews
Wawrzyniec Maziejuk (POLAND)



Gazdecki Michal (PULS) interviews
Roman Bartkowiak (POLAND)



THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY



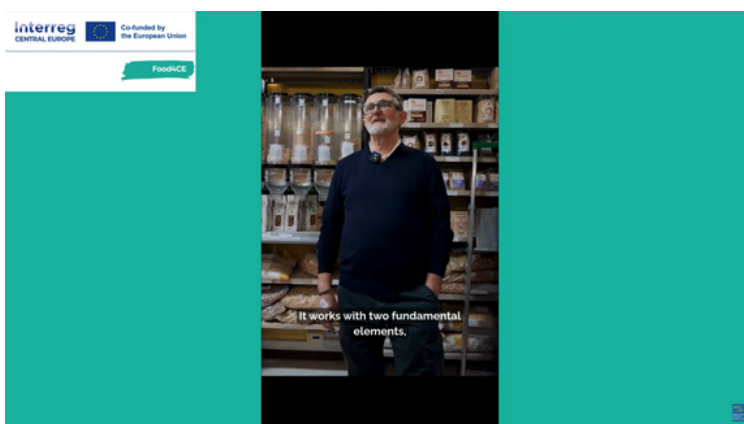
Food4CE presents **myflexbox**, one of the best Austrian practices



Food4CE presents **ROSY'S**, one of the best Austrian practices



Discover the Slovenian AFNs **KZ Rače** and **Krapše**



Food4CE presents **CAMILLA**, one of Italy's best practices



All the interviews are available on our YouTube channel.

THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY

Final Consortium Meeting: reflecting on results and securing the project's legacy

The Food4CE consortium gathered for its concluding Consortium Meeting on **25 February 2026** at the **University of Maribor in Slovenia**, marking a pivotal moment of reflection and strategic planning as the project reached its formal end.

This internal meeting offered partners the opportunity to reflect on three years of collaborative effort, from research and mapping to tool development, experimentation, policy engagement and transnational cooperation. Representatives from all regions shared insights into local achievements, the challenges they overcame, lessons learned and opportunities ahead.



Beyond a simple review, discussions focused strongly on sustainability and legacy: how to ensure that the platforms (KTP and MP), Innovation Hubs, digital tools and networks established by Food4CE continue to deliver value after the project's conclusion.

Participants emphasized that the **strength of Food4CE** lies not only in its tangible outputs, such as tools, methodologies and plans, but also in the relationships and trust built among actors across borders.

The partner meeting concluded with a **shared commitment to sustaining active cooperation, leveraging project results and ensuring that Alternative Food Networks remain central to regional innovation strategies**. This preparatory exchange also set the stage for the public Food4CE Final conference, aligning the consortium's vision with the broader stakeholder engagement planned for 26 February.



Field insights from Maribor

In the afternoon, partners took part in a **study visit to the Kovačnik and Baron experimental agro farms**, where they explored innovative agricultural practices and exchanged views with local actors on sustainable food production and regional value chains.

The visit provided a concrete example of the principles promoted by Food4CE, linking project discussions with real-world applications and inspiring future initiatives.



THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY

Food4CE Final conference From Best Practices to Policy: Advancing Logistics and Collaboration in AFNs

On 26 February 2026, the Food4CE Final conference brought together producers, logistics operators, policymakers, researchers and innovation stakeholders in Maribor, Slovenia, for a high-level exchange on the future of Alternative Food Networks in Central Europe.

Titled “From Best Practices to Policy – Advancing Logistics and Collaboration in Alternative Food Networks”, the event showcased key project results, reflected on successes and outlined pathways towards sustained impact beyond the project’s formal end.



The conference programme featured:

- **Presentations of Food4CE’s digital tools**, including the KTP and the MP, with demonstrations of how they support AFNs in logistics, cooperation and market access.
- **Policy sessions** focused on how Food4CE findings and recommendations can be embedded into Smart Specialisation Strategies, macro-regional frameworks, and future funding instruments.
- **Showcases of inspiring best practices from AFNs across partner regions**, illustrating real-world solutions to logistics challenges and collaborative models that strengthen local food systems.

- **Certificates of Excellence** awarded to selected AFNs recognized for their innovative and impactful contributions.
- A forward-looking **panel discussion** focused on sustaining Innovation Hubs and scaling Food4CE results, with insights from policymakers, practitioners and researchers.



The conference was designed not simply as a conclusion but as a launchpad: a space, where project achievements intersect with future ambition. Participants emphasized the critical importance of sustaining innovation ecosystems that connect producers, logistics actors, digital innovators and policy frameworks to ensure that AFNs continue to thrive and adapt in changing economic and environmental contexts.



Representatives reiterated that while Food4CE has formally concluded, its spirit of cooperation, knowledge exchange and policy dialogue must continue transforming closing reflection into ongoing action for resilient and sustainable food systems across Central Europe.

Read the
press release



THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE FOOD4CE JOURNEY

Certificates of Excellence awarded to outstanding Alternative Food Networks

A special highlight of the Food4CE Final Conference was the presentation of the **Certificates of Excellence**, recognizing selected Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) for their innovative approaches and impactful contributions to sustainable and resilient food systems.

The awards celebrated organisations that stood out according to the project's **Best Practice Criteria**, demonstrating strong performance in areas, such as: **advanced logistics**, **local focus**, **digitalisation**, **sustainability** and **transparency**.

Slovenia was represented by **Kmetijska zadruga Rače z.o.o.** for its strong **local focus** and **Krapše, d.o.o.** for its **advanced logistics solutions**.



From Poland, **Frymark** was recognised for its **local focus**, while **Wiejska e-skrzynka** received the award for excellence in **digitalisation**.



Hungary's selected AFNs included **Cibus Hungaricus**, honoured for **digitalisation**, and **Capriovus Kft.**, acknowledged for its achievements in **sustainability**.



Austria was represented by **ADAMAH BioHof** (advanced logistics and digitalisation) and **ROSY'S** (advanced logistics, digitalisation, local focus and sustainability).



Finally, Italy's selected AFNs included **Arvaia**, awarded for **sustainability**, **local focus** and **transparency**, and **Furgoncino Solidale**, acknowledged for its achievements in **advanced logistics**.



LATEST EVENTS

Food4CE project meeting in Poznan (Poland)

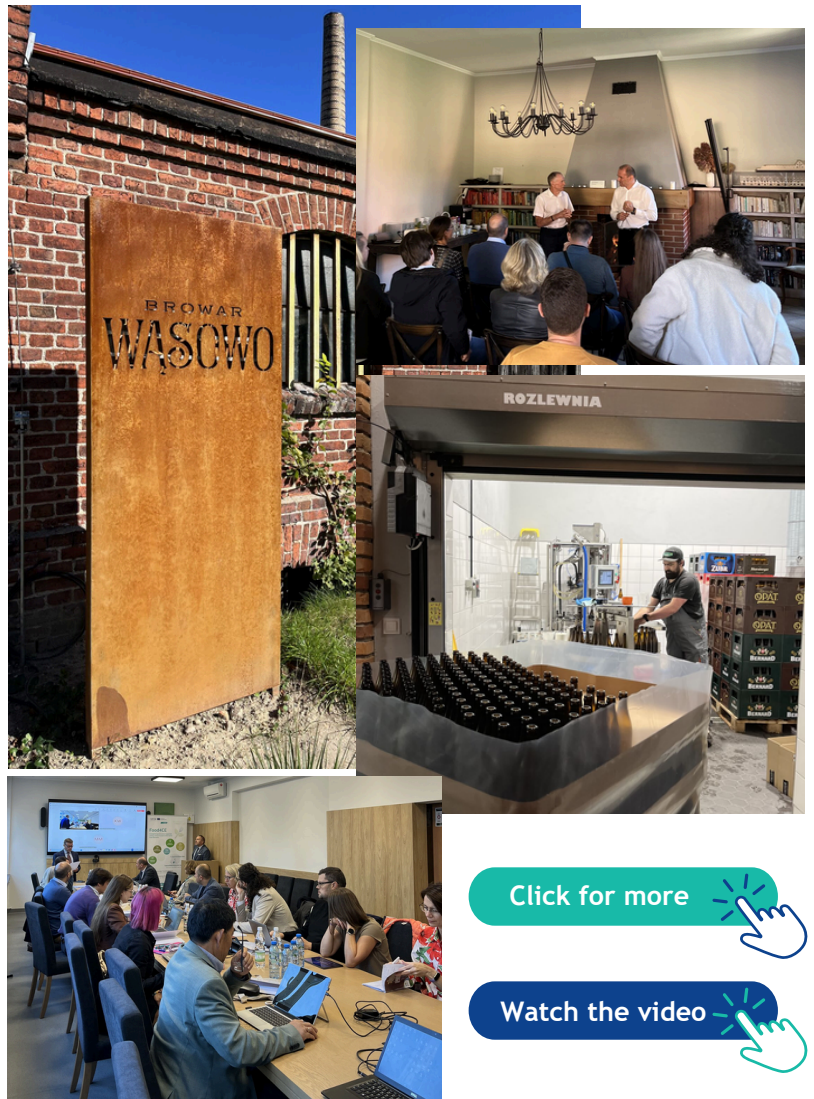


On 24 and 25 September 2025, the Food4CE Consortium gathered in Poznań, Poland, for a project meeting, hosted by the **Poznań University of Life Sciences (PULS)**. Over two days, the consortium strengthened collaboration, reviewed progress, and set the stage for the crucial steps that will shape more sustainable and resilient food systems across Central Europe.

Discovering Folwark Wąsowo: innovation rooted in tradition

A highlight of the meeting was the visit to **Folwark Wąsowo**, one of the Polish Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) involved in the project, a producer of processed organic vegetables and Slow Food Center located in Wąsowo. During the visit, partners had the chance to explore the farm's facilities through a guided tour, gain insights into its food processing, and experience first hand results of its sustainable practices. They also enjoyed tasting some of the farm's organic products, making the visit not only informative but also a sensory journey into the richness of local, high-quality food.

This inspiring experience offered a concrete example of how innovation and tradition can come together to strengthen local food systems.



[Click for more](#)

[Watch the video](#)

LATEST EVENTS

Scientific Seminar on AFNs at Poznań University of Life Sciences (Poland)



On 20 January 2026, the Scientific Seminar “**Alternative Food Networks: Consumer Values and the Sustainability of the Food System**” was held at the Poznań University of Life Sciences (Poland). The seminar welcomed invited researchers from the UEP – Poznań University of Economics and Business, who shared valuable insights from their research on consumer values, mobile communication, and innovation in alternative food networks.

[Click for more](#)

Smart Specialisations and Digitalisation in the Development of AFNs in Poland

On 13 January 2026, a round table discussion was held at the headquarters of the **Łukasiewicz Research Network – Poznań Institute of Technology**, focusing on Alternative Food Networks. The meeting brought together representatives of academia, public administration and agri-food market organizations. During the event, the results of AFNs analyses conducted in Poland and other partner countries were presented.



[Click for more](#)

Food4CE at the European Congress for Rural Renewal and Development



Food4CE actively contributed to the cross-border workshop “**Strengthening the role of local producers in cross-border tourism in the Slovenian-Hungarian border region**”, held on 18 November 2025 at the **Prekmurje Model Farm** in Lendava, organised by Pannon EGTC within the **CROSSDEST** project. Maršenka Marksel (University of Maribor) presented key insights from the Food4CE project with a focus on connecting Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) through smart and innovative logistics solutions.

[Click for more](#)

LATEST EVENTS

Food4CE at the Regional Rural Parliament of Podravje (Slovenia)



On Thursday, 27 November, the Slovenian partner of Food4CE, RRA Podravje - Maribor, represented the Food4CE project with a dedicated stand at the **Regional Rural Parliament of the Podravje region**, held at the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Maribor. Throughout the event, the Regional Development Agency for Podravje - Maribor engaged with more than 50 participants, including farmers, support institutions, Local Action Groups, associations, academics and students.

[Click for more](#)



Food4CE at 13th National Challenges in Agriculture Conference in Poland

On 20 November 2025, PULS promoted the Food4CE project at the **13th “National Challenges in Agriculture” conference**, organized by Farmer, the largest agricultural magazine in Poland. Benedykt Pepliński from PULS joined the event as an expert panelist in a debate on the future of pig production, sharing insights and perspectives relevant to the Food4CE mission.



[Click for more](#)



Food4CE at the “15th Lower Austrian Logistics Day” connecting with the Region’s key players



Food4CE project had the opportunity to participate in the **“15. Niederösterreichischer Logistik Tag”**, hosted by BVL Bundesvereinigung Logistik Österreich and Wirtschaftskammer Niederösterreich (WKNÖ) at the Vienna airport. As the most important regional event dedicated to logistics, it provided an excellent platform to showcase the project’s work. The Food4CE stand served as a hub for information and exchange, generating strong interest and meaningful dialogue around the project’s goals and activities, hosted by ECONSULT representatives Gerda Hartmann and Jürgen Schrampf.

[Click for more](#)



LATEST EVENTS

PULS participated in the Agricultural Innovation Forum in Poland



On 28 October 2025, the Poznań University of Life Sciences (PULS), partner of the Food4CE project, took part in the **Agricultural Innovation Forum held in Poland**. The event provided an excellent opportunity to build new connections and exchange knowledge and experiences within the agricultural sector, particularly in support of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). Prof. Benedykt Pepliński from PULS was interviewed during the event by the regional broadcaster Polskie Radio PiK.

[Click for more](#)



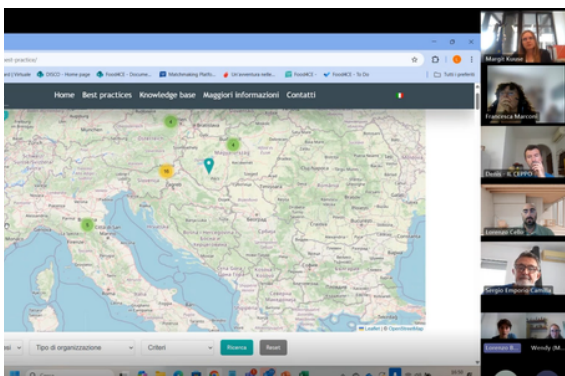
Digital Tools Empower Farms and Cooperatives: ORbITaLA Innovation Hub Workshop Highlights Practical Solutions

On 16 October 2025, the Slovenian ORbITaLA Innovation Hub successfully organised the online workshop “**How Can Digital Tools Make Work Easier for Farms and Cooperatives?**”. The event brought together local food providers, cooperatives, AFNs and other stakeholders to explore practical ways in which digital tools can improve efficiency, transparency and collaboration in short food supply chains.

[Click for more](#)



Strengthening Alternative Food Networks: Food4CE event at Localog Innovation Hub (Italy)



On 10 September 2025, the Italian partner ITL (Institute for Transport and Logistics Foundation) hosted an event within Localog, the Italian Innovation Hub. During the meeting, local food producers, logistics operators, and research organizations were introduced to the two key tools of the Food4CE project. The event also featured **BIS Appennino**, a public initiative dedicated to revitalizing the Apennine area around Bologna, strategically positioned to link these territories and their AFNs with the work carried out within Localog.

[Click for more](#)



LATEST EVENTS

Hungarian Food4Health Innovation Hub hosts an event on Strengthening Innovation in AFNs



On 4 September 2025, the Training Center of the Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture (NAK) in Dunaharaszti hosted a professional event jointly organized by the Food4Health Innovation Hub of the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE) and NAK, entitled “Strengthening the Innovation Capacities of Alternative Food Networks.” Géza Hitka, Associate Professor at MATE, presented the methodology of mapping AFNs alongside international best practices and innovative business models.

[Click for more](#)



Smart Food, Smart Future: Food4CE participating in SRIP Hrana meeting

As part of **AGRA 2025**, a special meeting was organised by **SRIP Hrana** – Slovenia’s long-term **Strategic Research and Innovation Partnership for Sustainable Food Production**. The working group builds on the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3), Slovenia’s operational plan for achieving a high-productivity economy through innovation, structural transformation, industrial diversification, and the growth of dynamic new companies.

[Click for more](#)



Smart Connections for a Smart Future: Food4CE Matchmaking platform at AGRA 2025



TRADITIONALLY FRESH



63. INTERNATIONAL FAIR OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

23. - 28. 8. 2025
Gornja Radgona, SI

POMURSKI SEJEM

The **AGRA fair in Gornja Radgona (Slovenia)** is one of the most important agricultural and food fairs in Central Europe, showcasing the latest innovations in precision farming, food safety, digitisation, organic production, forestry, and sustainable water management. At this year’s AGRA, the Food4CE Matchmaking Platform has been presented, showing how it can support local food producers and other stakeholders in the agri-food sector.

[Click for more](#)



WHAT'S NEXT

Although the project formally ends:

- The **Knowledge Transfer Platform** remains accessible and will continue to be updated with new content.
- The **Matchmaking Platform** remains operational.
- **Local and Transnational Innovation Hubs** will continue serving as platforms for cooperation, dialogue and knowledge exchange beyond the project's lifetime.
- **Regional action plans** will be implemented and monitored.
- **Policy recommendations** will be revised and shared into ongoing EU strategic discussions.

**Food4CE is moving from project phase
to ecosystem phase!**



Check out our website
and social channels
to stay updated
on the latest
Food4CE news
beyond the project!

EXPERIENCES FROM PARTNERS



Over the past three years, partners have experienced first-hand how cooperation across borders can generate innovation, build trust, and empower local actors.

In the following testimonials, partners reflect on lessons learned, challenges faced, and the lasting value of the Food4CE journey.



UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR - Lead partner of the Food4CE Project



“Through the Food4CE project, we’ve learned that **collaboration is key to strengthening Alternative Food Networks**.

By working together across Central Europe, we developed tools like the Knowledge Transfer and Matchmaking Platforms, and built Innovation Hubs that brought producers, logistics providers, and institutions to a dialogue. It wasn’t always easy: **differences in regulation, digital readiness, and local contexts challenged us, but those same differences became our strength.** We shared knowledge, adapted solutions, and built long-lasting connections.

The result? A stronger, more resilient network of AFNs and a shared belief that regional food systems can thrive through cooperation.



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY PODRAVJE



For the Regional Development Agency for Podravje - Maribor, Food4CE marked an important milestone as its first international project dedicated to short food supply chains and local food systems. **The project opened new perspectives through cross-border exchange, deepened understanding of AFN challenges, and strengthened cooperation opportunities** for both the agency and regional stakeholders.

By gaining new expertise, establishing valuable partnerships, and connecting local actors with transnational networks, the Agency has laid a strong foundation for future initiatives. These experiences will continue to support the creation of a **more enabling ecosystem for sustainable, innovative, and collaborative alternative food networks** in the region and across Central Europe.



EXPERIENCES FROM PARTNERS

INSTITUTE FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS FOUNDATION



“The Food4CE project has been both a challenging and opportunity-rich experience for ITL. It has reinforced our understanding that **logistics efficiency is not solely a matter of adopting the latest technological innovations, but is deeply shaped by the quality of relationships among the actors involved.**”

Working closely with organizations embedded in the solidarity economy ecosystem allowed us to experience first hand the value of trust, shared principles, and common purposes in structuring food distribution systems. At the same time, these relational strengths are often not supported by adequate infrastructure, policy frameworks, and digital tools. We believe that the results achieved through Food4CE have laid important foundations for further progress in bridging this gap and strengthening the enabling conditions for sustainable AFN logistics.”

HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES

“Participating in the Food4CE project provided the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences with a **valuable opportunity to connect academic expertise with the practical realities of Alternative Food Networks and local food systems.** The project strengthened our understanding of the regulatory, logistical and market challenges faced by small-scale producers, highlighting the importance of co-creation and close stakeholder engagement.”

Food4CE also demonstrated the **added value of transnational cooperation**, as shared experiences across Central European regions helped place local challenges into a broader European context. Overall, the project reinforced MATE's belief in the key role of universities as intermediaries between research, innovation and policy in supporting sustainable and resilient food systems.”



EUROPEAN NETWORK OF LOGISTICS COMPETENCE CENTRES



“Being part of Food4CE has been a valuable **opportunity to connect local food innovation with the broader European logistics community.** As a transnational network, Open ENLoCC contributed its experience in knowledge exchange, cluster regional cooperation and logistics innovation in Central Europe, while learning directly from the concrete challenges faced by Alternative Food Networks.”

The project demonstrated how collaboration across regions can turn **fragmented initiatives into structured innovation ecosystems.** The Food4CE project has strengthened our belief that sustainable logistics and resilient local food systems must evolve together through dialogue, shared tools and long-term partnerships.”

EXPERIENCES FROM PARTNERS

ECONSULT BETRIEBSBERATUNG GMBH

“

As a logistics consulting company, ECONSULT contributed a strong practical and analytical logistics perspective to the Food4CE project. Working closely with Alternative Food Networks made clear that **logistics is often the decisive bottleneck for scaling short food supply chains**, whether in terms of cost efficiency, coordination, or environmental performance. **Food4CE provided a structured framework to translate fragmented local practices into comparable logistics solutions**, supported by concrete tools for mapping, matchmaking, and knowledge transfer.



One key lesson learned is that **sustainable food systems cannot rely on proximity alone**: professionalised logistics, cooperation between actors, and data-based decision-making are essential to make regional food networks resilient and economically viable.

The project demonstrated that **logistics is not a downstream service, but a strategic enabler for the long-term success of Alternative Food Networks**.

”



POZNAŃ UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES



“

The Food4CE project results demonstrate that **Alternative Food Networks are an important concept in modern food markets**. At the same time, the experiences of individual project partner show that AFNs are strongly shaped by local conditions, particularly historical conditions, consumer expectations and the level of food supply-chain concentration. They face many challenges, particularly in the area of logistics in the broad sense, mainly due to the small scale of their operations.

This context-specific approach proved to be highly beneficial, as **the intensive exchange of knowledge and experience enabled local AFN representatives to define or redesign their development strategies**.

Moreover, since policy recommendations were prepared as one of the project outcomes, we believe that **the project results can support the development of food systems and AFNs in each country participating in the project**.

”

EXPERIENCES FROM PARTNERS

ŁUKASIEWICZ RESEARCH NETWORK - INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



“ For the Łukasiewicz Research Network - Poznań Institute of Technology, being a partner in the Food4CE project has been a **valuable journey in connecting technical and logistical innovation with the evolving needs of AFNs**. The project allowed Łukasiewicz-PIT to apply its research expertise to the practical challenges of short food supply chains, particularly regarding the digitalisation and modernization of local food systems. This collaboration deepened our understanding of the specific logistical bottlenecks faced by small-scale producers in the Greater Poland region, emphasizing the need for tailored ICT solutions and data-driven logistics.

The project also highlighted the significant benefits of transnational exchange, as sharing best practices with partners across Central Europe provided new perspectives on overcoming regulatory and infrastructure barriers. These experiences reinforced the Institute's role in aligning local innovations with the Regional Innovation Strategy, specifically in areas like bio-raw materials and food for conscious consumers. Ultimately, Food4CE has solidified Łukasiewicz-PIT's commitment to acting as a strategic bridge between research, industry, and policy to build more resilient and sustainable food networks.

”



UAS BFI VIENNA

“

Participation in Food4CE has been a valuable opportunity for UAS BFI Vienna to further strengthen its focus on (last mile) logistics, with **particular emphasis on short supply chain solutions, practical research, sustainability, and international collaboration**. Within the project, this focus could be significantly expanded and linked to concrete challenges in short food supply chains and AFNs in an innovative framework.

As a University of Applied Sciences, our core contribution lies in knowledge generation, communication and the connection of practitioners and experts, **translating application-oriented research into practical insights**. Active participation in numerous conferences (and other activities) not only enriched the project work and internal exchange, but also increased the visibility of Food4CE, short food supply chains, sustainability topics, all partners, the UAS and the Austrian AFNs. The **collaborative approach** with the project partners proved to be both professionally and personally enriching, highlighting the value of transnational cooperation for advancing resilient and sustainable food logistics. As collaborations started in the project span, we are now working on expanding them even further – nationally and internationally. We are thankful for the opportunity to participate in Food4CE!

”



KEY MESSAGES | LESSONS LEARNED

AFNs are not marginal, they are strategic actors in sustainable food systems.



Logistics innovation is the backbone of resilient short food supply chains.

Digital tools empower small producers when designed around real needs.



Cross-border cooperation accelerates learning and scaling of solutions.

Policy integration is essential for long-term impact.



Innovation Hubs create trust, dialogue and concrete transformation.

Sustainability requires collaboration, not isolation.



Help us spread our message!

Follow us
on our social
media channels,
like and share
our contents!



@Food4CE



@Food4Ce

OUR MESSAGE FOR THE FUTURE

Food4CE began as a EU funded project.
Over three years, it became a **shared commitment**.

It connected regions, empowered local food networks, translated challenges into solutions, and turned **dialogue into concrete tools and policies**.

What started as cooperation across borders has grown into a lasting community built on trust, knowledge and shared ambition.

**The platforms remain active.
The Innovation Hubs continue their work.
The partnerships endure.**

Most importantly, the vision of stronger, smarter and more resilient Alternative Food Networks in Central Europe moves forward.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all partners, stakeholders, producers, logistics operators, researchers and policy-makers, who contributed their expertise, energy and belief in this initiative.

This is not an end. It is a foundation.
And from here the work continues!

STAY UP TO DATE!



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
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Łukasiewicz
PIT

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www.econsult.at



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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!

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