



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Agri-food: Cluster activities for a sustainable and resilient ecosystem

Summary

EU Clusters Talks
30 November 2022, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Agri-food: Cluster activities for a sustainable and resilient ecosystem

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 30 November 2022, 8:30 – 9:45 CET, to discuss the critical challenges for the green transition in agri-food, the role of clusters to support the transition and improve the resilience and cluster projects and activities that can serve as examples of future involvement.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Zivile Kropaite

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Video introduction to the topic: *Sequences from the prep webinar for the agri-food matchmaking event*
2. Perspectives from the European Commission
Blaga Valentinova Popova, Team Leader, DG GROW, European Commission
Veronika Madner, Policy Officer, DG AGRI, European Commission
3. Panel debate: What are the ecosystem's most urgent issues for the twin transition and increase in resilience?
Claudia De Oliveira Ramos, International Project and Network Manager, VEGEPOLYS VALLEY
Pauline Bodin, European Innovation Projects Officer, VEGEPOLYS VALLEY
Gawel Walczak, International Affairs Manager, secpho
Paola Giavedoni, Director of Innovation, EIT Food
Yuan Chai, International Affairs Officer, Wagralim
4. Funding opportunities

Key messages:

- Clusters lack knowledge about potential applications of digital solutions in the agri-food sector, and in some cases, they lack digital infrastructure. Another challenge is transferring this knowledge to the farmers and convincing them about the uptake opportunities.
- Diversification is a key word, both for alternative solutions for animal protein as well as healthy maintenance of the soil. Crop and protein diversification is needed to make the value chains more resilient and greener.
- Grain transportation needs a disruptive and completely novel solution. EIT Food has opened a call for a feasibility study on transportation from Ukraine to Western European countries.
- There is a new start-up scene in Europe working on circular fertiliser solutions.
- Due to the energy crisis and inflation, many SMEs postpone investments into the green transition.
- Training and skilling are priority activities to help the SMEs with the twin transition



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Chris Burns, the following news items were presented:

1. Online [Agri-food Matchmaking Event](#) on 5 December
2. [Clusters meet Regions](#) in Spain on 14-16 December
3. [Public consultation](#) on de minimis regulation open until 10 January 2023
4. [Support Ukraine](#) by providing greatly needed energy equipment
5. Conference [“Fostering sustainable cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region and Ukraine”](#) on 8 December 2022

2. Perspectives from the European Commission

Veronika Madner, Policy Officer, DG AGRI, European Commission

Veronika Madner gives an overview of the funding opportunities that exist under the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development**. This fund is part of the Common Agricultural Policy. The support instruments encompass **investments** in production and processing of agricultural and non-agricultural products, renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and infrastructure, as well as funding for **rural business start-ups, cooperation, and knowledge exchange and dissemination** of information. She explains that the funding does not come directly from the European Commission, but from the Member States who draw up their strategic plans and implement the support. She shows examples from Poland, Greece, and Estonia under the current funding period.

Blaga Valentinova Popova, Team Leader, DG GROW, European Commission

Blaga Valentinova Popova speaks about the **EU Code of Conduct**, which is a major initiative to increase the sustainability of the food system. It is one of the actions under the “From Farm to Fork” strategy. On 29 November, the annual meeting of the signatories of the EU Code of Conduct took place. The signatories, which are mostly large companies, have made **concrete commitments to adhere to the sustainability goals**. The European Commission sees value in **extending this initiative to small and medium-sized enterprises** to set up sustainability strategies and become part of the community to exchange on their actions. She highlights that, within the EU Code of Conduct, companies create programmes for collaboration across the value chains. They expect to launch an **SME tool** on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform that will allow companies to sign up, evaluate their performance, find new areas of activity, and link to existing best practices.

In broader terms, she confirms that the European Commission receives many signals about the **challenges due to the energy crisis and increased costs for all inputs**. The Commission sees the link between resilience and sustainability and organises an **online matchmaking event on 5 December** for agri-food companies and technology providers.

3. Panel debate

The discussion focuses on the challenges for the green transition, the implementation of digital and circular solutions, and the role of clusters.

Claudia De Oliveira Ramos and Pauline Bodin present the SUAVE Eurocluster, which seeks to support SMEs from the agri-food ecosystem to innovate. It puts a particular focus on **urban farming** to be more resilient and move towards the green transition. The main challenges their cluster is working on are **water and energy management, diversification of crops, and a closer link to consumers**.



Pauline stresses that changes in products and methodology need to be accepted by the end users. Their cluster is promoting **circular bioeconomy solutions** with different end products.

Gawel Walczak explains that the cluster secpho works in deep tech with agricultural applications. From their perspective, the main challenge is **how to reach out to potential partners** to apply digital solutions. Many technological solutions are transversal and can provide interesting approaches to the agri-food sector. In many cases, there is a **lack of knowledge about these potential applications**. Claudia agrees that a challenge for agriculture lies in a potential **lack of digital infrastructure**.

Paola Giavedoni points out that EIT Food covers the whole agri-food value chain. They focus their innovation activities on the last stage, bringing them to the market. At the moment, they have three missions: net zero food system, healthier life through food, and transparent, resilient, and fair food system. **Protein diversification** plays an important role, as it can reduce energy-intensive protein sources, i.e. animals. EIT Food is currently funding different projects for **alternative protein sources**; many of them recover proteins from waste material. Combining them with animal protein creates hybrid products, which are still much more acceptable for the market. Furthermore, they are invested in **sustainable agriculture**, for example using sensors to reduce energy consumption, and **precision agriculture**, for example to reduce inputs.

Yuan Chai explains the B-Resilient Eurocluster, which wants to help the agri-food sector to become more resilient through digital innovation. They aim for an increased use of **biomass** and for up-skilling the staff of small companies. She highlights that the ecosystem is mainly composed of SMEs, which have to deal with a very complex situation. Many SMEs “only” try to survive and **postpone investments** in the green transition. Yuan Chai states that we have to convince the market should accept **higher prices**, as the green transition is linked to increased costs.

Regarding grains, Paola shares that they have opened a call for a feasibility study for **grain transportation**, for example via a pipeline, from Ukraine to Western countries. Gawel Walczak adds that they are currently working on transportation system for different grains and cereal-related products. He highlights that it is a **very complex topic** involving many different contributors. In every project, the challenge is to adapt the technology to the given situation and be flexible in the process.

Talking about the disruptions with the fertiliser supply, Pauline Bodin stresses the fact that we need to think about **reducing the use of fertilisers**, for which already different methods exist. With their members, they work on deepening the knowledge and application of those methods. Yuan Chai adds that we see many European start-ups emerging to work on circular fertiliser solutions. Furthermore, she says that SMEs are working on **maintaining the soil healthy**. She highlights the need to make better use of **crop rotation systems, the variety of plants, and circularity** to increase the resilience of our supply chains.

The speakers agree that **training and up-skilling of farmers** to apply existing digital solutions and encourage new applications to make the ecosystem greener and more resilient is very important. The collaboration between clusters is key to reach out to the right stakeholders successfully. Clusters can help in the communication and “translation” between the experts.

4. Funding opportunities

Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shares the following funding opportunities:

1. Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument: [New call in December](#)
2. [Maritime clusters as an innovative enabler for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean](#). Deadline to apply is 31 January 2023.
3. [Regenerative ocean farming in the Baltic Sea Region](#). Deadline to apply is 31 January 2023.
4. [F2F Health Matters: support to internationalisation for Japan](#). Deadline for SMEs to apply is 30 November 2022.