

**A EUROPEAN FOOD CLUSTER  
FOOD CLUSTER PRE-MEETING 29 NOVEMBER 2007 (SDME 1F)**

**CONCEPT OF THE FOOD CLUSTER INITIATIVE**

**Contribution by Keith Harrap**

**1 POLICY BACKGROUND**

Communication (COM 2007/0474 final – 16.08.07) on Competitive European Regions through Research and Innovation makes clear that innovation is effectively addressed at a Regional level; that common objectives of the Community's Research, Innovation and Cohesion policies include "to promote innovation and innovative clusters"; that the Commission in drawing up its policies for 2007-2013 has examined how three of its policies can complement each other: FP7, Competitiveness and Innovation (CIP), and instruments of Cohesion Policy (ERDF, ESF, etc). In the Annex 1 of the Communication the Food Innovation Network Europe (FINE) is provided as an example of strengthening the regional dimension in FP7.

**2 FOOD INNOVATION NETWORK EUROPE (FINE)**

FINE is the successful FP6 project prototype for what we now intend to undertake. There are those here today that are very familiar with FINE and its primary focus towards contributing to the development of best practices for regional RTD policy in general and local specificities in the field of food. In addition to achieving its action plan and identifying project ideas that could be categorised in various ways it generated a methodology and experience in activating regional stakeholders to define a regional strategy for stimulating food innovation and food research. In effect it successfully built the basis for a European network of regional food clusters.

**3 THE NEXT STAGE**

The aim now is to build a next phase of the FINE network, working towards a more complete EU network of regions which have ambitions in food. In fact building the ERA in food. Such ambitions can involve strengthening EU food research driven clusters by inter-regional cooperation, defining regional food RTD strategies, making the EU regional food RTD infrastructure landscape clearer – more transparent, investing in the combined regional strengths to create excellence in ERA by defining a mutual strategy and developing inter-regional projects.

**4 THE FP7 NEW PROJECTS**

The process of expanding FINE, or the FINE concept, in this way so as to embrace a next stage of development is envisaged by taking the opportunity of incorporating successful FP7 proposals as funded projects thereby creating a European Food Cluster (EFC). These Coordination Actions are funded as a result of REGIONS-1 and REGPOT-1 2007 Calls. These projects are the subject of presentations later this morning.

## **5 CONTENT AND COORDINATION**

The concluding stages of FINE as presently funded and its legacy together with the 6 newly funded FP7 projects provide the initial content for developing the European Food Cluster by enhancing FINE. From this platform it can be envisaged that other relevant projects are absorbed into the cluster as it develops. But even from the start of the initiative it will provide a focus on a range of features – food, region, strengthening of R&D, clusters, international cooperation, knowledge transfer (e.g. to companies and to development of regional RTD policies on food).

The EFC will need to achieve some cohesion if it is to avoid the danger of simply being a grouping of funded projects in the food sector. This is the challenge for the coordination role. Commonalities and complementarities need to be established that represent attributes of the cluster whether these be scientifically-based, regionally-based, through shared technological approaches, market features or stakeholders, distribution channels, sharing of best practice of various sorts, learning lessons of value to others, and so forth. It is for such reasons that an economic development expert and a policy/coordination expert have been foreseen as roles necessary for the evolution and successful delivery of the EFC.

## **6 DESCRIPTIVE, EVALUATIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE STAGES**

Addressing now just the policy/coordination role for which I am foreseen as having responsibility I can foresee the following requirements. There will be a need not only to facilitate coordination actions where these are identified but to develop methodologies that ultimately provide an assessment of outcomes and impacts of establishing a cluster in this way in the food sector. This will involve from the outset developing assessment methodologies that are descriptive, evaluative and prescriptive so that recommendations for future development also emerge. This will certainly involve analysis at least of S&T-related outcomes, regional outcomes and agro-sector outcomes and their inter-linkages. The following specific tasks can be foreseen as contributory to such input:

- Development of the policy objectives and direction of the cluster including follow-up and forward look;
- Development of the management structure of the cluster;
- Design and implementation of detailed action plans to stimulate integration of the new regions in FINE and the new cluster (to integrate weaker and successful operators);
- Policy, management /planning, and involvement in the implementation and direction of annual cluster meetings comprising all partners;
- Visits to cluster partners/groups requiring policy input and guidance;
- Participation in workshops relating to funding involvements and potential initiatives (FP7, structural funds, CIP);
- Consideration of the impact of the cluster and how to measure it – developing benchmarks internally, scientifically, in the agro-food sector, and regionally with appropriate interlinking.

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**OBJECTIVES, TIMING, MEETINGS OF THE FOOD CLUSTER INITIATIVE**

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**DESCRIPTIVE**

- The essence of FINE
- The policy features to be recognised
- The features and players in the FP7 projects
- The modes of working and realisation “on-the-ground”
- The real and potential inter-relationships in the FP7 projects
- The potential from other actors and stakeholders (CIP, structural funds, national/regional funds)
- The management of the component projects
- The characteristics of the host institutions involved
- Development of a coordination management and monitoring plan

**EVALUATIVE**

- The objectives of the individual components
- The processes being used
- The content involved in each individual cluster component
- The outputs foreseen and their delivery
- The outlook for each component of the cluster
- Coordination internally and externally
- Information dissemination
- Outcomes occurring - deliverables
- Performance benchmark development
- Impact occurring now or potentially

**PRESCRIPTIVE**

- Obstacles encountered
- Lessons learned
- Areas for improvement
- Objectives fulfilled
- Gaps and failings
- Future prognosis

NOTE: Timings and meetings are set out in the draft TORs for the coordination roles