

The results of creating, developing and coordinating a European FOOD-CLUSTER

Multi-level impact assessment of the European FOOD-CLUSTER initiative





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European FOOD-CLUSTER initiative

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CONTEXT

Interest in innovation clusters has arisen as a result of recognition that competitive advantage does not simply come from a firm's own resources and capability but from resources and capabilities located in the firm's nearby business environment. So the **pursuit of the benefits of clustering** has resulted in significant activity in public policy development relating to innovation clusters since the 1990s.

In its final recommendations the **European Cluster Policy Group**¹ set out certain principles. For example it considered that cluster programmes needed to be leveraged with vigorous efforts to strengthen framework conditions and that such programmes needed to be delivered in an integrated policy framework with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities for the Commission and EU Member States. So it is clear that *"clusters are of growing importance in the new global environment in which the Europe 2020 strategy has to succeed; European policymakers cannot afford to ignore their role and should actively explore their potential to modernise and improve economic policies"*. The Food Cluster Initiative (FCI) has been an early example of this approach.

Furthermore a new institutional configuration is emerging to promote innovation – a *"triple helix"* of university, industry and government in which the dynamic is a change from strong institutional boundaries to a more flexible overlapping. The **Regions of Knowledge (RoK)** programme initiative aims to strengthen the research potential of European regions in particular by encouraging and supporting the development across Europe of regional research-driven clusters associating universities, research centres, enterprises and regional authorities through Coordination and Support Actions. In the **Research Potential of Convergence Regions (REGPOT)** programme similar actions stimulate the realisation of the full research potential of the enlarged EU's convergence and outermost regions and help to strengthen the capacities of their researchers to successfully participate in research activities at EU level.

The **particular expectations of impact** for the different calls of the two programmes (RoK and REGPOT) were therefore taken into account in assessing the impact of those projects in the food sector funded in these programmes that constituted the FCI.

However proposals submitted as a result of the various calls in both programme areas had to be evaluated through procedures that have commonality across FP7. Those proposals that were successfully

¹ http://www.proinno-europe.eu/sites/default/files/newsroom/2010/09/ECPG_Final_Report_web-low1.pdf

evaluated and approved for funding were then seen as candidate members of the FCI if their activities fell within agrofood areas that it embraced. At the outset of the FCI in early 2008 the immediate need was to make a start and this was done with those RoK and REGPOT food-related projects for which the proposal evaluation had resulted in approval for funding.

The overall objective of the FCI was to find a way of bringing all players together so that successful and less experienced operators were integrated into a viable and successful European Food Cluster by building on the FP6 project FINE as a prototype. **A key aspect was to develop ways of involving the present and current project partners and potential successful projects under future Calls** and prepare for new coordination actions to be funded under FP7.

In operating and coordinating the FCI initially two advisors were used, one focussing on the economic and market development aspects and the other on impact and policy concerns. Subsequently a third advisor had a more management-orientated remit. The Cluster typically had two meetings each year at different locations where projects could report on progress, project coordinators and partners could hold joint or individual meetings, project presentations could be made and visits arranged. Early meetings were held in Brussels but subsequently venues were selected where projects or earlier activities had taken place – Mersin (Turkey), Wageningen (The Netherlands), Thessaloniki (Greece), Gent (Belgium).

OUTCOMES

There is a **geographical diversity of involvement** in FCI with regions represented from new Member States such as Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria; older ones such as France, Germany, Denmark, Spain, UK, Greece and Italy; as well as associated countries such as Turkey, Serbia, and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. At the outset there were six successful projects in the food sector as members of FCI. Later a further three joined as a result of their success in achieving funding in further Calls for proposals to the same programmes. Others have since been incorporated over time.

Although all the FCI projects are making a contribution to food sector research capability they are heterogeneous. This is an inevitable consequence of the FP7 proposal evaluation process that had to be used for project selection. So the **planning, coordination and development of a growing and broader cluster** needed (and will continue to need) to take all the varying features and objectives of the successfully funded projects into account. The difference between the two FP7 programme areas also had to be recognised.

Nevertheless certain aspirations are clear in virtually all of the FCI projects. Each of the REGPOT and RoK projects that originally constituted the FCI or joined the initiative during the first two years specified objectives, outcomes and impacts that the individual project was designed to achieve. Because there are some clear similarities such stated project-level objectives can be grouped into broader categories representing a commonality (or comparability) of the aims sought from projects that were members of the FCI. These aggregated project-level objectives are useful as generic parameters for **assessing the OUTCOMES of the Food Cluster projects** as a clustered group.

1. PROJECT OUTCOMES

As a result of information derived from project visits and written and electronic information provided by the project coordinators and partners the **aggregated project-level objective categories** described above were verified as pragmatic aggregate outcome areas for assessment purposes as the projects close to completion showed significant involvements in achieving such outcomes from their stated objectives and newer projects are also working actively to achieve their stated outcomes. These aggregate project outcome categories were therefore confirmed as:

Mobility/young researchers

(including activities such as people-related/professional enhancement, mentoring and recruitment of both of young researchers and more experienced scientists)

Institutional facilities

(including activities such as improved technical status and capabilities of laboratories through state-of-the-art equipment).

Training/best practice

(including activities such as know-how and science/methodology experience acquisition with partners and beneficiaries)

Awareness development

(including activities such as use of communication and dissemination tools including conferences, newsletters, websites and enhanced scientific publication rates in peer-reviewed journals).

Commercial benefits

(including activities such as technology transfer with a focus on companies/SMEs and user groups generally, involvements with meetings and equipment training).

Linkage

(including activities such as improvements in collaboration and various forms of cooperation locally, nationally and Europe-wide thereby contributing to ERA capability and capacity)

Quality and safety

(including activities such as contributing innovative solutions relevant to food production, testing, processing, packaging and supply chains).

Proposal development/leverage effects

(including activities relevant to obtaining future funding using new sources and synergy with other instruments including national funding by leveraging recognition as a result of achieving EU funding).

Sectoral strategy development

(including activities such as new research positioning (in agrofood) including project/institution/sector/locality SWOT/SOR benefits).

Cluster development

(including activities such as networks and dialogue platforms for operations for research and innovation).

These outcome categories therefore formed a basis for assessing the performance and impact potential of the projects in aggregate and so make a contribution to an assessment of the outcomes and likely impacts of the FCI as a whole.

All the projects in the FCI that are nearing completion or close to it have made significant contributions in achieving their stated objectives. In aggregate therefore one can find **interesting and exciting examples of mobility**, fostering of young researchers and the ability to retain or attract their energy and expertise to the region or nationally. Training and sharing of best practice have been notable attributes in several projects. There are **good examples of linkage creation** and development or formation of regional clusters, influence on regional or national government policy (for example in the areas of food quality and safety but also in broader areas for example European and/or R&D policy) and support from such sources for further developments. There has also been a **significant effort, successful in several cases**, to collaborate in the formulation of new proposals both to FP7 and to other sources of funding both national and European. In some cases better strategic definition of the necessary research effort has been put in place sometimes at institutional level, sometimes at regional or locality level.

Certain projects have been able to attract the interest and **involvement of the commercial sector** or other types of user group. It is likely that other impacts of this sort will arise in the future as awareness increases further. Even so several projects have been able to **create significant awareness** of their work and the capabilities of the institutions involved in their regions and beyond – for example in other Member States. The resources made available through the project and more widely have gained **significant credibility for the institutions and their research groups** as a result of the enhancement of the scientific capabilities. This also has given a significant boost to morale and confidence for working at a European level where this was not particularly apparent before. Credible contributors to the European Research Area are one outcome of this change of attitude and circumstances. In particular the impact of this improved resource capability is very noticeable with young researchers who have gained in enthusiasm and confidence as a result of the investment made.

However it can be argued that the individual projects might have achieved such successes in their own right without the support of the clustering put in place through the FCI. So the **added value achieved by having such a clustering approach in place needs to be considered also.**

So the key question for the FCI is whether the projects could have achieved the outcomes identified without being Cluster members?

Furthermore were there other outcomes that were particularly Cluster-derived from which the component projects of the Cluster **acquired benefits?**

2. CLUSTER OUTCOMES

Discussion sessions concerning **various cluster features and parameters** proved very valuable in this regard and some useful insights were obtained on the FCI, its nature and functioning and possible future direction. Even though outcomes from projects that have impact potential in different ways can indeed be aggregated into certain common areas the impact of the FCI overall looks somewhat diverse and so presents difficulties for any assessment of specific Cluster-originated impact.

So it is not possible to say for example that the FCI has increased regional commercial innovation in agrofood; or the FCI has generated new employment opportunities at a regional level; or changes in national/regional policy have been achieved. The Food Cluster objective would have had to be more focussed and targeted on particular issues to achieve such specificity of outcomes and impact for this to have happened.

However in the discussions with project coordinators and partners, areas were recognised as ones that were Cluster-generated thereby **providing**

some evidence of wider impacts from the outcomes achieved than might otherwise have occurred.

Some of the FCI aims/features and their outcomes include:

“Breaking the box” by putting people together at meetings who would not usually communicate was an impact aim e.g. involving people taken from different sectors and different regions as a stimulus to new thinking and innovative ideas.

The FCI meetings have put together professionals in agrofood areas who would not normally have been brought together because of different geographical locations or different R&D (or wider) interests. At times **new project proposals have been developed** as a result of such contact and are still being formulated. There have been successes in achieving funding.

Transfer of good practice: Researchers from different Member States learning from each other has been a feature of the FCI and its meetings.

The movement of both young researchers to experience working in mature established institutions elsewhere in Europe and visits of senior mature working scientists to institutions in new and accession states has created further awareness and recognition of both the state of the art, best practice and the needs of users more widely. The FCI meetings sought to portray bi-directional awareness of needs on the one hand and available experience and resources on the other through presentations and more informal exchange of ideas. Training and workshops have also been an important feature of this approach.

SWOT and SOR training showing the value of self-analysis for research planning in a given situation.

Training at FCI meetings (and more widely) in the socio-economic management techniques of assessing strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats assisted institutions in devising **strategic positioning (orientation) of their research** within a broader politico-economic context. In several instances this benefitted not only the way in which the project itself would be delivered but also the wider positioning of the research of the institution as a whole.

Developing awareness of synergies in approaching funding possibilities showing the relevance of other funding sources and their inter-relationships. This also underlined how research academia, commercial interests and government can be necessary stakeholders in the innovation process (the so-called “triple helix” model and its derivatives).

There was a need to create awareness of the wider context of support for R&D and socio-economic development other than submitting proposals for research funding under the Framework Programme. This was achieved through presentations at FCI meetings of **funding opportunities available under other instruments** such as Structural Funds and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP). For the Commission the **awareness of such synergies between instruments is seen as very important in the fostering of innovation**. Some project institutions have achieved successful funding from such synergistic approaches.

Creating awareness of the sector, of the region, of the innovation process, of the European dimension – all were important elements for the FCI in enhancing the impact and recognition of agrofood R&D activity.

FCI **membership is increasing** as the initiative becomes better known – for example through its new website. Some new projects have become part of the FCI as a result of achieving RoK or REGPOT funding (e.g. AFRESH; AGRISCIMONT) or sought membership earlier after **funding from other sources such as INTERREG** (e.g. REAL). Other projects and clusters are now seeking membership or association with FCI in greater numbers (e.g. FCUB-ERA; FOOD2MARKET; Baltfood; the Bioactive food plants network.)

In several cases the **successful achievement of funding a research project** under FP7 has raised awareness of an institution and what it is trying to develop in a changing economic situation - a new approach to innovation and/or an awareness of opportunities in a Europe-wide situation but from a regional standpoint.

Sometimes the recognition of this situation takes the form simply of political (or policy-related) public statements by senior government officials. In other cases it has achieved more tangible outcomes through matching or **complementary funding from national/regional sources** to further enhance what has been put

in place from European funding – so the leverage of the FP funding has been an important impact component.

Creating a larger scale European activity than an individual project could achieve on its own – this was valuable in portrayals to government/regional agencies, other research organisations and potential stakeholders and created more “substance” towards fulfilling the aim of contributing to ERA.

The FCI **achieved a presence for its component projects** that would have been difficult or impossible for each of them to achieve in isolation. For example at EU level:

- During **Open Days 2008** the FCI was the lead topic of a press conference involving Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik.
- The FCI was presented as part of a Round Table discussion (“*Clusters – a policy or a tool for a policy*”) at **WIRE 2010 in Granada**.
- The FCI is cited as an example in the **European Strategy for the Danube Action Plan** (COM 2010, 715) p. 60.

The involvement of the FCI as **representing a wider platform of EU research funding** facilitated a meeting with the national Ministry of Agriculture, Tallinn, Estonia during a FLAVOURE project visit by one of the FCI coordinators.

The **FCI brought potential for enhancing contacts** through co-location of its meetings with larger professional events (Thessaloniki, Wageningen, ...)

RESULTS

The food sector faces challenges induced by globalization and societal issues such as demographics (ageing, migration), diseases (diet-related disease, cognitive decline, obesity and allergy), lifestyles (occupation, quality of life) and sectoral competition. In addition there are **consumer demands to be taken into account for healthy, safe, environmentally sustainable and ethically produced food**. The food industry, which is a large manufacturing sector in Europe, therefore requires a good understanding of the triggers of future change and the inter-relationship between these and their impact in order to remain competitive and overcome emerging threats. The aims of the FCI were supportive of this by addressing some challenges in agrofood.

In addition, the need for **providing support to clusters and cluster formation** in general was a further important aspect of the FCI and cluster development is identified as one of the aggregate outcome areas. The EC present strategy on clustering sees it as a tool for regional economic development playing a vital role in fostering business innovation.

Optimising the impact of Cohesion Policy funding that is allocated to innovation is an important element in the regional dimension of the Europe 2020 Innovation Union - asking **regions to design “smart specialisation strategies” (S3) to unlock growth**. Clusters are an identified action to be considered in S3.

The future orientation of programmes such as RoK should be closer to these identified flagship initiatives. The **EU Strategy for the Danube Region’s Action Plan might be illustrative of this approach where the FCI is cited as an example of a FP7 initiative** that can be built on (but interestingly more in relation to capacity-building - which is the thrust of the FP7 programme involved - rather than cluster creation *per se*).

CONCLUSIONS

The **following conclusions are identified from the assessments** made of the FCI both on the component projects of the Cluster and the implementation of the FCI in its own right:

1. The **individual Cluster project outcomes constitute a success in virtually all instances** that are at or nearing completion. However when these are viewed in relevant aggregated categories that show commonality across the FCI projects the added value brought by having the FCI in place needs to be identified separately.
2. Many project coordinators have confirmed the view that the **FCI itself has provided outcomes or attributes that could not have been achieved effectively on a “project only” basis**. There were outcomes and impacts achieved by the component projects of the FCI that benefitted from and were complementary to activities embraced by the Cluster at its meetings and more widely including:
 - **Stimulating linkage** at various levels and in various ways
 - Fostering the **transfer of good practice**
 - Fostering **strategic planning** through SWOT/SOR training
 - **Developing awareness** of different funding possibilities and formulating appropriate proposals

- **Creating broader awareness** of the agrofood sector in Europe
 - Supporting a European research effort and so **creating awareness of ERA.**
3. The **FCI is not a typical cluster** as there is no proximate geographical dimension – it is more a network and should develop as such in the future. Clusters need to be regionally - or locality - based to maximise effectiveness.
 4. The FCI was a **research capacity-building pilot initiative** conceived as a tool for building research capacity for enhanced cooperation between European regions. From this standpoint alone it has been successful in the agrofood sector and increasing interest in applications for “membership” illustrate this.
 5. It is envisaged that the FCI will develop further over time as a network of European regional food clusters through acquisition of future projects and associated actions. This is already happening. So the **FCI should become a European network of food-related clusters** aiming to spawn and enhance food-related regional clusters in Europe.
 6. The FCI or its **successor needs a “foresight” capability** to determine where the particular focus of its effort should be over time. This will avoid dilution of resource capacity that can result from too great a degree of heterogeneity in the activities supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How can the FCI contribute to achieving what is needed in the future?

What should its organisation and style be like and how will this be decided?

How can it be made to perform tasks identified as forming part of its remit?

Should it be a network of regional cluster members who make a contribution to resource its functions as defined in a MOU?

In which case should projects continue to be candidates for membership or should such applicants be clusters?

***It is RECOMMENDED
that a working group be formed to advise on the
future governance and implementation of the FCI.***

Choices will need to be made on what theme(s)/niche(s) to pursue in future so that the FCI gains a reputation for certain specific contributions e.g. food industry innovation; food and health; agrofood and the environment; farm to fork issues – what should the supply chain be like; the effect of large scale retailing on food issues; safety and quality of food; European agrofood exporting

It is RECOMMENDED
that the FCI or its successor organisation devotes effort to assessing and specifying what is needed - by whom, where, why and with what result.

It is not sufficient simply to foster cluster formation - clear and specific definition is needed on what the cluster is for and how it will make a contribution especially in relation to the Europe 2020 Innovation Union as described.

An important aspect of this process is to devote some thought to the key societal issues involved and their prioritisation. For example is the overriding need for increased economic activity; better global competitiveness; improved health and welfare; environmental acceptability; spreading the “influence or reach” of Europe – in science/research/innovation, in the food sector, in a social context?

There is a need to stimulate more innovative activity in the European agrofood sector by brainstorming ideas in the chosen areas of activity relevant to public need rather than collaboration for the sake of collaboration.

It is RECOMMENDED
that a foresight activity be established as a key aspect of the Recommendations proposed above in order to brainstorm such societal needs.

There are other initiatives and organisations with which FCI might have a good “fit” or complementarity. For example European Technology Platform (ETP) Food for Life (See <http://etp.ciaa.eu>) which is an industry-driven instrument to unite stakeholders at European level with aims to enhance competitiveness of the agrofood sector in Europe and strengthen innovation and to meet the needs and expectations of society better. Further information on this was presented by Andras Sebok (Campden

BRI – www.campden.co.uk; www.campden.hu) at the FCI Gent meeting in 2010.

It is RECOMMENDED
that possibilities for association or inclusion of FCI
with other organisations with comparable aims are
explored as part of FCI's strategic positioning for
the future.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The **Food Cluster Initiative has proved to be beneficial** as its critical mass allowed it to attain outcomes that would not have been reached at individual project level. These have been discussed earlier in this document.

It allowed notable unlocking of the research potential in the European Food Research Area by bringing together regional research actors that would not have met otherwise.

For this **positive impact** to be leveraged up in the future, the FCI's objectives will need to be more focused on specific issues such as for instance **increased regional commercial innovation**.

In that respect, the **recommendation to set up a foresight activity** to identify the priority societal challenges to be addressed by the Food Cluster Initiative is 'key' to the success of its future activities.

**REGIONS and TEAMS
participating
in the European FOOD-CLUSTER initiative**

RAF-REGIONS [FP7-REGIONS-2007-1]

Bringing the benefits of research to Agrofood SMEs of the regions of Central Macedonia, Puglia and Pazardjik

Euroconsultants SA (*coordination*) **GR**

Region of Central Macedonia

Federation of Industries of Northern Greece

Institute of Agrobiotechnology, Centre for Research and
Technology Hellas

INNOVA SpA **IT**

Agenzia regional per la Tecnologia e l'Innovazione – Regione
Puglia

Institute of Sciences and Food production CNR

Distretto Agroalimentare Regionale Scrl

Euroconsultants SA Bulgaria **BG**

District of Pazardjik

Agricultural University of Plovdiv

Bulgarian Association of food and drink Industry

BALTFOODQUAL [FP7-REGPOT-2007-1]

Unlocking animal food quality research potential in the Baltic region by developing the scientific and technical capacities of the research institute SIGRA

Research Institute of Biotechnology and Veterinary Medicine **LV**

"Sigra" – Latvia University of Agriculture

SAFETechnoPACK [FP7-REGPOT-2007-1]

Improving the scientific and technological research capacity of a food institute on safety and technology of food-packaging

TUBITAK – Turkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Arastirma Kurumu **TR**

EU-BALKANVEGETABLES [FP7-REGPOT-2007-1]

Balkan vegetable crops research centre for transfer of European knowledge research and practice

Maritsa Vegetable Crops Research Institute **BG**

FEED-TO-FOOD [FP7-REGPOT-2007-3]**Reinforcement of FEED-TO-FOOD research centre at the Institute for food technology at the university of Novi Sad**

Institute for Food Technology of Novi sad (<i>coordination</i>)	RS
Forschungsinstitute Futtermitteltechnik der IFF	DE
Institute of Food Research - Norwich	GB
National Research-Development Institute for Animal Biology and Nutrition - Balotesti	RO
Institute of Animal Science of LVA	LT

CHROMLAB-ANTIOXIDANT [FP7-REGPOT-2007-3]**Reinforcement of the Western Balkan countries research capacities for food quality characterisation**

Faculty of Natural sciences and Mathematics, University Sts. Cyril and Methodius – Skopje (<i>coordination</i>)	FYROM
Faculty of sciences and Mathematics, University of Nis	RS
Institute of Organic Chemistry with centre of Phytochemistry, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences	BG
Department of Food Sciences and technology, National Centre for Scientific Research – Murcia	ES
Joint research unit "Science for Oenology", INRA – Montpellier	FR

SWOT-CHEMISTRY-FOOD [FP7-REGPOT-2008-2]**Evaluation of the research capacity and development of a strategy for further growth in chemistry in general and in food sciences in particular**

Faculty of Natural sciences and Mathematics, University Sts. Cyril and Methodius – Skopje	FYROM
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AGFORISE [FP7-REGIONS-2008-1]**Agrofood clusters platform with common long-term research and innovation strategy towards economic growth and prosperity**

Mersin Special Provincial Administration	TR
Alata Horticultural Research Institute	
Targid Food and Agricultural Products Industry and Trade	
Mersin Chamber of Commerce and Industry	
Regione Emilia Romagna	IT
Institute of Biometreorology	
Cooperativa Terremerse SCRL	
ASTER Scienza Tecnologia Impresa	
Region of Murcia – Ministry of Agriculture and Water	ES
National Technological centre for the Food and Canning Industry	
Juver Alimentacion S.L.U.	
Grupo Taso Economic & Business Development	

CEFSE [FP7-REGPOT-2008-1]

Reinforcing research potential in the Laboratory for chemical contaminants at the Faculty of Technology towards the establishment of the Centre of Excellence in Food Safety and Emerging Risks

Faculty of Technology – University of Novi Sad

RS

FLAVOURE [FP7-REGPOT-2008-1]

Food and Feed Laboratory of varied and outstanding research in Estonia

Estonian Research Institute of Agriculture

EE

AGRISCIMONT [FP7-REGPOT-2010-5]

Fostering a science-based development of a sustainable Montenegrin agriculture

Biotechnical Faculty – University of Montenegro

ME

AFRESH [FP7-REGIONS-2010-1]

Activity and food for regional economics supporting health

Stuttgart Region Economic Development Corporation

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REAL [INTERREG]

Galicia-North Portugal Food Innovation Network

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Universidade do Minho	
Universidade Católica Portuguesa	
Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo	
NERVIR – Associação Empresarial	
Universidade de Vigo	
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela	ES
Centro Tecnológico da Carne	
Xunta de Galicia	
ANFACO-CECOPECA	

FINE [FP6-KNOWREG-2-2005]

Food Innovation Network Europe

Ontwikkelingsmaatschappij Oost Nederland NV (<i>coordination</i>)	NL
Öresund Food Network DK & SE	DK/SE
Stiftelsen Rogalandsforskning	NO
Universiteit Gent	BE
ASTER S. cons. P.	IT
Centuria RIT Romagna Innovazione Tecnologia soc. cons. a r.l.	PL
Fundacja Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza	GB
Scottish Enterprise	GB
Centro de Automatización, Robotica y Tecnologías de la Información y de la Fabricación	ES

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The full report is available in electronic and paper
version from:
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The overall objective of the FCI was to find a way of bringing all players together so that successful and less experienced operators were integrated into a viable and successful European Food Cluster by building on the FP6 project FINE as a prototype. A key aspect was to develop ways of involving the present and current project partners and potential successful projects under future Calls and prepare for new coordination actions to be funded under FP7.

The Food Cluster Initiative has proved to be beneficial as its critical mass allowed it to attain outcomes that would not have been reached at individual project level as described in this document. It allowed notable unlocking of the research potential in the European Food Research Area by bringing together regional research actors that would not have met otherwise.

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