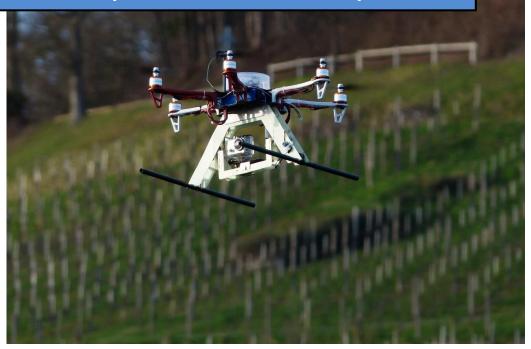




# A3.3: Input paper for the organisation of the interregional workshop on stimulating innovative products development



Stara Zagora Regional

Economic Development





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#### 1 Introduction

INNOGROW — "Regional policies for innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural SMEs" is an Interreg Europe project that aims to improve partners' policies on rural economy SMEs competitiveness, regarding the integration of new production technologies and business models that can lead to innovative products.

This document is the first deliverable of INNOGROW Activity A3.3, which foresees the organisation of an interregional workshop on stimulating innovative products development. The aim of the input paper is to be used as the primary source of knowledge for the capacity building and interregional learning processes of the policy workshop.

The input paper will define the most relevant issues to be discussed and addressed by regional authorities, provide guidelines and directions for the workshop topics and focal points; and present workshop delegates with the most relevant needs & challenges to be addressed through regional policies. It will also specify the organisational details of the workshop to be hosted by SZREDA and provide guidelines on how to prepare the workshop summary report so as to facilitate the integration of its results/findings into the INNOGROW action plans.





### 2 The INNOGROW project

The INNOGROW project aims to improve partners' policies on rural economy SMEs competitiveness as regards the integration of new production technologies and business models that lead to innovative products. The project will promote the adoption of innovation by rural economy SMEs, through sharing practices/experiences between regions and actors relevant to rural economy SMEs competitiveness and integrating lessons learnt into regional policies and action plans.

Rural economy SMEs need to remain globally competitive by adopting innovative solutions, new business models and modernisation approaches that will lead to increases in productivity and access to new markets. Territorial capacity building and policy innovation involving all regional actors are critical factors for promoting the diffusion of innovations, to maintain and strengthen SMEs' competiveness and consequently regions' growth. Regions in rural areas can play an important role in the modernisation of existing SMEs and the proliferation of innovative start-ups, providing incentives to promote the adoption of technological innovations, such as organic farming, functional food, crop resistance systems, selective breeding and feeding processes to boost livestock resistance to local conditions. At the management level, incentives need to be provided for mixed production of crops and livestock products, and new business models and coalitions that lead to innovative business ideas.

#### 2.1 INNOGROW activities

INNOGROW brings together 9 partners from 8 countries, involving the managing authorities & regional bodies influencing regional and national policy instruments, to promote the adoption of technology and business model innovations by rural economy SMEs. To boost SMEs' competitiveness and foster rural development, the project includes a wide range of activities, focusing on promoting the interregional learning process and the exchange of experience among regional authorities. Project activities include:

- Investigation of innovative technologies' impact on rural economy SMEs competitiveness and productivity.
- Identification of successful new business models for rural economy SMEs.
- Evaluation and analysis of existing policies and strategies related to the promotion of innovation in rural economy SMEs.





- Analysis of the factors (barriers and enablers) that influence rural economy SMEs to adopt innovation.
- Promoting public dialogue and consultation process to build consensus and ensure the successful implementation of regional action plans, through the support and participation of key regional stakeholders.
- Fostering interregional learning and capacity building through workshops, study visits, and policy learning events.
- Development of transferable tools & resources to promote benchmarking and policy learning, and transfer knowledge and lessons learnt beyond the partnership.
- Joint development of action plans to promote the improvement of the policy instruments addressed by the project.
- Increasing awareness, promoting and disseminating the project results and knowledge beyond the partnership.

#### 2.2 INNOGROW expected results

INNOGROW will improve 8 policy instruments, relevant to the abovementioned policy areas, targeting to achieve:

- Enhanced innovation support services for over 5% of rural economy SMEs in partners' regions.
- Improved horizontal & vertical cooperation among SMEs in rural areas for products commercialisation.
- Increased capacity of 200 staff of public administrations to effectively implement policies, stimulating innovation adoption by rural economy SMEs.
- 10 million of Euros of investments unlocked to promote innovative technologies and new business models.

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## 2.3 INNOGROW partners

	Region of Thessaly (RoT)
	Lombardy Foundation for the Environment (FLA)
	Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR)
	The University of Newcastle upon Tyne (UNEW)
	Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency (SZREDA)
	Regional Development Agency of the Pardubice Region (RRAPK)
	Chamber of Commerce of Molise (CoC – Molise)
<b>→</b>	Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska, BSC Business Support Centre Ltd, Kranj (BSC)
	Pannon Novum West-Transdanubian Regional Innovation Non-Profit Ltd (PANOV)





## 3 Rational and aims of INNOGROW workshops

Exchange of experience through workshops is an interregional learning process, which is considered the main catalyst for generating the expected policy change in the participating regions. The production of new knowledge at the regional level relies on multi-actor innovation networks/communities, in which key stakeholders and policy makers come together to find solutions and answers to various social, economic and environmental problems, associated with policy development.

During interregional workshops, partners have the opportunity to gain insights and understanding of the political priorities and initiatives in the field, identify challenges and needs to be addressed at the action plans implementation phase (project phase 2), as well as to ensure the involvement of key stakeholders in the facilitation of action plans.

The interactions and discussion to take place during interregional workshops will enable project partners to a) discuss about the economic and environmental challenges faced by rural economy SMEs, b) comment and elaborate on policy measures, designed to foster innovation adoption, c) examine the scalability and transferability of measures into other geographical contexts and sectors, and d) contribute to policy development, taking into account regional specificities.

The INNOGROW project includes the organisation of 3 interregional workshops to promote interregional learning and capacity building, as presented in the following table:

**Table 1: INNOGROW Interregional workshops** 

#	Title	Host	Country	Date
A3.1	Interregional workshop on innovation support centres for rural SMEs	FLA	Italy	Semester 2
A3.2	Interregional workshop on supporting new business models for rural SMEs	PANOV	Hungary	Semester 5
A3.3	Interregional workshop on stimulating innovative products development	SZREDA	Bulgaria	Semester 3







The following diagram presents the structure of INNOGROW workshops as described in the Application Form of INNOGROW project.





## 4 Scope and policy purpose of the 2<sup>nd</sup> INNOGROW workshop

#### 4.1 Scope and objectives

Activity A3.3 includes the organisation of an interregional thematic workshop for regional authorities' officials on how to stimulate innovative products development for rural economy SMEs. All partners will participate with members of their stakeholder groups and external experts, to discuss regional strategies, advancing interregional learning and capacity building. During the workshop, regional authorities' representatives will have the opportunity to exchange views with their peers, familiarise themselves with existing policy measures and strategies, and co-shape a common approach for issues such as: support for patents use and costs, studies for new products commercial potential, and feasibility assessments for new technologies.

The mission of the workshop is to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences, acquisition of knowledge and inspiration on how to steer policy implementation in stimulating innovative products development by rural economy SMEs. The workshop will be based on the theme/results of INNOGROW activity A1.1 and activity A1.4.

#### **Relevant INNOGROW Activities**

A1.1 "Investigating innovative technologies' impact on rural economy SMEs competitiveness and productivity": Impact analysis of the main new disruptive technologies for rural SMEs, e.g. innovative technologies in agriculture: main features, costs and benefits, environmental impact, market potential and productivity impact scenarios based on local conditions and challenges. The purpose of A1.1 is to provide policy makers with an overview of the economic and environmental benefits of the main new technologies on rural economy SMEs productivity and competitiveness, and ramifications in their regions.

#### A1.4 "Investigating the factors that influence rural economy SMEs to adopt innovation":

Survey with stakeholders in INNOGROW regions: analyses the barriers and enablers that affect rural SMEs' investments in innovative technologies and involvement in innovative collaborative networks and

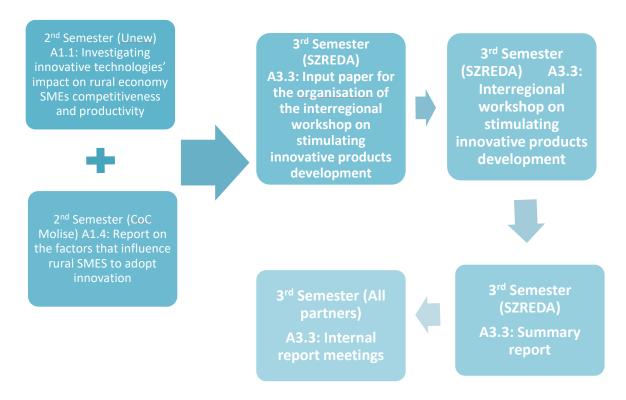




models. The purpose of Activity A1.4 is to offer an overview that will enable policy makers to understand the inhibitors and the policy obstacles related to innovation adoption by rural SMEs in INNOGROW regions, and improve the management and implementation processes of own policy instruments.

The process of knowledge sharing and interaction is expected to have fruitful results for the participants, especially in cases when EU regions show very different levels of eco-innovation performance and SMEs' competitiveness.

#### Links with other INNOGROW activities:







## 5 Thematic background

This section provides the theoretical framework on which the suggested topics to be discussed at the workshop are based upon. To begin with, it is important to provide a working definition for the term "New Products Development", which constitutes the main focus of this workshop.

New Products Development is a vital part of the innovation process in order the rural economy SMEs to remain competitive in the international markets. New product development can be defined as the process of transforming a market opportunity into a new product and introducing it to the market. New Products Development when carried out efficiently, can facilitate market expansion and potentially encourage the creation of a niche market which in turn will foster the establishment of a competitive advantage and a dominant presence within a particular market.

#### 5.1 Innovative Production Technologies for rural SMEs

More advanced methods of production such as innovative production technologies, do not only increase productivity, but also limit waste and tend to be environmentally friendly. According to the results of A1.1, the adoption of innovative technologies can essentially improve rural SMEs' competitiveness and productivity, yielding numerous benefits such as better environmental performance, access to new markets, lower production costs, and delivery of new products that will bring new value to the market.

This section presents a number of innovative production technologies that can be adopted by rural economy SMEs, seeking to improve their productivity and stimulate the creation of new products. The main attributes and benefits of the following technologies are briefly described.

- Organic farming
- Renewable energy resources
- Precision farming
- Crop resistance systems
- Novel crops
- Functional foods





#### **Organic farming**

Organic farming is defined as a farming system seeking sustainability, enhancement of soil fertility and biological diversity while, avoiding synthetic pesticides, antibiotics, synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, and growth hormones.

As one of the most reasonable alternative agricultural system, organic farming may be the answer to improving the crop quality and to facing the challenges of climate change. Amongst other advantages, organic techniques and machinery are able to reduce weed burdens and stimulate crop growth. Organic farming is becoming increasingly popular, currently practiced in 162 countries worldwide. Simultaneously, markets for organic foods have been increasing since the relevant European Union Regulation was enacted in 1991, while sales of organic food and drink has also been rising since 2008.

The benefits that rural SMEs gain from the adoption of organic farming technologies and machinery include:

- Avoidance of pesticides and fertilizers, therefore lower input use and costs
- Improved productivity because of higher resistance to disease, pest and drought, which results
- The possibility to diversify their crops and reduce economic uncertainty.
- Higher prices and revenues as rural SME access the market of premium consumers, who
  recognize organic food as of greater value and are willing to pay premium prices for it.
- Increased exports to reach a larger number of premium consumers in other EU countries, who make informed choices on organic products and their origin.

#### Renewable energy resources

Renewable energy resources, allow the production of energy from resources that are naturally replenished, such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves, and geothermal heat. Some of the most commonly used renewable energy technologies are solar photovoltaic systems, sea water air conditioning, solar air conditioning, and solar water heating.

In recent years, the field of renewable energy resources is continuously experiencing innovation. The invention of new solar thermal storage solutions including molten salt technology that can be integrated in concentrating solar power systems to absorb the heat to make steam for immediate electricity





generation or store it for later use, are such examples. Printable organic solar cells, using semiconducting inks printed directly onto flexible stretchable thin plastic or steel, could also revolutionise photovoltaic solar power generation, reducing the cost of solar cells and performing better in low light conditions.

Benefits for rural economy SMEs from adopting the renewable energy solutions include because:

- Reduced energy costs from renewable energy technologies, generate considerable cost savings.
- Renewable energy technologies have stable operating costs, assisting rural economy SMEs with long-term business planning, in contrast to diesel-based electricity characterised by volatile prices.
- An increasing number of eco-friendly travellers and higher willingness to pay premium prices for sustainable tourism experiences leads to increased revenues for sustainable hotel businesses.
- The use of renewable energy and/or locally developed energy-saving technologies usually help accommodation businesses to increase tourist numbers, who regard rural areas more luxurious than before. This way rural economy SMEs of the tourism sector can improve their competitiveness.
- Adoption of renewable energy technologies help rural economy SMEs to reduce their environmental impact, and comply with relevant EU and national regulatory mandates.

#### **Precision farming**

This farming management system is based on observing, measuring and responding to variability in crops and aims to optimize returns on inputs, while preserving resources. Innovative commercial precision farming techniques include the use of smart-meters (to measure temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, soil temperature, soil moisture, leaf wetness etc.), robotics in dairying, measurement of water usage, egg counting, bird weighing, better control of environment in poultry houses, computerised feed systems, climate control, automated disease detection and growth measurement.

Precision livestock is the use of advanced monitoring technologies in order to optimise the contribution of each animal. Both techniques entail interpretation of the measurements to identify when critical limits are reached, and employ automatic control systems to take corrective measures. When adopting





precision technology, rural SMEs can directly benefit from material savings and improved costeffectiveness and indirectly from the reduction of environmental burden improvements in food safety. It is important to note that even though precision agriculture and technologies exists for the last 20 years in Europe and it is often considered as "technology push" innovation, it is still found in the early adoption stage.

Other advantages from the adoption of precision farming techniques include:

- Savings in pesticide use which can reach 30,000 tonnes (of pesticide) per annum at EU level,
   reducing environmental footprint of farming.
- Using the appropriate combination of technological elements in crop production reduces uncertainty of crop yield and increases reliability of the farmer's income.
- Improved management of fertilizer usage and other inputs which boost SME's competitiveness.
- The employed better matching farming practices with the aid of precision technology result in better quality of crops and livestock products.

#### **Crop Resistance Systems**

Innovative crop protection mechanisms such as integrated pest management systems and biological pest control techniques minimize the use of conventional pesticides and consequently environmental impact. Particularly, integrated pest management (IPM) systems are innovative systems of pest prevention, pest monitoring, and intervention, using a range of pest management tools that help rural SMEs minimise crop losses due to pests and diseases. IPM uses non-chemical methods where possible to minimise effects on the ecosystem.

Certain benefits arise for rural economy SMEs when adoption IPM systems such as:

- <u>Pest related benefits</u>: reduced number of pests and of pesticide applications needed, and reduced occurrence of pest resistance, leading to better crop quality and yield.
- <u>Economic benefits</u>: cost savings associated with using less pesticides and improving production.
   IPM may be more labor intensive than conventional pest control and may require more up front resources. However, costs are generally lower over time because the underlying cause of the pest problem has been addressed.





- <u>Environmental benefits:</u> improved environmental safety and impact, helping rural economy SMEs to comply with European legislation.
- Market benefits derived from the access of early adopters of IPM systems to specific markets segments characterized by strict environmental requirements.
- <u>Health benefits</u>: related to reduced incidents of allergies and asthma, due to the decreased use of conventional pesticides and number of pesticides' applications.

#### **Novel crops**

Novel crops are defined as a range of unusual crops such as oil crops, fibre crops and biomass crops, that can be grown for specific end markets, such as fibre production, dietary supplements, plastics, pharmaceutical and energy industries. These are crops are used to produce a wide variety of products, by generating heat and electricity, or by producing transport biofuels.

Some non-food crop uses such as textiles are widely known amongst the actors concerned, although others may be less familiar such as plastics made from starch-based polymers. The long-term vision of novel crops is that a significant proportion of demand for energy and raw materials should be met through the commercial exploitation of science from crops, in a way that stimulates innovation and the rural economy, enhances biodiversity, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and waste, and slows depletion of natural resources.

Rural economy SMEs can benefit from cultivating novel crops as:

- Novel crops can generate new business opportunities in rural areas, providing additional diversity and innovation beyond agriculture. For example, growing energy crops to produce biomass or biofuel gives farmers the opportunity to diversify, and access many different industries and markets as a supplier.
- Although gross margins depend on the end price for the crop, which can be unstable, it is usually
  higher than conventional alternatives. Specifically, gross margins for the novel crops in the UK
  range from around £100/ha to over £600/ha.
- Production of innovative, higher value added products, which meet more consumer needs, can improve SMEs' competitiveness, while reducing energy use, pollution and waste.





• The whole industry's economic competitiveness can be improved due to the access to new markets and production of new products by SMEs specializing in novel crops.

#### **Functional foods**

Functional foods are foods, which are given an additional function usually related to health-promotion or disease prevention, by adding new ingredients or more of existing ingredients. Functional foods include essential nutrients (also called nutraceuticals) are derived from natural foods and can be added to other foods to impact specific health benefits. Some examples include probiotics (microorganisms that provide digestive benefits), omega-3 (fish oil) extracts, and phytonutrients found in plants, such as soy beans, blueberries or grapes.

In the EU there are at least 168 companies active in the field of functional foods, aggregating to a market value of approximately 8 billion Euros [33]. Growth in the market is greatly driven by the advances in food and medical science as well as changing consumer demand and demographics. The industry is well positioned to respond to emerging healthcare trends, including personalized medicine and greater incentives to reduce medical costs. Although cost effectiveness of functional foods in reducing disease burden and lost productivity is currently an important research gap, the popularity of functional foods is increasing and the effect on the food industry is evident.

Rural economy SMEs producing functional foods can benefit from this fasting growing and innovative industry, enhancing their competitiveness due to two main reasons:

- Consumers are becoming increasingly health conscious and therefore willing to pay premium
  prices for functional food. Although these products typically require greater initial R&D and
  ingredient costs, price premiums may reach 30 percent or higher, depending on the product.
- On average functional foods are estimated to have a 25 percent profit margin, which is well beyond the percentages that food companies make on many conventional food products.





#### 5.2 Factors influencing the adoption of innovation for rural SMEs

This section presents the main findings and conclusions drawn from the survey conducted with SMEs representatives (in the context of INNOGROW Activity 1.4), regarding the factors that influence the factors that influence SMEs in rural areas to invest in new technologies and get involved in new collaborative models.

Further research was carried out in order to validate the findings of the survey (in terms that they comply with relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks) and to gain more insights on the determinants of innovation adoption. Relevant information/evidence were retrieved from secondary sources of information such as academic publications, web portals of agencies or/and bodies responsible for the promotion of innovation in rural areas, business reports as well as the outcomes of similar research conducted in the context of other EU projects.

#### 5.2.1 Needs and Objectives

Rural SME's engage in innovation and innovative products development to achieve certain needs and objectives. The most pronounced motivations for rural economy SMEs behind the adoption of innovation include: "Responding to competition and to increasing consumer satisfaction and needs", "Gaining access to new markets", and "Expansion and identified market opportunity on a local, national and international level in order to reduce production costs and increase their profitability and revenue."

Through their innovative procedures, rural SMEs also intent to positively contribute to the protection of environmental impact and to improve resource efficiency. The reduction of long-run production costs and the meeting of legislative or policy changes is another possible motivation. Finally increase control, risk sharing and personal interest in new technologies are secondary objectives when rural SME's decide to adopt innovative methods of production.

#### 5.2.2 Barriers and Challenges to innovation

Evidence shows that rural economy SMEs experience certain limitations to engage in innovation, having for instance difficulty in accessing funding, lacking sufficiently qualified personnel in-house, and/or receiving limited support from regional authorities that could enable them to market new products or processes.





The factors that can be identified as "the most pronounced barriers to innovation" are those related to funding, regulation and uncertainty over business benefits. Evidence shows that rural economy SMEs face difficulties in accessing funding, lack sufficiently qualified personnel in-house or receive limited support from regional authorities.

In particular, the "Lack of own financial resources" and "Difficulty in accessing funding from external sources" are found to be the most constraining factors for an organisation considering to invest in innovation. This is particularly true considering that innovation is a highly costly procedure.

The difficulty to integrate new technologies into business processes, as well as the limited internal know-how, also constitute potential hurdles that rural economy SMEs are likely to face when attempting to adopt innovative product development.

Other barriers to innovation and innovative products development are the following:

- Uncertainty over business benefits and high risk
- Lack of internal research and technological capabilities
- Lack of expertise and/or skills of existing employees
- Lack of appropriate external advice
- Inability to hire new employees with relevant skills
- Unavailability or inadequate existence of technological infrastructures
- Weaknesses in networking and cooperation with the innovation stakeholders
- Accountability/ management problems
- Cultural and traditional issues such as a negative attitude towards technology
- High innovative costs
- Uncertain demand for the newly developed products lack of customer demand
- Time commitments and limitations
- Product differentiation, gain market share and ensure a leading position in the specific industry
- Unfavourable perception of competitiveness of renewable energy options compared to diesel power generation, due to the limited range of use and a potentially challenging integration with the existing electricity grid.





- Limited access of rural economy SMEs to capital and cost of financing, as an upfront capital cost is required for investing in renewable energy technologies.
- Barriers related to the ownership status and the different interests of the managing company and the owners of many hotels, who are usually separate entities. Specifically, there is difficulty in motivating the owners to invest in the development of renewable energy solutions, as the energy bill is paid by the managing company, who would be the one benefitting from the energy costs savings. On the other hand, the managing company might consider more convenient to pay for a service instead of investing in infrastructure, which carries an upfront capital cost.
- Lack of technical capabilities necessary to install and manage renewable energy technologies in tourism facilities. Therefore, the installations performed by unskilled personnel may lead to under-performance and failure of technologies, leading to misperception of the real benefits by hotel owners.
- Inadequate capacity building programs, creating a gap between demand and supply of the skills needed.
- Lack of incentives and clear policy instruments, such as introduction of feed-in tariffs or tax rebates, and preferential loan terms for the purchase of renewable energy technologies, to increase technology competitiveness and lower upfront investment costs.
- Lack of dedicated institutional bodies such as coordinating agencies for renewable energy deployment, and international and regional cooperation mechanisms to overcome technical and institutional capacity barriers.

#### 5.2.3 Drivers and Enablers

Innovation is a key enabler for rural SMEs' growth and competitiveness across the EU. Regarding the key enablers of business innovation, the survey results indicate three categories of drivers of innovation, namely: a) internal capacity and capability (e.g. availability of existing technological infrastructures, internal capital, employees with relevant skills), b) market structure (e.g. market potential, collaboration with other business actors across the supply chain, availability of business support) and c) the external environment (e.g. favourable regulatory framework, external funding).

The adoption of innovative technologies and procedures is primarily encouraged when there exists a favourable regulatory framework, which is further supported by internal capital and private or external





funding opportunities (from banks, investors, venture capital or national funding programmes). Such a framework is crucial in order to generate and speed the diffusion of new technologies and accelerate the reallocation of resources to innovation-driven firms and industries.

Additionally, a suitably skilled workforce is a key prerequisite for the adoption of innovation. It is important that employees develop and learn new production techniques and have adequate skills to be able to make efficient use of new technological methods and processes; which according to the survey results constitutes the second most influential factor when encouraging rural SMEs innovation. Other factors encouraging the adoption of innovation include the market potential, collaboration possibilities with other businesses across the supply chain, as well as the availability of external support such as technology vendors and prior experience with new technology implementation is also a potential enabler to innovation.





#### 5.3 Business support services for new products development

This section provides regional authorities with recommendations and guidelines on how to create a favourable framework to promote the diffusion of innovation among rural economy SMEs, whilst stimulating the production of new products, by providing financial and legal incentives and delivering business support and advisory services.

The anticipated impact for rural SMEs from the adoption of innovative technologies and/ or participating in innovative collaboration networks is also examined within the scope of the previously mentioned survey. The results indicate that through innovation, amongst other factors, SMEs primarily intend to expand their customer base, gain access to new national or international markets and increase their operational efficiency.

In order to achieve these goals, public authorities should undertake initiatives and actions to create a stimulating environment for rural SME's that will allow them to adopt innovative technologies and to invest in new products development. Such interventions should be focused assisting rural SMEs to overcome the existing barriers and challenges, thus encouraging the adoption of innovative technologies which in turn will improve their competitiveness and productivity.

#### Support for patents use

The establishment of a patent is an essential part of the process of innovation and has to be carried out before the product goes into production. A patent is defined as exclusive right given by law to inventors to make use of, and exploit, their inventions for a limited period of time. Particularly for the rural economy SMEs support from the public authorities through the implementation of various measures, in order to establish sustain the industrial foundations is essential for the driving force of the regional economies. Regional authorities may support rural SMEs in this process by the following methods:

**Organization of explanatory meetings and seminars**- specifically designed for corporate managers and R&D developers, which will introduce issues on intellectual property rights, as well as strategic acquisition of intellectual property rights that will meet particular regional needs.

Workshops and consultation services on industrial property rights – individually accustomed sessions by experts for guidance on specific issues related to intellectual property rights and patent use.





Additionally, the dedicated staff can provide assistance regarding the examination of requests, applications and filing processes.

**Support and guidance for Prior Art searches** – public authorities should provide free of charge searches prior to the beginning of the procedure, upon the applicant's request.

#### Other services include:

- Support for examinations and appeals of industrial property applications
- Reduction of fees and costs.

#### **Studies for New Products Commercial Potential**

Targeted market research and studies for new products development in the global markets and the international competitive landscape, is essential in order to understand consumer behaviour, preferences as well as the market opportunities of a particular industry. Doing so jointly, with the support/cooperation of public authorities and/or other SMEs specialising in related products or technologies and their market potential commercial will be beneficial for all players, ensuring the following: a) costs are kept to a minimum, b) uncertainty is limited and c) products' commercial potential is maximised. Identifying the potential of a new technology is vital for determining and implementing successful commercialization strategies.

#### Feasibility assessments for new technologies

Feasibility assessments are costly, however they determine the potential economic viability of a process or technology and therefore constitute a crucial step before its introduction in the production process and innovation. Feasibility studies aid to identify if the technology is well suited for the particular process and thus limits economic inefficiencies, eliminates the possibility of incompatibility but also verifies the safely introduction in the work place.

The main types of feasibility assessments for new technologies, which should be carried out prior to the introduction of the new technological process should include the following:

**Technical feasibility:** Do rural economy SMEs have the technical resources required for the implementation of a particular technology?





**Economic feasibility:** Does the SME have the financial capacity required to install the technology and machinery?

**Schedule feasibility:** Will the technology allow for the completion of the product in the required time limits?

**Operational feasibility:** Is the technology compatible with the product production, requirements and objectives? Are there the necessary resources to ensure the efficient operation and maintenance of the technology in the long-run?

**Legal and ethical feasibility:** Is the technology in line with the national laws and regulations or are there any specific certifications which have to be obtained prior to its use?

When investing in new Products Development, there are usually high risks and uncertainty involved in the process. Other recommendations for rural SMEs New Product Development include:

- Adoption of policies which will further encourage efficient cooperation between public authorities and rural SMEs and enhance financial support by introducing national or EU funding programs, on a regional, national and European level.
- Introduction of educational programmes will help workers develop the required skills and facilitate the introduction and integration of new, more advanced technologies/techniques in the work place.
- The use of best practices and elimination/tackling of barriers to entry, particularly through specialized training and education of existing/new employees. Regional authorities can provide such training on a regional or national level.
- Promotion and a suitable marketing strategy for the new product launch.
- Simplification of legal issues and bureaucratic procedures.
- Testing and piloting of the product before launching stage.

Some of the most common issues enterprises are facing when considering to invest in New Product Development are briefly described below:





- Product differentiation: Does the product solve a current problem (ex. inconvenience, inefficiency) or introduce a new product/ idea to the market, responding to current consumer trends and needs? The product should be customer-centric focused, targeting a niche market and therefore will it succeed in gaining market share.
- Obtaining a Competitive advantage: in terms of quality, time or cost, in order to gain market share
- Ability to respond to the market size, standards and requirements, in an existing competitive environment
- Lengthy and time consuming procedures in order to research and understand the particular market structure, competition and international landscape. Technology is progressing at a fast rate and therefore enterprises should ensure that they are up-to-date.
- Challenging to acquire the required specialized capital (technology and financial) and skilled labour for the production process
- Protection of initial idea and intellectual property rights





#### 5.4 Best evidence from actual implementation

This section presents 3 best practices of European rural SMEs that have adopted innovative techniques and technologies to deliver new products in the market. The purpose of this section is to provide best evidence from actual implementation, paving the way to similar establishments to engage in R&D activities and stimulate the production of innovative products. For each case the situation/objectives, solution, main encountered difficulties and main achievements are presented.

#### 5.4.1 PROMIX - EKOL Auxiliary plant protection product



**Proxim s.r.o** is a limited liability company in the **Czech Republic**, operating in the industry of chemical products manufacturing. For the last 20 years, Proxim manufactures and distributes chemicals for garden, household and industrial use. The company's priorities are reliability, quality and business partnership, which regularly result in the introduction of new products in the market and innovations in its production and packaging.

Situation/Objectives: Proxim s.r.o aims to improve its market position and customers' perception and to advance its current position in the market to become the most reliable manufacturer and seller of high-quality and affordable chemicals. In 2012 the company identified the opportunity to access the agriculture market, providing plant protection products that comply with the principles of integrated and organic farming. The idea resulted from the managers' interest in innovative products in crop resistance systems as an attempt to better satisfy their customers' needs, who are increasingly interested and looking for environmentally-friendly plant protection products against pests.

**Solution:** Proxim developed the EKOL Auxiliary plant protection product in 2012. EKOL is an adjuvant used to increase the effectiveness of insecticide spray against overwintering pests on fruit plants. EKOL was nationally approved for use in integrated production and organic farming, as an auxiliary agent, water soluble, containing 90% rapeseed oil and ethoxylated fatty acids. The EKOL product is now an approved and registered product to be used not only for fruit plants, but also for ornamental wood and vine to protect them from overwintering pests. The availability of internal capital from the firm and its





owners, the well-identified need in the market, and the close collaboration with other businesses in the sector were important factors for success of the product in the market.

**Difficulties:** The main barrier encountered during the development of the innovative product was the difficulty and time needed to hire employees with the appropriate skills. Being specialized in treatment of water pool and pond water, existing employees did not have adequate expertise in the agriculture sector, plants protection and crop resistance.

Main achievements/impact: The development of the EKOL product allowed Proxim to access a new market, that of organic agriculture, increasing its competitiveness and the number of customers. Positive impact was also noticed on the firm's productivity, as well as on the products' overall quality.

#### 5.4.2 Ahiflower



Ahiflower is a new novel crop that has been approved by the UK and the US, which aims to increase profitability and revenue, and to respond to the competition in the industry.

**Situation/Objectives:** UK farmland biodiversity has been continually declining for the past 4 decades. Research is implemented by agricultural R&D institutes aiming at producing innovative weeds that can become commercial and viable crops, since pollinator-friendly crops can contribute to improved farmland biodiversity in the soil and the sky at a regional level and to the productivity and revenues of rural SMEs. Farmers in certain rural areas in the UK are interested in investing in novel crops to increase their profitability and revenue, and to respond to the competition in the industry. In Lincolnshire specifically and therefore farmers are looking for novel crops which don't require the acquisition of special equipment or skills, and that can be tested at a small scale first in coexistence with their existing crops. Farmers are more willing to take the risk to invest in novel crops that have health benefits for consumers, as their market potential is higher.

**Solution:** the Ahiflower has been approved and as a result this novel food is entering the global market of dietary supplements, since it is a member of the borage family and has high levels of omega-3- fatty acids. Ahiflower is added to functional foods, like salad dressing or omega boosts for smoothies, and it is





used as a supplement. Ahiflower is also vegan, plant-sourced, sustainable and traceable to the fields in which it is grown, at least in the UK. The market potential and opportunity if big, and farmers can easily invest in this crop variety as it doesn't require any specific equipment or skills.

**Difficulties:** the Ahiflower crops can be grown only on selected pieces of land in the UK. The company responsible for the research and invention of Ahiflower (Natures Crops International) follows a proprietary process of identity preservation named Crop Assured 365®, in order to guarantee the quality of products, ensuring against co-mingling through segregation, isolation and containment of genetic material, and to make Ahiflower products 100% traceable. Thus consultation, research, information, and collaboration with other businesses in the field are required, before deciding to invest in this novel crop.

Main achievements: for farmers the main benefit from investing in Ahiflower crops is that they report higher on-farm revenues per hectare due to higher prices and consequently an improved level of income as well as a minor positive impact on productivity and competitiveness. Furthermore, the Ahiflower requires less land and less water than flax to deliver the healthy omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, improving the SME's resource efficiency, and having a positive impact on soil erosion. Being a sustainable crop favoring green farming, Ahiflower can be planted without herbicides' use. Finally, the crop is easy to cultivate and does not require a high level of skills and knowledge.

## 5.4.3 Baltic Dairy Board Ltd. - Ingredients for functional foods



Baltic Dairy Board, is Latvian family-owned company, first established in 2008. From 2008 to 2015, the company was engaged in logistics of raw milk and purchase and distribution of other dairy products. In 2015, the company opened a new factory of whey / milk protein and products of high added value in Bauska. The factory is one of the largest milk / whey protein producers in Northern Europe and produces around 8,000 tons of protein powder a year.

**Situation/Objectives:** The company produces non-traditional and innovative milk, whey, lactose products, and milk and whey proteins. It is also involved in an industrial project related to Whey Bioconversion into Ethanol and By-product Processing with the aim to integrate a zero-waste process for





the production of sweet and sour whey, improving its resource efficiency and environmental impact. Baltic Dairy Board decided to enter new markets and especially the emerging market of functional foods in order to increase profitability. This goal was derived from the owner's personal interest in the industry and the increasing demand from the supply chain partners for ingredients suitable for functional foods.

**Solution:** To achieve its goal, the Baltic Dairy Board was involved in the research, development and implementation of the production and sale of new milk / whey ingredients with less fat, through the integration of a controlled enzymatic hydrolysis process for obtaining high-quality whey and milk protein hydro lysate. A modern sewage treatment system was built in the company's facilities, which includes a full cycle of production of whey and milk ingredients for dairy products, including a wastewater treatment system. The laboratory staff works with the latest milk analyser FOSS MilkoScanTM FT2 to provide chemical analysis of raw ingredients, intermediate products and end products. The chemical analysis determines the amount of fat, protein, solids and lactose in the contents of the product. The integration of the technology was supported by public funding through an ERDF-funded project, as well as by external funding from banks, investors and venture capital. Private funding was also required to finish the project. Collaboration with technology experts and business consultants in the field was essential to achieve the company's vision, i.e. become an example in the dairy industry.

**Difficulties:** The most important minor obstacle which was encountered during the adoption of the new technology was the limited legal clarity regarding functional foods in Latvia and the controversial interest from stakeholders on functional foods. Additionally, initial funding was also difficult to find as well as the improving the skills of the involved employees was challenging.

**Achievements:** Entering the industry of functional foods and providing ingredients to major dairies, the Baltic Dairy Board managed to increase its competitiveness and productivity.

Production costs fell and the new enzymatic hydrolysis process adopted improved the quality of products. This resulted in the company increased its prices, the number of customers, the number of employees, as well as it improved the skills and productivity of the involved employees. Baltic Dairy Board also experienced an increase in its exports, improving the level of income. Finally, through the production of less fat products and ingredients for dairy products, the company positively contributed to its customers' health status.

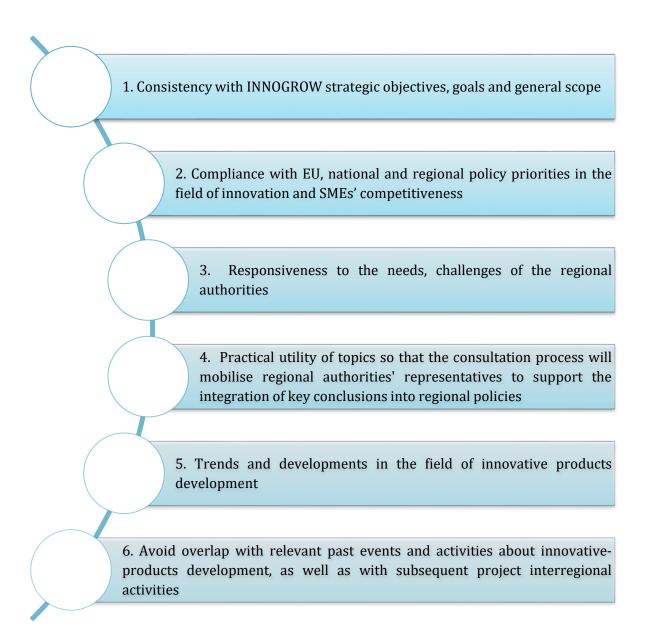




## 6 Topics to be discussed in the workshop

#### 6.1 Topic selection criteria

The following criteria will be considered for the identification of the most relevant and up-to-date topics for the "Interregional workshop on stimulating new products development" for rural economy SMEs.







#### **6.2** Suggested topics

This section will present an overview of the innovative products technologies and the ways that they can contribute to increase rural economy SMEs' efficiency, productivity and competitiveness.

#### Thematic area A: Overview of Innovative production technologies

#### **Indicative discussion topics:**

- Demonstrating how innovative production technologies can lead to the development of highquality products
- 2. Insights from actual implementation: Presenting the case of the Baltic Dairy Board

#### Thematic Area B: Diffusing the adoption of innovation among rural SMEs

This thematic area will inform regional authorities' representatives about the needs and challenges encountered by rural SMEs (e.g. regulatory conditions, skills, financial resources, lack of information and business/innovation support), setting the ground for relevant initiatives and policy measures.

#### **Indicative discussion topics:**

- 1. Enhancing the research and innovation capacities of rural SMEs by helping to create synergies with other research institutions (open innovation)
- 2. Creating a framework with funding and legal incentives to promote innovation adoption
- 3. Public private partnerships to accelerate investments in R&D activities

#### Thematic Area C: Business support services for new products development

This thematic session is expected to provide practical insights into how public authorities can significantly contribute to the creation of an enabling environment (through the delivery of business support and advisory services) that will prompt rural SMEs to engage in R&D activities, fostering new products development.





#### **Indicative discussion topics:**

- 1. Support for patents use through:
  - The organization of explanatory meetings and seminars
  - Workshops and consultation services on industrial property rights
  - Continuous support and guidance prior to and during the application process
- 2. Carrying out feasibility assessments for new technologies
- 3. Highlighting the importance of studies and market research regarding New Products Commercial Potential





## 7 Organisational issues of the 2<sup>nd</sup> INNOGROW interregional workshop

#### 7.1 Date and place of the Workshop

Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency will host the interregional workshop on stimulating innovative products development in the city of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. The interregional thematic workshop will last two days (6-7 June 2017) and the steering group meeting which is scheduled to hosted by SZREDA too, on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of June. All project partners will participate, with members of their stakeholder groups and external experts. The working language of the workshop will be English, which means that participants must have a sufficient knowledge of the language to be able to fully participate in the hands-on activities.

**Table 2: Interregional workshop details** 

INNOGROW - Interregional workshop stimulating innovative products development			
Thematic focus	Innovative products development		
Host organisation	Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency		
Date	6-7 June 2017		
Venue			
Language	English		
Number of participants	20-30 participants		
Type of participants	Regional authorities' officials, stakeholders, external experts		
Format	Presentations, discussions, study visit		
Contact details	Venelin Dobrev E-mail: office@szeda.eu Telephone: .: <u>+359 42 605007</u>		





#### 7.2 Partners and other participants

The INNOGROW Application Form (AF) foresees that 2 representatives from partners' organisations, accompanied by 1 regional stakeholder / external expert can participate in the second interregional thematic workshop.

ANNEX A provides a list of key regional stakeholders per project partner as they appear in the Application Form. This is only an indicative pool of regional stakeholders identified at an initial stage. Project partners are advised to send invitations to any other organisation or body, involved in the decision making process and/or interested in triggering policy and behavioural changes towards innovative products development.

#### 7.3 Type of session formats

The workshop will include three different types of activities to facilitate the transfer/exchange of knowledge and capacity building among regional authorities' representatives; namely: a) presentations, b) round table discussions and c) study visits. Presentations will provide an opportunity for gaining an overview of the existing policy measures towards innovation-driven business development and new products development. Round table discussions will allow participants to discuss the issues under examination in-depth and interact with each other, promoting networking and equal participation/contribution, triggering spontaneous conversations and allowing for faster decisions. Finally, study visits include presentations and local visits to rural economy SMEs that have successfully launched innovative new products, seeking to provide participants with best practice evidence and inspiration.





## 7.4 Draft Agenda

"Interregional workshop on stimulating innovative products development"

## Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

#### 6-7 June 2017

## DAY 1: TUESDAY, 6 JUNE 2017

Time/ Duration	Description
09:30 - 10:00	Arrivals and registration
10:00 - 10:15	Opening speech
10:15 – 10:30	Objectives of the workshop / Overview of the agenda
10:30 - 13:00	Thematic area 1: Overview of Innovative Production Technologies
	Indicative topics
	<ul> <li>Demonstrating how innovative production technologies can lead to the development of high-quality products</li> </ul>
	Insights from actual implementation: Presenting the case of the Baltic Dairy Board
	<ul> <li>Presentation of thematic area 1 (30 minutes)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Questions of attendees on speaker's speech (10 minutes)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Answering the attendees' questions (10 minutes)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Interactive session (roundtable discussion): Participants will be split into small groups to discuss specific topics or issues raised during the presentation (45 minutes)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Wrap up: The main conclusions and findings from the interactive session will be presented</li> <li>(25 minutes)</li> </ul>
	Short break after the oral presentation
13:00 – 14:00	Networking launch
14:00 – 15:30	Thematic area 2: Diffusing the adoption of innovation among rural SMEs
	Indicative topics
	<ul> <li>Enhancing the research and innovation capacities of rural SMEs by helping to create synergies with other research institutions (open innovation)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Creating a framework with funding and legal incentives to promote innovation adoption</li> <li>Public – private partnerships to accelerate investments in R&amp;D activities</li> </ul>





	discuss specific topics or issues raised during the presentation (45 minutes)  — Wrap up: The main conclusions and findings from the interactive session will be presented (25 minutes)
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 – 17:30	Discussion on project activities / Wrap - up

#### DAY 2: WEDNESDAY, 7 JUNE 2017

Time/ Duration	Description		
09:30 - 11:00	Thematic area 3: Business support services for new products development  Indicative topics  Support for patents use Carrying out feasibility assessments for new technologies Highlighting the importance of studies and market research regarding New Products Commercial Potential		
	<ul> <li>Presentation of thematic area 3 (30 minutes)</li> <li>Questions of attendees on speaker's speech (10 minutes)</li> <li>Answering the attendees' questions (10 minutes)</li> <li>Interactive session (roundtable discussion): Participants will be split into small groups to discuss specific topics or issues raised during the presentation (45 minutes)</li> <li>Wrap up: The main conclusions and findings from the interactive session will be presented (25 minutes)</li> </ul>		
11:30 – 12:00	Coffee Break		
12:00 – 14:00	Study Visit		
14:00 - 15:00	Networking launch		

<sup>\*</sup> The topics to be discussed during the workshop are presented (in the form of recommendations) in section 6.3. The host organisation can choose more than one topics from each thematic area to present in the workshop.





## 8 Preparing the summary report

The final stage of the 2<sup>nd</sup> interregional thematic workshop includes the preparation of a summary report by the hosting partner. This document will present the final outcomes of the workshop and will be used by project partners as the main input for diffusing the lessons learned within and across their organisations.

Summary reports are short written communication documents, which aim to convey information related to the discussions and activities carried out during workshop activities. The summary report should include the following aspects:

- Document the interventions of participants and the overall discussion within each session of the interregional thematic workshop.
- Draw conclusions from debate and workshop activities (e.g. study visits)
- Briefly present policy recommendations for the development of action plans based on the interventions of the participants and the conclusions drawn from the discussion.
- Present the metrics of the workshop (number of registered participants, number of completed evaluation questionnaires, and number of participants from each category of the target groups).

The summary report should be drafted as follows:

**Step 1:** Develop short summaries for each session of the workshop. The summaries should include a) the context and objectives of the session, b) the main points from oral presentations/keynote speeches, c) key argumentation from the interventions of participants, and d) conclusions and findings extracted from the overall discussion and interactive exercises.

**Step 2:** Review the evaluation forms (if available). The author should summarise the key ideas (as drawn from the forms completed by workshop participants), with regards to the themes / topics of the workshop. It is highly recommended that any idea (i.e. policy advice) that could contribute to the improvement of regional policies in the field (i.e. establishment of innovation support services for rural economy SMEs) should be integrated into regional action plans.

**Step 3:** Present the main conclusions with regards to the following themes:





- Evaluating the impact of innovative technologies on SMEs competitiveness and productivity.
- Recognising the challenges/barriers hindering the adoption of new, disruptive technologies by rural SMEs.
- Recommendations for the creation of an enabling environment for new products development.

  Presentations of case studies by project partners

**Step 4:** Juxtapose the key arguments / conclusions drawn from the workshop with any relevant results and findings from INNOGROW thematic studies and guides on similar policy aspects. Identify convergences and divergences between findings.

**Step 5:** Provide guidelines (in the form of policy recommendations) on how to utilise the key conclusions drawn to design policy measures and action plans to promote innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural SMEs. The guidelines on how to integrate the lessons learnt in the INNOGROW action plans should be described in a way that is simple, brief, and easy to follow.

**Step 6:** Draft the summary report. The workshop summary report should be drafted in a clear and concise way, focusing on the conclusions drawn from knowledge sharing and consultation processes that took place during the workshop sessions.





Indicatively, the workshop summary report can have the **following structure**:

Introduction
 Background and objectives of the workshop
 Summary of sessions
 Key discussion points
 Main conclusions
 Juxtaposition with key findings from project activities
 Policy recommendations
 ANNEX A: Agenda
 ANNEX B: Participants list
 ANNEX C: Evaluation of the workshop





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# 10 ANNEX A: Regional stakeholders per project partner

PARTNER	COUNTRY	KEY REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
RoT	≝	<ul> <li>Ministry of Economy, Infrastructure, Maritime Affairs and Tourism</li> <li>Regional Association of Municipalities of Thessaly</li> <li>University of Thessaly, Department of Regional Development</li> <li>University of Applied Sciences of Thessaly</li> <li>Association of Thessalian Enterprises and Industries</li> <li>Technical Chamber of Central and Western Greece</li> </ul>
FLA		<ul> <li>Lombardy Region</li> <li>Sondrio Province</li> <li>ISPRA Institute</li> <li>ERSAF – Regional Agency for Agricultural and Forest Services</li> <li>Politecnico di Milano</li> <li>Università degli Studi di Milano</li> <li>Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca</li> <li>Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore</li> <li>CRASL – Centro di Ricerca sull'Ambiente, l'energia e lo sviluppo sostenibile</li> <li>CNR, JRC, ARPA</li> <li>Milan Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>A.R.I.B.L</li> <li>AIEL – The Italian Agroenergy Association</li> </ul>
ZPR	=	<ul> <li>Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia</li> <li>Latvia University of Agriculture</li> <li>Union Farmers Parliament</li> <li>Rural consulting and education centre of Latvia</li> <li>Rural support service</li> </ul>
SZREDA		<ul> <li>Ministry of Economy Economic</li> <li>Promotion Policies Directorate</li> <li>Stara Zagora Regional Administration</li> <li>Municipality of Stara Zagora</li> <li>Municipality of Kazanlak</li> <li>Municipality of Gurkovo</li> <li>Municipality of Nikolaevo</li> <li>Municipality of Gurkovo</li> <li>Municipality of Opan</li> <li>Municipality of Radnevo</li> <li>Municipality of Bratya Daskalovi</li> <li>Faculty of Economics, Trakia University</li> <li>Faculty of Agriculture, Trakia University</li> <li>Chamber of commerce and industry – Stara Zagora</li> <li>Bulagro Group Holding Agroconsult Ltd.</li> <li>First Investment Bank</li> <li>United Bulgarian Bank</li> </ul>





	- Somoni Financial Group
RRAPK	<ul> <li>Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic</li> <li>Pardubice Region</li> <li>University Pardubice</li> <li>Regional Chamber of Commerce of the Pardubice Region</li> <li>Agrarian Chamber of the Pardubice Region</li> <li>Energy Technical</li> <li>Innovation Cluster</li> </ul>
CoC-Molise	<ul> <li>Molise region</li> <li>Unioncamere</li> <li>Università degli Studi del Molise</li> <li>Sviluppo Italia Molise</li> <li>Finmolise</li> <li>360° Olive Cluster, Compagnia del Molise Cluster</li> <li>Pignatelli Oil, Valerio Wines, Di Nucci Dairy, Cheese factory, Le IFE Truffle</li> </ul>
BSC Kranj	<ul> <li>Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Directorate for Entrepreneurship, Competitiveness and Technology</li> <li>Slovenian Centre for Competitiveness and Innovation (SCCI)</li> <li>The Slovenian Rural Network, national support unit (NSU)</li> <li>Competence Center for Biotechnological Development and Innovation (CCBDI)</li> <li>Biotechnical centre Naklo</li> <li>Intercompany education and training centre (MIC)</li> <li>Centre for Sustainable Rural Development Kranj</li> <li>Initiative Start:up Slovenia</li> <li>Agro Biznis</li> <li>Agro Gorenjska</li> <li>Datalab</li> <li>The Slovene Enterprise Fund</li> <li>The Slovenian Regional Development fund</li> <li>SID Bank Inc.</li> </ul>
PANOV	<ul> <li>Ministry for National Economy / Deputy State Secretariat</li> <li>of Economic Development Programmes</li> <li>The National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NRDI Office)</li> <li>Local Government of County Vas, and Győr MosonSopron</li> <li>University of West Hungary,</li> <li>Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences</li> <li>University of Pannonia Georgikon Faculty</li> <li>Pannon Novum Regional Innovation Agency</li> <li>Chamber of Commerce and Industry of County</li> <li>Chamber of Commerce and Industry of County Vas</li> <li>Zala County Foundation for Enterprise Promotion</li> </ul>





# 11 ANNEX B: Participation List

INNOGROW project workshop, Stara Zagora – List of participants INNOGRO				
#	Full Name	Organisation	e-mail	
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