



**AgriFoodResults**

*European Initiative for a better use of results of agri-food research*

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# Final recommendations report

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Project coordinator **ACTIA**

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AgriFoodResults aims at improving the dissemination of food research projects. The project runs from May 2009 to May 2011, it involves sixteen partners and is coordinated by ACTIA (Association de Coordination Technique pour l'Industrie Agro Alimentaire, France). More information on the project can be found at <http://www.agrifoodresults.eu>.



## ***INTRODUCTION: Dissemination as a key factor for a successful exploitation of research results in the food sector***

**The European food sector is facing several challenges for its future development:** To supply safe and cheap food, in sufficient quantity, in the context of a growing world population; to provide healthy food that answers consumer demand and addresses public health concerns, and to reduce its impact on the environment while increasing its competitiveness. In other words, the food sector needs to answer the societal and consumer demand for safe, healthy and sustainable food while continuing to provide jobs for more than 4 million people across Europe.

**Innovation is becoming a key factor for successful development of the sector:** to answer these challenges, more and better innovation is required. The food sector has certain characteristics that make innovation more challenging than in other sectors. One of these characteristics is the importance of small businesses: among the 310 000 companies involved in food and drink production, more than 90% are Small and Medium Size enterprises (SMEs). Compared to other sectors, such as automotive, ICT or health, innovation is much more incremental and there are fewer connections between the research performers and the users of research results.

**The project *AgriFoodResults* has been developed against this background:** taking into account the specificities of the food sector, the ambition of the project is to boost innovation by ensuring better use of the results of agri-food research. Enhancing the use of research results requires the improvement of dissemination practices in food research projects.

***AgriFoodResults* was one of the first projects supported by DG Research focusing on dissemination in the food sector:** as a “pioneer project”, several issues related to scientific communication have been covered: the study of current practices (through a survey on dissemination activities in FP6 and FP7 projects), capacity development (through the preparation of guidelines and the delivery of training), the development of innovative communication tools (wiki website, web 3D) and the study of best practice for the food sector (through a study on the cost-effectiveness of dissemination activities).

**The specificity of each target audience has been taken into account.** Dissemination is an interactive matching process that requires the improvement of capability and willingness to tell and to listen. Communication is a two-way process of giving and receiving information through a number of channels, for example, via publications, face-to-face meetings, emails or websites. When researchers communicate their scientific results, it is crucial that they do it in a way that enables the person or target group addressed to understand their messages. The following target groups have been considered in *AgriFoodResults*: (1) the industry and in particular SMEs, (2) policy makers, and (3) consumers.

This document gathers the key messages as well as recommendations that should be considered to achieve success in communicating results from research projects in the food sector. More information can be found at <http://www.agrifoodresults.eu>.



## 1. ***THE PRESENT SITUATION: COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN FP6 and FP7 AGRIFOOD RESEARCH PROJECTS***

The AgriFoodResults survey on dissemination practices identified which activities have been implemented in FP6 & FP7 agrifood research projects. The results from 49 projects (differentiated in large projects (LP) and small projects (SP)) show that:

- FP6&7 research projects are primarily targeted to the scientific community.** According to the respondents, the most important users of the project results are: researchers (35% of the projects), policy makers (30%), food industry (28%) and consumers (7%).
- Few specialists in communication are involved in FP projects.** Besides the requirement to have a work package dedicated to dissemination, there is a lack of professionalism; half of the projects interviewed do not employ a specialist in communication and do not design a dissemination strategy.
- Dissemination activities have been continued after the end of the projects.** According to the survey, 90% of SP and 65% of LP intend to continue dissemination after the end of the project.
- The most common dissemination activities** include the development of websites (100% of the answers), publications of scientific articles in peer review journals, the participation in scientific conferences (all LP and 88% of SP) and the publication of newsletters (84% for SP, 96% for LP).
- Some differences:** Almost all the LP use videos for presenting the results (96%) while less than half (48%) of the SP produced a video. The preparation of leaflets for other audiences such as consumers or policy makers is done by 52 % of LP, whereas the majority of SP (80%) do not develop such leaflets. 80% of the LP but only 30% of the SP have organized or will organize training or workshops for scientists or regulatory bodies. 60% of the LP are organizing workshops (WS) or training sessions (TS), more often than the SP (20% (WS) - 28% (TS)). Overall, the LP reported more activities targeted at food companies than the SP.
- Few activities are targeted at food companies.** Only half of the SP took part in conferences that were dedicated to food industry, whereas around 75% of the LP attended these conferences. Self-organised training for the industry was also seldom (20% for SP, 57% for LP). 40% of the SP and 48% of the LP actively visited food companies.



## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOCUS #1: COMMUNICATION TOWARDS SMEs

Food SMEs are interested in solutions rather than in scientific findings. National and simplified language but accurate and credible messages are essential for success. Face-to-face meetings, including demonstrations, have been proven to work. Use of mediators such as associations or consultants is recommended. Communication towards SMEs is challenging.



#### Key questions:

- Which problem of food SMEs will be solved by the research results?
- What is the impact of the research results on organisation, management, products, services, markets and/or the value chain?
- What is the added value of the research results for food SMEs?

### Specific Principles in Communicating Research Results

The AgriFoodResults “Guide of good practice for communication towards SMEs” identifies three main communication phases in the knowledge transfer process (see below). Following this outline will enhance the likelihood that results are implemented. It is important that researchers who want to communicate their research results to food SMEs know the typical needs of their target audience. SMEs are not uniform in their behaviour therefore different approaches are required for the different groups of food SMEs.

**Communication Phase 1:** Identify your target audience and its motivation for exploring new ideas

- Learn about the needs & working conditions of food SMEs
- How can you reach SMEs?
- How can you convert research results into an applicable format for SMEs?
- How can you build a trusted relationship?

**Communication Phase 2:** Facilitation of knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer involves the processes of capturing, collecting and sharing knowledge. It is important for scientists to adapt and integrate their research into the industrial processes. This is possible when a strong relationship between scientists and food companies has been established and the needs and problems are known.

**Communication Phase 3:** Using knowledge transfer tools

- Upgrade the expertise/knowledge of SME personnel
- How to publish articles in food magazines?
- How to write a successful press release?
- How to measure the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer process?



### ***Further reading: Good Practices for communication towards SMEs***

The guide gives advice on how researchers can communicate their research results in the best way to food SMEs. The focus is on helping researchers to understand how to start, facilitate and succeed in the knowledge transfer process.

The guide starts when research results are already available or at least predictable. The identification, systematic collection, adaption and formulation of research results to suit food SMEs are very important to generate their interest. This will in turn enhance the likelihood of them implementing the results. It is important that researchers who want to communicate their research results to food SMEs know the typical needs of their target audience. SMEs are not uniform in their behaviour. Therefore different approaches are necessary for the different groups of food SMEs.



### **Source**

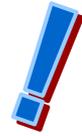
The guide is available on the website [http://www.agrifoodresults.eu/docs/sme\\_guide.pdf](http://www.agrifoodresults.eu/docs/sme_guide.pdf)

The main author is partner Food Processing Initiative (FPI, Germany).



### 3. FOCUS #2: COMMUNICATION TOWARDS POLICY MAKERS

Policy Makers follow their own agenda and so it is important to understand their interests. For research results to be fully exploited they must match the interests of policy makers. It is important to understand the policy process. Arrange face-to-face meetings with the right people to explain your research results and the implication of your research.



#### Key questions:

- Which political or regulation area can be affected by the research?
- Are the research results in compliance with the present and future political and legislative agenda?
- What is the added value of the research results for policy makers?

The objective of communicating research results towards policy makers is to transfer new knowledge, information and impact assessment studies to them which they can use in their policy and legislation formulation, decision making, policy implementation and legislation enforcement. Knowledge transfer to policy makers is a process, which starts at the design phase and continues during the implementation and beyond the end of the research project.

<b>Phase 1</b> <b>“Design”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential applicability and benefits of the expected results must be considered at the design phase of a research project.</li> <li>• Problems and solutions must be identified; could they be in the priorities of policy makers?</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2</b> <b>“Plan”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the research results are already predictable or available a more careful consideration of their practical applicability and benefits for policy makers is necessary.</li> <li>• The messages, the targeted segments of policy makers’ group, the communication channels, the tools used, the timing and the responsibilities have to be specified and regularly updated.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3</b> <b>“Conversion”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research results must be converted into an appropriate format, which is easily understood for policy makers.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 4</b> <b>“Use”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research results can be used better by policy makers if they are integrated in available knowledge, described in the (scientific) literature or opinion letter or processing techniques</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 5</b> <b>“Network”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic transfer of knowledge can be carried out to a wider group of policy makers</li> </ul>



### ***Further reading: Good Practice for communication towards policy makers***

This guide gives advice on how researchers can communicate their research results to policy makers. The focus is to guide researchers in the process of communicating with policy makers; who to speak to and how, and the steps that have to be taken into account in this process. This guide is the starting point for communication with policy makers. Researchers have the obligation to inform policy makers on project results because they were funded with taxpayers' money.



#### **Source**

The guide is available on the website [http://www.agrifoodresults.eu/docs/policy\\_guide.pdf](http://www.agrifoodresults.eu/docs/policy_guide.pdf). The main author is partner Inovamais (Portugal).

## ***4. FOCUS #3: GOOD PRACTICE FOR COMMUNICATION TOWARDS CONSUMERS***

Your information should be easy for the general public to understand and, ideally, disseminated via well-established associations to add credibility to your results. Face the challenge that consumers are more interested in science and technology results when they meet their interests such as health, safety or sustainability. More and more consumers are searching on the Internet for information. It should be used with interactive tools like blogs taking into account the increase usage of social networks. The research results can be distributed via national and well established consumer associations to enhance the perceived credibility of your data.



#### **Key questions:**

- Which channels and format are best suited to transfer the message to the diverse groups of consumers?
- Who are the peers and which communication arenas are used by consumers (word of mouth marketing)?
- What is the added value of the research results for consumers?



When facing a communication process that involves consumers, it is important to take into account the different factors that influence this process. In particular, it appears that the general public is obtaining its information mainly from mass medias outlets (radio, press, TV), which are difficult for researchers to access. Therefore different media outlets are not equal in accessibility and in impact. Putting information on a web site is easy but inefficient. The most important tip is to simplify the message to be communicated. Members of the general public may not have a scientific background and so may not understand scientific concepts. This is a very challenging issue which scientists may have difficulty accommodating. Communication via consumer associations or food safety authorities is also highly recommended.

### ***Further reading: Good Practices for communication towards consumers***

This guide gives advice on how researchers can communicate their research results to consumers. Communication of research results towards consumers is a complicated issue to embrace. This target audience comprises a wide range of subgroups, /is a much diversified group, in which subgroups differ, for example, in culture, religion, social status, age, sex, countries of residence and economical resources.

### **Source**

The guide is available on the website [http://www.agrifoodresults.eu/docs/consumer\\_guide.pdf](http://www.agrifoodresults.eu/docs/consumer_guide.pdf). The main author is partner AINIA (Spain).



## 5. FOCUS # 4: GOOD PRACTICES FOR PROJECT MANAGERS

Organise dissemination and communication as process: plan, act, check and improve. Every research project needs a responsible person, a written strategy and a dissemination plan. Communication starts from the beginning before the project starts to produce results. Use milestones during the project to verify your dissemination success. Adapt the strategy and the plan continuously.



<b>Who?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify yourself/your team – Personality counts!</li> <li>• A communication structure with responsibilities should be designed for the communication activity.</li> <li>• Collaboration between scientists and communication manager is essential.</li> </ul>
<b>When?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication should start from the beginning of a given project; “pre results” communication, if properly done, will magnify the efficacy of the post results communication.</li> <li>• Engaging with any media requires tenacity; it is not a single shot action.</li> </ul>
<b>What?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the content (message) of your announcement. Be clear and concise!</li> </ul>
<b>Whom?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the needs of the specific group of people you would like to approach.</li> </ul>
<b>Which channel?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose the communication channels and tools that fit best in the specific case.</li> <li>• Choosing the appropriate media is a key element to success.</li> </ul>
<b>What effect?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide, from the beginning, the main goals of your campaign (e.g. raise awareness, sell a new technology, influence the regulation-making process etc.)</li> </ul>

(Based on Lasswell’s 5 W)

AgriFoodResults has designed a guide of good practice for communication managers. In order to overcome the aforementioned, and other, challenges of research communication, scientists can use some of the following general communication tips:

- ☑ Focus on results, not just methodology. Your messages should be focused on the needs of the audience you would like to approach.
- ☑ Mass Media is only one communication channel with specific tools of the dissemination process: Personal contacts, with your audience, can be a significant asset for your communication strategy.
- ☑ Keep contact information up to date. Remember that in today’s life the mobility of employees



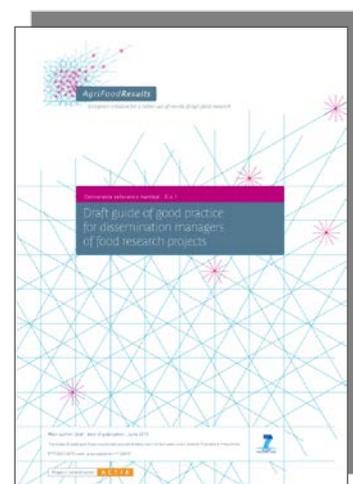
- is increased. Keep a contact's list in electronic form and update it on a regular basis.
- ☑ Make sure you are approaching the right person with the right method. Different groups of people can be identified as involved in the agri-food sector; each need specific media and specific tools.
  - ☑ Use the whole range of communication tools:
    1. Press releases
    2. Events (press conferences, scientific conferences/symposia, workshops on research results etc.)
    3. Publications (articles, brochures, newsletters, posters, information sheets, white papers)
    4. Internet Tools (websites, social media tools)
    5. Audiovisual Tools (broadcasts in TV and radio, CDs/DVDs/videos)
    6. Personal communication tools
  - ☑ Try to attract the audience's attention: When making an announcement it is important to get the audience's attention as soon as possible. Use interesting titles, avoid complex, technical terminology and differentiate according to the nature of the different audience.
  - ☑ Use appropriate language. Experience has shown that dissemination of research results to the food industry and especially to food SMEs, should be carried out in their native language.
  - ☑ Be different. Try to use innovative ways to approach your audience. For instance, communication tools such as information sheets, blogs and scientific platforms can be employed, as well as other tools that the target audience has not been extensively exposed to.
  - ☑ Be honest and reliable. The primary goal of an effective dissemination strategy is to develop a long lasting relationship of trust with the target group, a task that usually takes time. Honesty and reliability are necessary requirements for establishing a credible profile.

### ***Further reading: Good Practice for dissemination managers***

This guide provides practical advice for the development of an efficient strategy for the dissemination of research results towards various groups of stakeholders. Special emphasis is given to audiences with the potential to further exploit the research results, such as the food industry, policy makers and consumers.

### **Source**

The guide is available on the website <http://www.agrifoodresults.eu/docs/guideline.pdf>. The main author is partner ETAT (Greece).



## 6. FOCUS # 5: USE OF INNOVATIVE NEW TOOLS

In *AgriFoodResults*, we developed an interactive virtual world in which the target audience can explore ideas, without restraint, in a familiar environment. This world includes three examples of ‘knowledge hot spots’ which present different kinds of research results (see figure 1):

1. A supermarket with shelves for the dissemination of product oriented research results
2. A bakery representing a process and technology oriented approach to disseminate R&D results focusing on bakery technology
3. An information desk for cross-sectoral R&D projects and themes like “food and consumer”, “food and health”, “food quality and safety”, “food chain management”, “sustainability” and “dissemination of R&D results”.



Fig. 1: Screenshots of the three AgriFoodResults Web3D knowledge hot spots supermarket, bakery and info desk for the dissemination of agrifood research results

The specific project results are represented via ‘infopoints’ (marked with [i]) placed at the shelves in the supermarket, at the machines in the bakery or at the information desk. Through exploration the user can discover the results of R&D projects at his/her special point of interest. The infopoints in the supermarket function as one-stop-shops and teasers, giving a short overview on the project’s results. They give easy access to more in-depth information via icons (e.g. pdf-short summary, pdf-reports, videos and simulations) and to experts via an email link directly to the responsible project manager and project website (see figure 2).

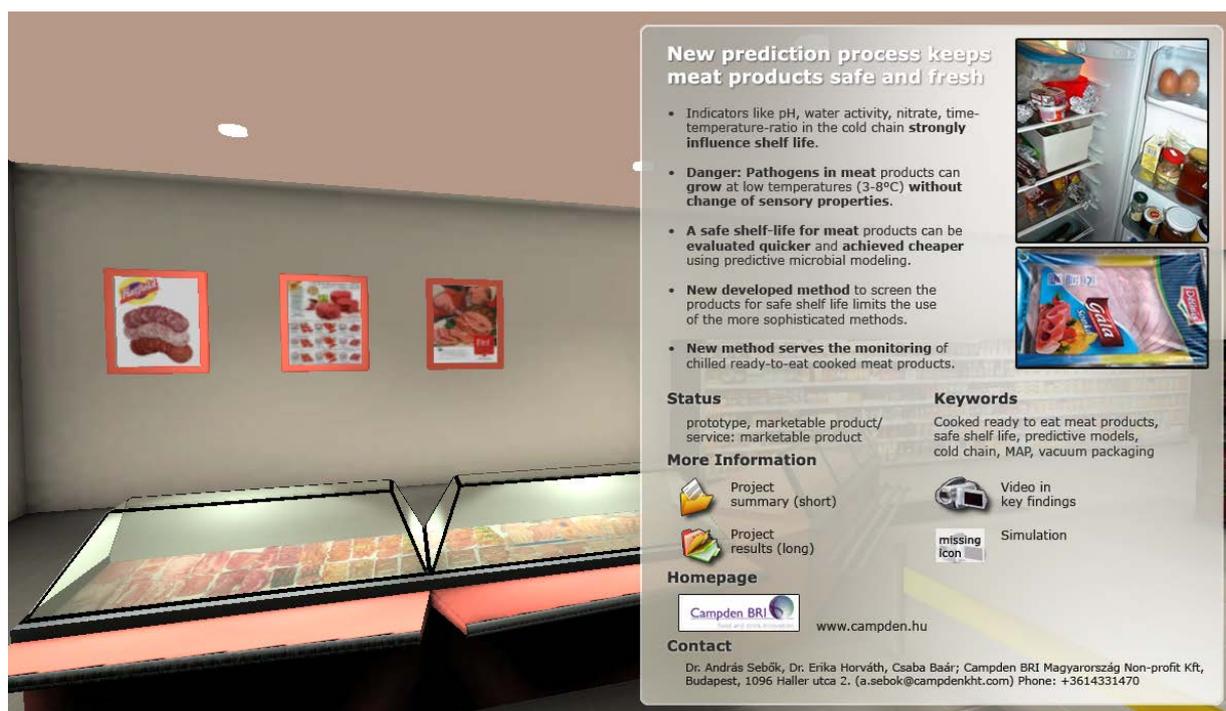


Fig. 2: Screenshot of an infopoint in the Web3D-supermarket

This is an entirely new dissemination approach, using cross-media, to explain results in a Web3D-world. The program can be accessed via the Internet or on CD/DVD where the user can navigate in a “virtual landscape” (representing the familiar environment of the target group) and where information (audio, video and text) can be placed and explored.

The main advantages of this dissemination tool are as follows:

- Easy, intuitive and flexible access to R&D results via an interactive and game-like user interface and guidance.
- A multimedia, rather than linear, approach with rich media presentation of documents, audio, video etc.
- Uploading facilities via a content management system.
- Integration of Web 2.0 / Social Web functionalities to implement a lively expert system and to promote networking. Discussion and experience exchange via a forum system, blogging engine, wiki, expert profiles, private messaging between users etc.

Experts and money are required for the design and programming of the virtual world, as well as for sustainable operation. Despite these difficulties, it is an effective tool when implemented alongside good practice as described by *AgriFoodResults*' dissemination guides.

## 7. CONCLUSION: IDEAS TO IMPROVE DISSEMINATION IN FP8 PROJECTS RELEVANT TO THE FOOD SECTOR

### **Idea 1:** Take into account the specificities of the food sector



The European food sector presented requires innovation to meet the consumer demand for affordable, safe, healthy and sustainable foods. Because the sector has characteristics (e.g. number of SMEs, importance of incremental innovation) that make innovation and knowledge transfer particularly challenging. In FP7, an effort was made to improve the communication of research results through several support actions. This effort should continue in FP8.

*How? Continue to support projects dedicated to knowledge transfer in FP8*

### **Idea 2:** Stimulate the use of intermediaries such as regional innovation networks



Knowledge transfer is a process in which intermediaries, such as regional innovation networks or technology mediators, play a crucial role. They act as an interface between the numerous food SMEs and the research community and they play an important role in communicating results to both the consumers and the European food industry.

*How? In the guide for proposers, ask which information relays will be used to communicate the results to the targeted audience. Continue also to support actions for the networking of intermediaries at European level.*

### **Idea 3:** Facilitate access to research results and knowledge



Currently, DG Research and Innovation is compiling information about the projects that are supported at EU level but information about the results of these projects is missing. To facilitate the access to the knowledge generated in these projects, a single website with brief summaries of the projects' results could be created. Access to information on knowledge transfer and dissemination practices in the food sector should also be facilitated.

*How? Require that each project submit a one-page summary of its results and publish it on a dedicated website (as done by the EACI for eco-innovation projects). Publish guidelines and reports related to knowledge transfer on this website.*

**Idea 4: Make dissemination more professional**

The *AgriFoodResults* survey reveals a lack of professionalism in food research projects financed by the EU: more than 50% of the projects surveyed did not employ a dissemination manager trained in communication and did not prepare a communication strategy.

*How? In the guide for proposers, request the profile of the person in charge of communication and knowledge transfer. Ask beneficiaries to include a dissemination plan in the Description of Work (DoW) and include a chapter on dissemination in the periodic activity reports (and not only in the final activity report as it is the case in FP7 projects).*

**Idea 5: Stimulate the participation of stakeholders via involvement of user groups**

Improving the effective use of research results in the food sector requires a change of paradigm; from a very early stage, users should be involved in the design of the research projects to ensure that the impact of the activities and the exploitation of research results are maximised. A participatory approach where users are involved should be stimulated.

*How? In the guide for proposers, require that a user group is involved in the project. This user group will provide reports on the benefit of the project results in the final management report.*

**Idea 6: Implement mechanisms to stimulate knowledge transfer after the end of the project**

The *AgriFoodResults* survey shows that a large majority of stakeholders consider necessary to continue dissemination activities after the end of research projects. Incentives are needed to stimulate the continuation of knowledge transfer after the project end.

*How? For “marketable” results, the final management report should describe how and who (in most cases the party which holds the IPR) will take care of dissemination after the project; in a review one year after the project ended this partner has to describe what was done and the outcome of the project.*

**Idea 7:** **Promote the importance of communication activities by rewarding projects for their dissemination strategy**



In *AgriFoodResults*, we used the competition *Communication Star 2011* as an “engagement trick”. The initiative was very well received by project coordinators or dissemination managers as more than 25 dissemination managers of food research projects participated. When efforts are acknowledged people are more motivated. The organisation of such events in the future will help to motivate project coordinators or dissemination managers to invest more time and effort on this subject.

*How? Organise a European competition to reward food research projects for best practices dissemination (like Communication Star 2011). Consider making the participation mandatory.*

**Idea 8:** **Promote the use of innovative communication tools**



New technologies offer an interesting potential to raise awareness and to engage users in interactive experiences. The prototype of virtual supermarket has been developed *AgriFoodResults* demonstrates that there is interest in interactive tools.

*How? Continue to support the development and the utilisation of innovative new media.*