



AgriFoodResults

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Final guide of good practice for communication towards food SMEs

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Summary: Specific Principles in Communicating Research Results

This guide gives advice 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.

There are three main communication phases in the knowledge transfer process:

Phase 1: Identification of the target audience and its motivation for exploring new ideas

Phase 2: Facilitation of knowledge transfer

Phase 3: Using knowledge transfer tools

This 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 is 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 knows the typical needs of their target audience. SMEs are not uniform by their behaviour. Therefore different approaches are necessary for the different groups of food SMEs.

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

Get to know the needs & information behaviour of food SMEs

The first step for you as a researcher is to gather information on the SMEs you want to approach. This information can be available from commercial available databases, the Internet or with the assistance of mediators such as food industry federations, industry branch associations and national food technology platforms. The mediators can help to identify which sectors and which SME groups are the most likely users of the research results and which information channels they usually use. Knowing your target audience will allow you to determine which types of communication/dissemination activities are the most appropriate.

How to reach SMEs?

Selected SMEs can be contacted via e-mail, phone or personally via face-to-face meetings. Workshops, press releases can also be organised. Based on the answers those SMEs can be selected, who are suitable for the results and who show some interest.

How to convert research results into an applicable format for SMEs?

For successful communication researchers should use a style which is easily and quickly understandable for SMEs. Research results have to be converted to solutions and support



applicable to SMEs (Which practical problem will be solved? Which practical support can be offered?). This includes information, technology, methodologies, relationships, products, services, practical tools and training materials.

How to build a trusted relationship

Confidence in the discipline, understanding the problems and way of thinking of the company, technically correct and timely advice and successful solutions are the elements necessary for building trust with SMEs.

Phase 2: Facilitation of knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer involves the processes of capturing, collecting and sharing explicit and tacit knowledge, including skills and experiences. It includes both commercial and non commercial activities, such as research collaborations, consultancy, licensing, spin-off creations, researcher mobility and publications. It is important for scientists to adapt and integrate their research into the industrial processes and in particular in the individual production processes of your target audience thereby showing how scientific knowledge can be transferred into practice.

Phase 3: Using knowledge transfer tools

Upgrade the innovation competence of SME personnel

The innovation competence of personnel can be upgraded by visiting companies, open and closed trainings, written materials, visual aids, practical demonstrations, seminars, workshops and conferences.

How to publish articles in food magazines?

Articles in food magazines are more appropriate to reach SMEs than publications in peer reviewed scientific journals. You need often direct contacts with journalists for placing an article into a food magazine. A set of recommendations are listed to raise the interest of journalists.

How to write a successful press release?

A press release is the fastest and most common instrument used to inform SMEs via the media about news. A press release should be short, clearly phrased and free from technical and scientific terms not known by the public.

How to measure the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer process?

The knowledge transfer process should be measured with some indicators. For example number of contacts, number of new products or number of new services/technologies. To evaluate the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer process it is important to establish some success criteria.



1. *Introduction and overview*

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

To get an overview, figure 1 highlights the process for researchers when communicating with SMEs. This guide considers three main communication phases in the knowledge transfer process:

Phase 1: Identification of knowledge user and motivation for exploring new ideas

Phase 2: Facilitation of knowledge transfer

Phase 3: Using knowledge transfer tools

This guide starts when research results are already available or at least predictable. This shall not be contradictory to other recommendations. Some food SMEs may be interested also in information of newly started projects but the focus of this guide will be on available results. The identification, systematic collection, adaption and formulation of research results which suit food SMEs is very important to generate their interest. This will in turn enhance the likelihood of the exploitation of the research results by thy targeted SMEs. It is important that researchers who want to communicate their research results to food SMEs knows the typical needs of their target audience. SMEs are not uniform by their behaviour. Different approaches are necessary for the different groups of food SMEs. To make it easier to communicate use these questions:

- Can you specify exactly what you are expecting and/or which are your available results?
- How can food SME use your results? How can they benefit from these results?
- Who are the specific food SMEs that may exploit or implement your research results in their processes or organisations?

SMEs can be classified by their innovation behaviour. Knowing your target audience will allow you to effectively target your communication approach. The “Guideline on effective knowledge and technology transfer activities to SMEs in the food sector with particular focus on traditional food manufacturers” from the TRUEFOOD project makes a useful classification of SMEs as **Innovators (Technology Pioneers)**, **Early Adopters (Leading Technology Users)**, **Early Majority (Technology Adopting Enterprises)** and **Late Majority and Laggards (Basic SMEs)**. Using this classification method will allow you to be more successful with your communication and dissemination of research results. For example, basic food SMEs will only follow when the application will be a widely applied customer or consumer expectation, requirement, standard or legal requirement. Therefore it may not be reasonable to include basic SMEs in the target



audience of a relatively new research result. However they may be the main target audience when a new practical and simple solution is developed for low cost implementation. The main barrier of the broader implementation is the perception of the basic food SMEs that the new method is too sophisticated, time consuming and/or expensive. You have to convince them of the contrary.

Designing your communication activities systematically is crucial. This will allow you to attract the interest of your target group, developing collaborative actions, explore business potential and prepare the SMEs for adaptation and practical implementation of your results.

Knowledge transfer from researchers to SMEs is a process which is illustrated in the following figure 1. We have illustrated the active role of researchers. One bottleneck in the process can compromise the effectiveness of the whole process. Therefore each step has to be carried out properly. The **knowledge transfer process for SMEs** (active role for SMEs) is given in the TRUEFOOD guideline on page 12. This will not be repeated. Additionally, the basic stages of the knowledge transfer process are described in “Guide of good practice for dissemination managers of food research projects” on page 2 and following:

- **Awareness stage:** an active researcher should reflect how he/she approaches a food SME to learn of the existence of a new idea or practice (e.g. target oriented dissemination channels).
- **Interest stage:** an active researcher should reflect how the food SME becomes interested in the new idea or practice and seeks information about it (e.g. Communication Phase 1).
- **Evaluation stage:** an active researcher should reflect how the food SME makes mental application of the new idea or practice to his/her present and anticipated future situation and decides whether or not to try it (e.g. via personal visits of the company, Communication Phase 2).
- **Trial stage:** an active researcher should help the food SME to apply the new idea or practice on a small scale in order to determine its utility in the own situation of the SME (Communication Phase 2).
- **Adoption stage:** an active researcher should support the food SME in deciding to use the new idea or practice continuously on a full scale (Communication Phase 3).

The separately published Annex 4.2.1 provides practical help for preparation of a Communication Plan towards food businesses, particularly SMEs and other stakeholders.



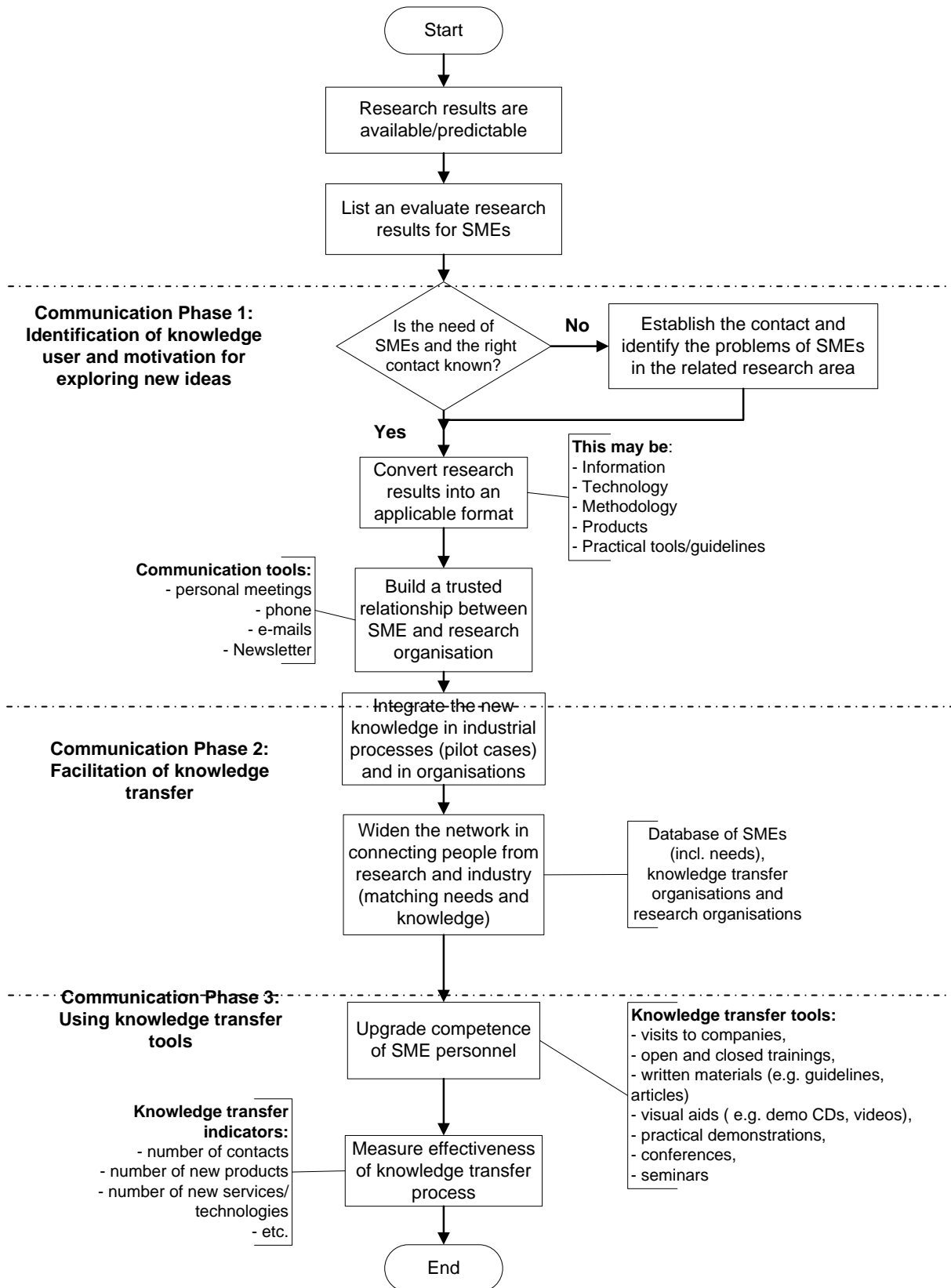


Fig. 1: The knowledge transfer process from researchers to SMEs



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

Get to know the needs & information behaviour of food SMEs

The first step to successful communication is to list and review your expected results. Also consider who can be the users of the different parts of your results. For the typical types of results having interest for the industry see paragraph 2.1 of the template for preparation a Dissemination Plan (see Annex 4.2.1). This exercise has to be made during the planning of the communication activity, optimally at an early phase of the implementation of the project.

The list of expected and available results should be updated regularly. At the same time, it is important to identify results that might be commercially exploitable. This is crucial to prevent that the communication will compromise the legal protection and/or marketability of the results.

The second step is to establish a database with contact details of food SMEs. The best to do this is in cooperation with food industry federations, industry branch associations and national or European food technology platforms. They may act as mediators. The researcher has then to identify the appropriate food SMEs from the database for his or her specific research results. The preparation should include the following questions:

- Which branch of the food sector may use the research results (e.g. meat, dairy, fresh produce, spices, technology oriented companies or others)?
- Which kind of food SMEs are the most likely users in the current period? (e.g. Innovators (Technology Pioneers), Early Adopters (Leading Technology Users), Early Majority (Technology Adopting Enterprises))

In addition to categorising your SMEs using the above questions, it may also be useful to send some questions via email to make sure that you are targeting exactly the right group of SMEs:

Dear reader of this e-mail. Please reflect to the following sentences and indicate where you best belong.

- ☞ *Innovators: Innovation is your daily business. You are always ahead of others.*
- ☞ *Early Adopters: Reliability for your customers is the most important thing to you. You consider new technology if it will fasten your processes.*
- ☞ *Early Majority: Technology has to be proven its usefulness before adapting. However, the business is monitored permanently to follow in the right moment.*

According to your choice please indicate: What can we do to support your business from the research sector and keep your position as it is? What keeps you awake at night?



Be aware that you will not get a lot of answers but the ones who are reacting are the most interesting for the contact to researcher. After establishing your target audience you need to consider which types of communication activities are most appropriate to reach your goal. In addition, it is useful to look at publicly available information (business and annual reports, websites, industry directories, trade journals) from the SMEs you are targeting. This will give you an indication as to what their specific interests are. Attending industry meetings and internal discussions can also provide useful information on the potential users for the researcher.

All these activities will give an overview on interested and not interested food SMEs. Keep in mind, that 50-70% of all companies may be food SMEs which are not interested in research results. That means that you have to approach a large quantity of SMEs to filter the interested ones. Sometimes industry mediator organisations like associations or consultants may provide useful assistance on that.

How to reach SMEs?

Identifying and selecting your target SMEs is the first step. A phone call which takes much longer than an e-mail but is more personal should be the first choice to reach the responsible person. After identifying the right person you may send an e-mail to summarize your intention.

Bases on these first contacts, you will be able to select the interested companies that match your scientific area. However, others who have answered to the contact email but do not fit with your research should not be forgotten! They should be informed with a letter indicating that your research has not targeted their problems so far but you will be in touch again if more suitable results become available.

As a researcher you have several possibilities to get in direct contact with interested food SMEs. The most effective way is to contact the food SMEs directly and present your findings in an internal discussion. This allows to target the research results more to the specific needs of the company and to get to know in-depth knowledge on the company. Workshops or conferences for practitioners where the available results will be presented to a wider audience are useful, too.

How to convert research results into applicable suitable format for SMEs?

Food SMEs have their own language. You will need several meetings and discussions with SMEs to learn this language and understand where you may support them with the outcome of your research. Here are some examples how research may be converted into practical solutions and support for food SMEs:



Information: Exchange of knowledge may help to increase efficiency. Surveys and pilot implementations will create data and facts to increase the confidence in the research. For example, put in place a RSS feed link on your research project website. This enables interested visitors to keep informed on latest research developments by automatic updating from the system.

Technology and methodologies: Replacing the “old” technologies with new ones in pilot applications (e.g. replacing the barcode with RFID application).

Results: Results may be underlined with statistics and facts from the production in the food company. For example, how many products per hour are produced before and after the implementation of new knowledge; how much waste / failures of articles are still there; increase of turnover and so on; maybe new clients. Your statistics should illustrate patterns, rules and established relationships.

Products: specifications, basic recipes, descriptions of technologies and demonstration samples for innovative products, such as fruit jams without added sugar, guacamole prepared by high hydrostatic pressure, low fat versions of traditional meat, dairy and bakery products, biodegradable food packaging, new methods for measuring maturity of green beans etc.

Services: description of service details, procedures, service manuals, innovative products-service systems etc.

Practical tools: mathematical and realistic food models with protocols for practical implementation, inventories of successful cases, checklists, web-based self-evaluation tools (e.g. marketing capabilities, innovation capabilities, etc.), case study descriptions, inventories of successful application of certain methods, industry guides for good practices, manuals, practical procedures for application of methods (e.g. identification of common chain goals), decision support tools, toolboxes (e.g. for reduction of acrylamid level in food) etc.

Training materials: tutor manuals, course notes, core presentation material, group exercises, individual exercises, e-learning tools.

How to build a trusted relationship?

The only way to build a relationship of trust between researchers and companies is via invested time and exploitable results for the company. Researchers cannot buy the trust of food SMEs through purely financial benefits of funded projects. In fact, the opposite is often the case and



SMEs do not trust consultants or researchers if they promote “free” participation in research projects because of the funding schemes. Confidence in the discipline, understanding the problems and way of thinking of the company, technically correct and timely advice and successful solutions are the elements necessary for building trust with SMEs. The communication tools to build a relationship of trust are personal meetings, phone calls, e-mails and newsletters.

3. Communication Phase 2: Facilitation of knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer involves the processes for capturing, collecting and sharing explicit and tacit knowledge, including skills and experiences. It includes both commercial and non commercial activities, such as research collaborations, consultancy, licensing, spin-off creations, researcher mobility and publications. Although the emphasis of researchers is on scientific and technological knowledge, other forms such as technology-enabled business processes should also be considered.

Therefore scientists should integrate new knowledge in the industrial processes. For that reason it is important to learn the individual production processes in order to translate scientific knowledge into practice. To be able to get to know the processes in a company a relationship of trust has to be built. The SME needs to know the person who sends the message. It is also a question of language. There must be certain closeness between sender (researcher) and listener (SME). If you have established good relationships you are able to widen your network of SMEs using their information channels and arenas. Furthermore you can foster the dissemination of your research results via word-of-mouth recommendation from one SME to another.

4. Communication Phase 3: Using knowledge transfer tools

Upgrade the competence of SME personnel

On the one hand product innovation is a must to survive the strong competition in the food sector. On the other hand optimisation of processes is a solution to reduce costs and to increase quality and is therefore also an important driver for strengthening the competitiveness. Both strategies need competent and trained personnel. For SMEs it is often very difficult to implement trainings which are not mandatory by legislation. Scientists and mediators can play an important role in this respect. The competence of personnel can be upgraded with the following knowledge transfer tools:

Visits to companies: use these opportunities to talk about SME’s problems and offer potential solutions with benefits and drawbacks, technology and food safety audits, troubleshooting and consultancy.



Open and closed trainings: public courses and tailor-made in-house trainings adjusted to the need of the company and combined use of trainings for a group of SMEs with specific face-to-face on-site consultations for each SME.

Written materials (guidelines and articles): involve SMEs in the development of sector specific guidelines/manuals, such as guidelines e.g. on the prevention of *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination on the reduction of salt content of food/bakery products or on allergen management. Involve SMEs in the publication of articles in food magazines.

Visual and interactive instruments (e.g. demo CDs and videos): show practical application of new processes, cleaning methods, manufacturing operations in factory environment where physical access of visitors cannot be organised, 3D hotspot for visibility of technical information, working practices and illustration of the process with combined use of moving pictures, graphics, sound and documents similar to computer games. Offer CD or online libraries with smart functions on specific subjects such as food safety, diet and health, process design and control.

Practical demonstrations: use of practical applications such as mathematical models, decision support tools, testing methods etc. particularly when SMEs can make a short trial in pilot plant stations or laboratories.

Seminars, workshops: In the phase of awareness creation avoid lengthy events. Limit the length to half one day. Make relatively short presentation sessions and combine them with group discussion and practical exercises. Do not rely on self-development of group discussions; instead prepare a set of questions in advance to be discussed. Send discussion material to participants before the meeting and ask them to prepare. Discuss conclusions, present and future actions.

Conferences: Use annual meetings of the industry associations for a short presentation or other industry meetings on hot issues when possible to create awareness and reinforcing messages. Conferences are usually seen by SMEs as too long, expensive and theoretical. However, conferences with speakers representing different SME stakeholders such as senior policy makers, acknowledged technical experts of industrial R&D organisations, leading food manufacturers, other SMEs who have achieved success in practical application of research results in a specific discipline and food control central authorities may be effective tools to convince the industry on the importance, benefits and future businesses potential of new innovation areas.



How to publish articles in food magazines to reach SMEs?

At the Media for Science Forum 2010 in Madrid, scientists and science journalists agreed that scientists have an obligation to communicate their results. Researchers should spread their results around the world and get the results integrated in processes and political agendas. It is also important to raise the awareness of the general public, companies and politicians to generate further funding. However, an AgriFoodResults survey on dissemination practices has shown that a high percentage of scientists are mainly interested in their own reputation and in funding. Also in the competence evaluation process of a research institute communication and dissemination competence is not a criterion! Research institutes shall focus their efforts on the scientific task and be independent from external relationships. Therefore most scientists publish the results only in peer-reviewed, scientific journals which are mostly not understandable. This is not the right way to reach food companies.

Instead, surveys show that special food magazines are more frequently read by food companies. In this guide you will find a list of important food magazines in Europe complete with contact details of journalists (Annex "List of Journalists" published on the website www.agrifoodresults.eu). To place an article in a food magazine you need to establish contact with the relevant journalist. His/her interest can be aroused if the press release targets the needs of his/her audience already in the title and in the first line. A journalist will get between 100 and 200 press releases per day. That means he/she will invest only 30 seconds per press release to screen the content.

Here are some recommendations to raise the interest of journalists:

- 1) Successful communication starts above all with good ideas, interesting topics and content. Only then can contacts with the media be developed and maintained.
- 2) In order to win the interest of the media, not only good ideas, but also professional communication is required. First of all, it is important to respect the working conditions of the journalist.
- 3) If you want to work with a particular media outlet you must consider the respective editorial deadline. You should contact daily papers a few days, weekly media outlets two weeks and monthly magazines about four to eight weeks before their next date of publication.
- 4) You must also offer your story exclusively to your chosen media outlet. For example you may suggest an expert chat on the topic "Challenges of food safety" to medium A and a telephone conversation on the topic "New insights for food production" to medium B. The same is valid for scientific articles or user reports. Two different media will not publish the same article.
- 5) Journalists need competent and available contacts. Therefore, organise a deputy contact for your vacation periods and medical leave. Journalists do not have time, as they are



bound to editorial deadlines, to get connected from department to department. Next time the same journalist will simply call another scientist.

- 6) Before you offer a service, an interview or background discussion or dispatch a press release, you should know the medium, the responsible department and if possible the responsible journalist. Find out exactly which editor writes for which section of your chosen outlet.

How to write a successful press release?

The press release is the most favourable, fastest and most common instrument to inform the media about news (more details in “Guide of good practice for dissemination managers of food research projects”, pages 21-29). The second target should be the intended audience for the research results (e.g. food SMEs). Therefore the press release should be interesting for the media and the target audience. Do not expect that your press release is literally printed. This should not be the intention of the scientist. It is usually not the case for the journalist and what you cannot expect from him/her. The journalist decides which angle will be reported. He or she is responsible for the communicated information.

If you would like to inform for example newspapers and technical periodicals about your research it can be important to write two different press releases:

- One in the language and with main topics to address SMEs in general and
- another one in the technical language of the specialised media and with appropriate main topics for the specialists in SMEs. Press releases for technical periodicals can be longer and more detailed since the specialised public is interested in more details.

We advise against an accompanying letter, because everything that is important for the journalist should be in your press release. Everything else is redundant and information garbage. The shorter a press release is the better. Usually about half to one whole A4 page will be sufficient and never longer than two A4 pages. The easiest way if you are writing several press releases is to create a uniform template which you can use again and again. The press release should have a specific layout. A press release should be disseminated only if you have to say something. Here are some purposes that may trigger a press release:

- Start (or end) of a project
- Advertisement of project partners
- Achievements or milestones
- Worth-telling stories
- New discovery
- Jubilee (which is connected with the research, e.g. “World day of”)
- Public interest/discussions
- Additional new partners



How to measure the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer process?

The knowledge transfer process should be measured with some indicators. Here are some examples:

- number of contacts,
- number of new products,
- number of new services/technologies.

To evaluate the effectiveness of your communication campaign it is important to first establish some success criteria (see also 5.1 and 5.2 of the user's instruction on how to prepare a dissemination plan, Annex 4.2.1 published on the website www.agrifoodresults.eu).

5. Conclusion

Communication and knowledge transfer to SMEs in the food sector has to be well prepared and will take a lot of time to be successful. The contact to SMEs should be done by personal visits to explain the own research and to build a trusted relationship. Using Technical Transfer Organisations (TTOs) for this purpose may therefore be useful. TTOs are specialised in transferring knowledge to different stakeholders. In particular, technical food associations can be used to inform their members or other interested stakeholders. A good list of European federations may be found on the Internet on the CIAA homepage (<http://www.ciaa.be>) under "About CIAA" and "About our members". Another interesting contact may be the European Food Technology Platform (<http://etp.ciaa.be>) or the National Technology Platforms (http://etp.ciaa.be/asp/nftp/index.asp?doc_id=615) where research requirements from the point of view of food companies are discussed.

Researchers should not forget to include the efforts for a knowledge transfer into the research budget. Personal visits may take a lot of time and travel arrangements.

Practice Example: New dissemination channel for research results

The project AgriFoodResults has developed a Web3D-Knowledge Hot Spot which will be an innovative communication approach for scientific results (see also "Guide of good practice for dissemination managers of food research projects", pages 65-67).



Internet-based virtual worlds as an innovative dissemination tool

Imagine the target audience of the R&D project results could linger around looking for interesting ideas in a familiar environment. No thresholds or cognitive barriers, just an intuitive access and guidance via an internet based virtual world. How does this look like? In our FP 7 project called “AgriFoodResults – European initiative for a better use of results of agrifood research” we developed a supermarket as an internet-based virtual 3D-world. Three examples for so-called knowledge hot spots 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 info 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. 2: 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 so-called infopoints (marked with [i]) placed at the shelves in the supermarket, at the machines in the bakery or at the info desk. By walking around 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 and an 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 to the project website (see figure 2).

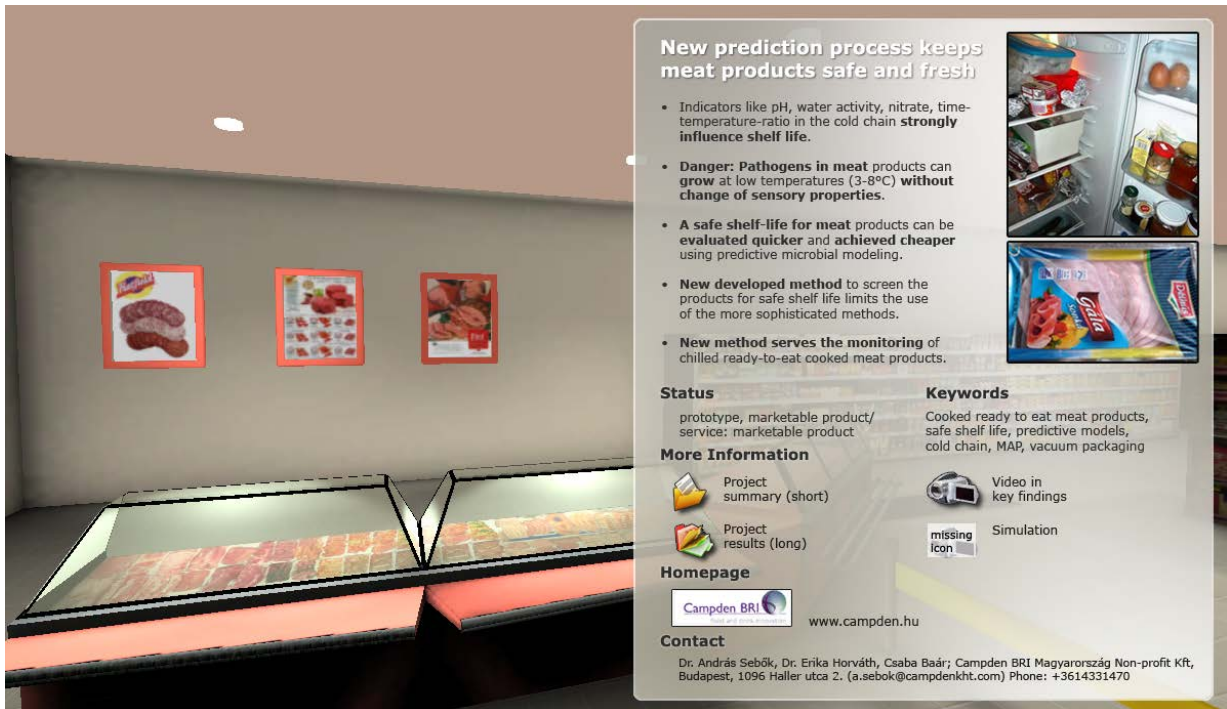


Fig. 3: Screenshot of an infopoint in the Web3D-supermarket

This is a totally new dissemination approach using cross-media for the explanation of results at the infopoints placed in a Web3D-world. It is a program on the Internet, on CD/DVD, computer etc. where the user can navigate in a “virtual landscape” (representing the familiar environment of the target group) and where information (audio, video, text) can be placed and explored.

The main advantages of this dissemination tool are obvious:

- easy intuitive and flexible access to R&D results via an interactive and game-like user interface and guidance
- from a linear to a multimedia approach: rich media presentation of documents, audio, video etc.
- uploading facilities via a content management system to guarantee an actual 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.

Of course one has taken into account that experts and money are needed for the design and programming of the virtual world as well as for the sustainable operation. That means, it is not an easy-to-implement tool, but a very effective one, if you follow the good practices given in the different dissemination guides of the AgriFoodResults project.