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AGRIFOOD

4Future

Towards a training network of Centers of Vocational Excellence in Smart Farming and Sustainable Food Systems



Welcome to the AgriFood4Future project

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the whole AgriFood4Future consortium, I am happy to welcome you to this first project newsletter.

The AgriFood4Future project is an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Commission. It is quite a complex and ambitious project: it brings together 23 partners from 13 EU Countries. Universities, Business Clusters, Innovation and Research Institutes, Vocational Educational Training (VET) providers, and SMEs will work together toward the same goal: innovate the European skills ecosystem in the agri-food system.

The project is conceived around four main pillars: digitalization, green transition, resilience and sustainable food systems, and business sustainability.

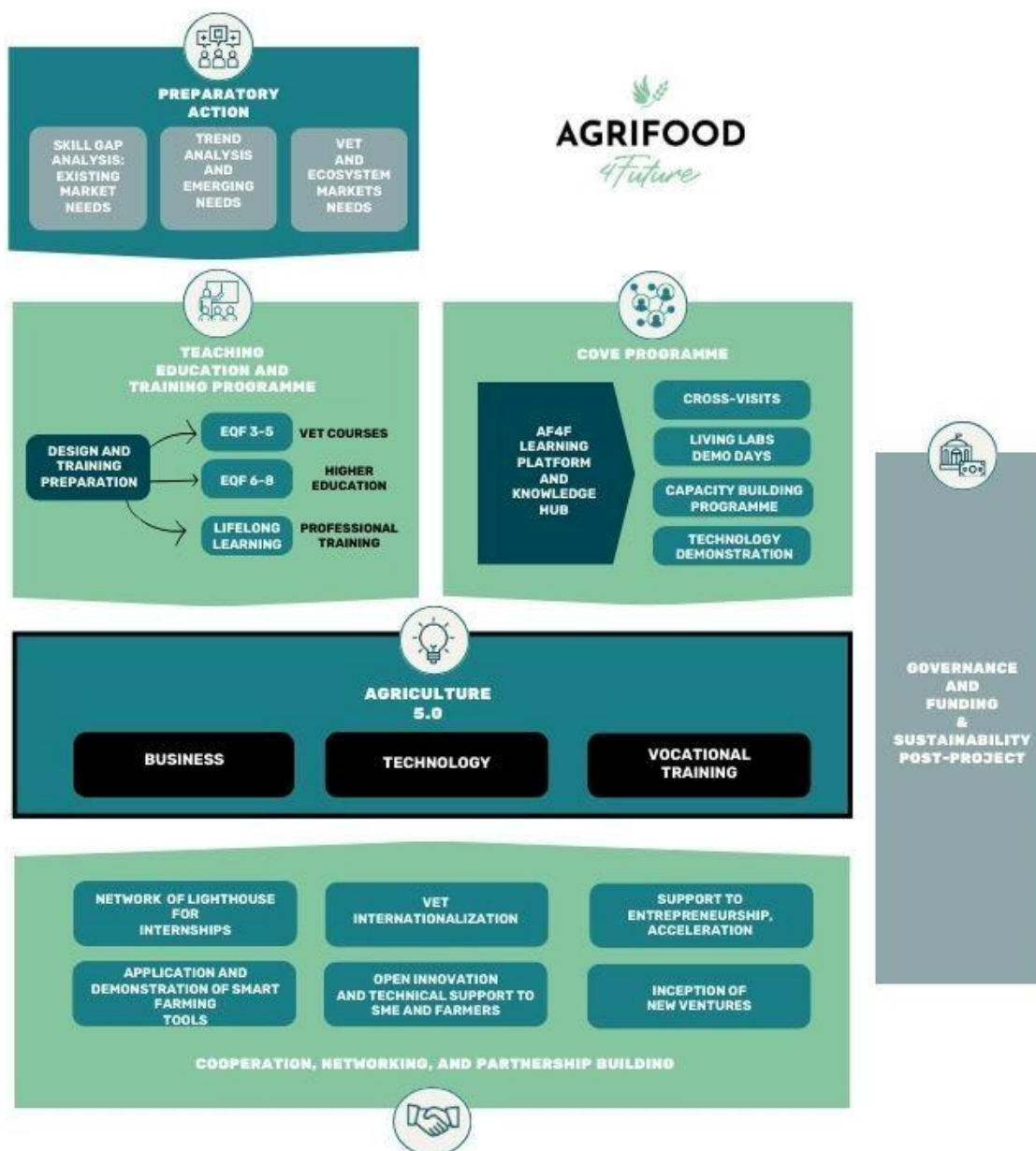
The project framework reflects the need for synergies between training, new business model development, governance, and cooperation. Over the next months, we will inform you of the main results achieved through the voice of partners and actors involved in project activities.

The first year of the project is already complete and the next months look challenging and promising!

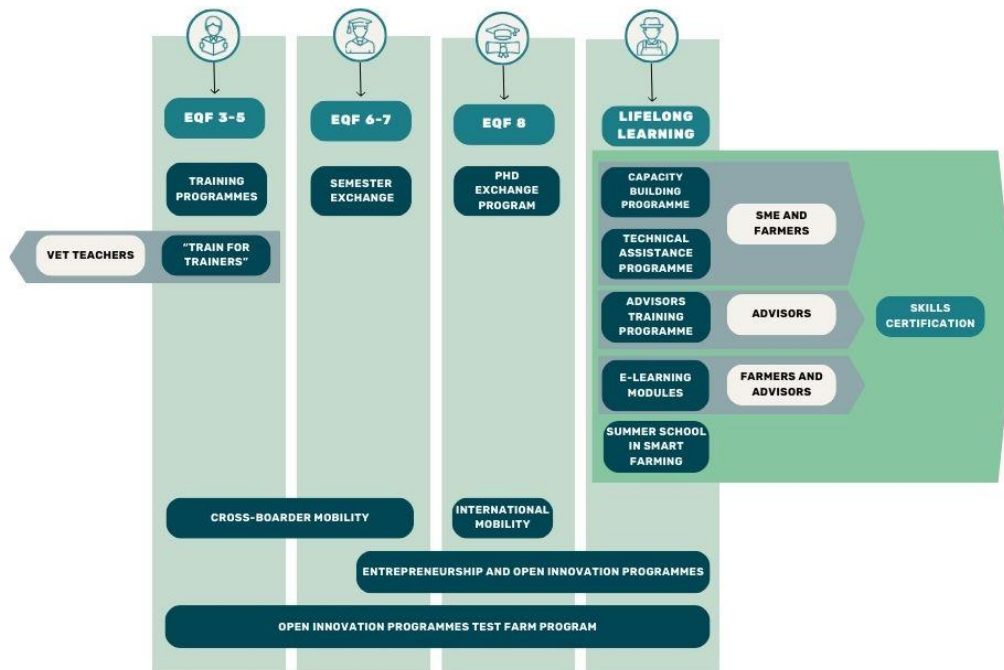
We are glad that you are with us on this journey!

Irene Diti, PhD
AgriFood4Future Project Manager

AgriFood4Future project in a nutshell



1. **Preparatory action:** an analysis of needs at different levels to support the definition of the training program. Which are the levels considered?
 1. Skill gaps in workers
 2. Requested skills by the labor market
 3. VET ecosystem weakness
2. **Teaching, education, and training programme:** the overall scheme combines educational training and education from EQF 3-8, from VET to PhD, and lifelong learning training for advisors of farmers, SMEs, and farmers, as illustrated in the figure below.



3. **Centres Of Vocational Excellence (COVEs) activities:** the project activities are supported by 6 national or regional COVEs that will grow during the entire project including new local members. The COVE (Center of Vocational Excellence) is an agri-food network territorially-anchored consortium that can share, create and disseminate educational contents and tools to improve skills across the value chain. The COVE will include key stakeholders from the agri-food sector such as Industry representatives, VET providers, Higher Education, Public institutions and Farmers' associations.
4. **Governance and funding & sustainability post-project**
5. **Cooperation, networking, and partnership building**

Get involved in your CoVE!

Would you like to join the COVE in your country? Do you believe that your professional experience and your knowledge could be useful for the project?

Visit our website to learn more about good reasons to join the COVEs network and how to contact our local COVEs members.

[Visit our CoVE page](#)

Point Of View of....Stefano Poni



Full professor of Viticulture and Past chair of the Department of Sustainable Crop Production of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Piacenza (Italy) since 1 November 2014. Coordinator of the Master of Science in Sustainable Viticulture and Enology).

He has authored or co-authored more than 300 papers, 174 of which published in international, refereed journals with an IF of 43.

Invited speaker at 52 conferences worldwide, he has been awarded of the "Perdisa" prize in 1994, the "Enotecnici" Prize in 2004, the Rudolph Hermanns Foundation Prize in 2011. Winner of the "2013 Best Paper Award" from the American Society of Enology and Viticulture.

Peer reviewer for 21 scientific journals, Associate editor for the Amer. J. Enol. Vitic. since 1 January 2006 and Chief Editor of the Australian Journal of Grape and Wine Research since 1 September 2023. He has been member of the national evaluation panel for assessment of the quality of research in Italy for the 2011-2014 time span and he is having the same responsibility for the 2023-2025 session.

What are the main challenges in innovating the agri-food sector?

As we are referring to a European context, the main initial challenge is that the unavoidable innovation must adhere to the well-known tradition of several food products. Then, innovation must be environmentally and economically sustainable, otherwise its adoption will be slow and sporadic. Finally, any innovation will have to be communicated in a user-friendly and, at the same time, effective way.

How the AgriFood4Future could contribute to innovation in the agri-food sector?

The last concept of item a) is crucial. First of all, the expertise provided by the different countries will have to merge trying to fill mutual gaps. Then, at any level of education and formation, AF4F is the ideal booster from the endless number of new solutions coming from research and development activities. Currently, the final adoption of innovative solutions can be represented with a funnel, receiving many drops (inputs while releasing just a few of them as practical and market-ready solutions. AF4F would like to consistently increase the flow through this funnel.

How the proposed training programmes will be effective in innovating the agri-food sector in Europe?

Training and education is at the base of items b) and c). This is true for trainees and attendants. A perfect case in point is the need to form people able to handle, for instance, innovation bursting from digital technologies. A figure as such requires multidisciplinary skills ranging from agronomy and engineering, from informatics to economics. This is a current gap that AF4F envisages to fill.

AgriFood4Future state-of-play

Let's have a look at the main activities that have characterized the first 12 months of the AgriFood4Future project. Surely this first year was crucial in defining the "team spirit" among partners highlighting the synergies and the best way to be effective in activities implementation.

Preliminary activities are on the way, and they will define the foundations for the curricula, training, and assistance programs.

COVEs established in Italy, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Greece will contribute to the definition of the future paths for stakeholder involvement.

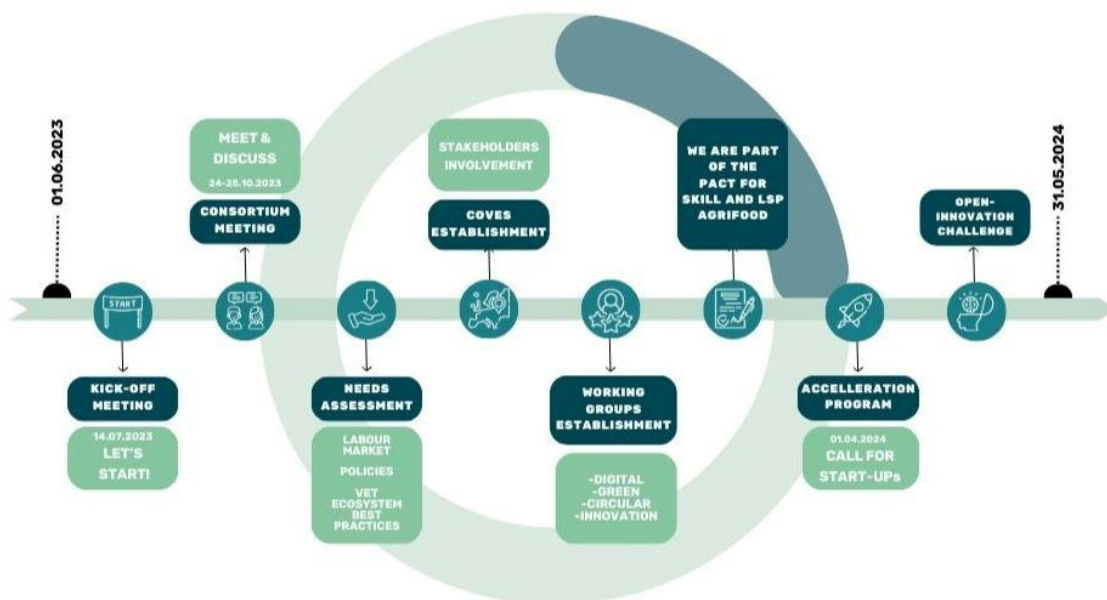
Training activities that will be developed in WP4 for lifelong and European Qualification Framework (EQF) 3-8 education levels will be supported by the expertise of members of the

Transnational Working Group. These groups outline the 4 pillars of the project: Digital, Green, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Circular.

In April, the innovation program for start-ups and the open-innovation program for SMEs was launched by BGT.

To support the networking activities and the future sustainability of the proposed action, the AF4F partnership joined the European initiative “Pact for Skill”.

Other ongoing activities involve partners, such as the definition of EQF 3-8 curricula as well as the definition of common e-learning tools



AgriFood4Future news



Consortium meeting in Piacenza (Italy)

The first physical consortium meeting took place in Piacenza, on 24-25 October 2023. Project lead partner, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore welcomed partners from Spain, Portugal, Greece, Germany, Belgium, and France at the Faculty of Agriculture. The partners discussed and reviewed the project plan and timeline, focusing on the project's preliminary activities. The meeting was opened by two keynote speeches focused on the challenges of the agri-food sectors given



Pact4Skills

The AF4F project is now part of the Pact for Skills, supporting the Pact for Skills Large-Scale Partnership in Agrifood.

What is the Pact 4 Skills?

The Pact was initiated by the European Commission in the framework of the “[EU Skills Agenda](#)” to mobilize concerted efforts among private and public stakeholders for quality investment in

by: dott. Massimo Albanelli - CLUST-ER and prof. Davide Viaggi - Università degli Studi di Bologna. Project partners also visited the unique “Vine and Wine Museum” in Vigolzone (Piacenza - Italy) which provides a sense of the intangible cultural heritage of the region.



Training activities

In the AgriFood4Future project, the main focus is on educating students, farmers, advisors, researchers,... to better equip themselves against the challenges in the agri-food sector. On March 21, 2024, an inspiring afternoon on innovative and sustainable soil management was organized by Inagro (COVE Belgium). We delved into the importance of soil analyses to enhance soil fertility. Additionally, we explained why avoiding and/or alleviating soil compaction is crucial for healthy crop growth. Lastly, attention was directed towards soil microbiology, specifically on conserving soil life by implementing non-tillage practices and how to best nourish and maintain soil microbiology. Following the various sessions and networking opportunities, more than 80 participants went home with practical tips to work towards a better and more resilient soil.



Participation in the LABSUMMIT international event

The first edition of LABSUMMIT®, an international event that brought together the world's leading laboratory experts, was

Vocational and Educational Training (VET).

The initiative aims to upskilling and reskilling adults.

More than 2500 organizations are part of these communities, and now also our 23 partners will contribute to this challenge.

A little curiosity: our partner AGENSO was awarded as the 2500th pact member!

If you want to know more about the Pact 4 Skills and the LSP Agri-food do not miss to visit the [website](#).



Forum on Vocational Excellence 2024

“Reshape the future of skills with Centres of Vocational Excellence”. This is the main theme of this year's Forum. From 10 to 12 September 2024, representatives of all these Centers of Vocational Excellence will meet in Lyon, France, for the 3rd Forum on Vocational Excellence. Some of our partners will attend.

We are curious to listen and then share their experience with you!

Stay tuned!



Participation in the International Artificial Intelligence Tech Summit 2024

Málaga TechPark participated in the international [AI Tech Summit 2024](#) held in Málaga on April 17th and 18th. The AI Tech Summit 2024 is a prominent event

held in Coimbra, Portugal, between 16th and 18th May, co-organized by ISQ. The project AGRIFOOD4FUTURE was disseminated to 1000 people from 15 different countries who joined the event. In addition, ISQ's project manager, Ana Mota, had the great opportunity to present the project at a round table session regarding "Creating Innovation and the Lab of Future via a Collaborative Ecosystem" to an audience of 40 people. The discussion following the round table session was very engaging, with the audience showing great interest in the project!

that brings together professionals from various fields to explore the impact and possibilities of artificial intelligence (AI) and technology in the upcoming industrial revolution.

Throughout the summit, leaders in AI companies shared their perspectives on advancements and transformations in the field. The event served as a unique opportunity to unravel the latest trends and discover how AI and technology are shaping the future of our global community.

Do not miss...

Do you want to start your entrepreneurship journey in agrifood? On April 1st, AgriFood4Future launched the **Entrepreneurship & Acceleration Program**. This program offers early-stage startups and innovators (TRL 2-6) training, ongoing mentorship and global exposure to take their business to new heights of success. Find out more and express your interest!

[Find out more](#)

If, on the other hand, you have a disruptive startup in the agrifood area (TRL >4-5) and aspire to pioneer a pilot project in collaboration with a leading agrifood company, the **Open Innovation & Challenge-Based Program** is for you! Learn more about this program connecting startups and corporates/SMEs to tackle industry challenges head-on, and stay tuned for the call opening in July 2024!

Don't miss out on the opportunity to attend the RIS Inspire - HealthySoil4Life Summer School! From July 1st to 12th, dive into online sessions focusing on soil health. Then, join us on-site in the stunning UNESCO site of Penha Garcia, Portugal from July 29th to August 1st for hands-on experience, entrepreneurial skills, and networking. Applications are open until June 15th!

[Find out more](#)

Are you an agricultural or agri-food company searching for skilled students for internship opportunities? Does your training organisation aim to provide enriching internship experiences for your students? The Agrifood4future project is launching its **internship mobility program** soon, offering internship opportunities that are focused on sustainability and digitalization within the agricultural and agri-food sector. Find out more and express your interest!

[Find out more](#)

Meet the COVEs

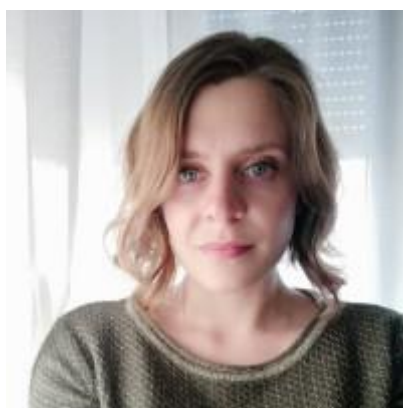
How to be effective at the local level? How the project could be linked to local actors for innovation? The project tries to answer this question through its 6 national COVEs. In each issue, a national COVE will be presented.

3 questions to Laura Castellan, COVE Italy Leader

The Italian COVE is led by the Emilia-Romagna Agrifood Cluster (CLUST-ER). Let's learn more about this organization and its role in the project.

The Emilia-Romagna Agrifood Cluster (Clust-ER Agroalimentare) is a dynamic partnership of public and private entities, including companies, research centers, and educational institutions. Together, they drive innovation in the agrifood sector of Emilia-Romagna, one of the most productive Italian regions, aligning with the Smart Specialization Strategy to enhance regional competitiveness and sustainability. As the coordinator of the Italian Center of Vocational Excellence (COVE) within the AgriFood4Future project, the Emilia-Romagna Agrifood Cluster plays a fundamental role in promoting vocational excellence, especially concerning its ability to respond to the agrifood industry's evolving needs.

Laura Castellan is an experienced project manager specialising in European funded initiatives. Her work primarily focuses on coordinating efforts to meet the existing and emerging needs of the agri-food industry through innovative training and development projects. Within Agrifood Clust-ER, she manages significant EU funded projects including AgriFood4Future and Circolive, aimed at improving vocational education and training across Europe. Her role in leading the Italian Center of Vocational Excellence (COVE) showcases her commitment to advancing innovative agricultural practices and education in Italy.



What is the “mission” of the Italian COVE?

The Italian Center of Vocational Excellence (COVE) is committed to fostering a reliable skills ecosystem that promotes vocational excellence and innovation in the agri-food sector. Currently based in and focused on the Emilia-Romagna region, with plans for a broader national expansion in the future, the COVE acts as the main representative and point of contact for the AgriFood4Future project at both regional and national levels. Its mission focuses on collecting local needs to bring them into the project, and on fostering and enhancing the implementation and dissemination of AF4F activities and results within the territory. The Italian COVE aims to be recognized as a key player in advancing vocational education and training, ultimately contributing to the Emilia-Romagna region's and Italy's agri-food sector development.

What is the “added value” of the Italian COVE for the AF4F project?

The “added value” of the Italian Center of Vocational Excellence (COVE) for the AF4F project lies in its role as a point of reference for integrating regional expertise and resources into project initiatives. Operating as a “virtual hub,” it serves as a facilitator for knowledge exchange and leverages on a network of partners representing an ecosystem of competencies, tools, structures, activities, and projects. Currently, it aggregates and adds value to the initiatives of its founding members — Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Clust-ER Agroalimentare, Phorma Mentis — and in the future, it aims to include initiatives from other project stakeholders as part of the AF4F COVE network expansion efforts. This strategic development will enhance the CoVE's

impact and further amplify the project's reach and influence, ultimately fostering vocational education and training innovation and excellence across Italy.

When we finish the AF4F project, what would be the greatest achievement of the project in your opinion?

The greatest achievement of the AF4F project would be its contribution to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the European agri-food industry, empowering individuals and organizations to thrive in a rapidly changing world through enhanced vocational education and training (VET) practices. By fostering innovation, sustainability, and resilience within the workforce, AF4F will leave a lasting impact on the industry, equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the evolving landscape of agriculture and food production. Moreover, the establishment of a strong European network of Centers of Vocational Excellence (COVEs), including the Italian COVE, will serve as a cornerstone for ongoing collaboration and knowledge exchange beyond the project's duration. This legacy will ensure the continued advancement of vocational excellence and innovation in the agri-food sector, benefiting both current and future generations of industry professionals.

Your opinion matters

What content would you like to find in the next newsletter?

[I give my opinion](#)



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