EQVEGAN

EQVEGAN Project – European Qualifications & Competences for the Vegan Food Industry

Sector Skills Alliance

An alliance for the continuous professional development and mobility of European professionals in European Vegan Food Industry

2023

1. Preamble / Context

The food and drink industry is the largest manufacturing sector in EU in terms of employment and added value[1]. The food industry, like others, is driven by consumers preferences and demand. In recent years, consumer's awareness of sustainable, nutritious and healthy food, but also of animal welfare concerns, food safety concerns (such as antibiotics resistance), are driving the industry towards more plant-based products and diets. The European food industry is increasingly focused on innovation, with an emphasis on creating healthier and more sustainable food products, and plant-based foods are in line with this trend.

Market share is steadily increasing, and the industry is trying to keep up with demand and offer new and appealing alternatives. At the same time, with limited global resources, the industry is investing in reducing food waste in a circular economy. All these are challenges but also opportunities for companies that must adapt and invest in product development and innovative technologies. To comply with these market trends and at the same time be competitive, it is vital to master new processes and technologies.

In addition, the food industry is subject to more demanding sustainability requirements, which, together with digitalization and automatization trends, are rapidly changing the required skills of its workers. Flexible and innovative training and apprenticeship programmes are needed to unlock opportunities for more qualified jobs and resilient companies.

The EQVEGAN Sector Skills Alliance (EQVEGAN SSA) intends to build a strong partnership launched by the network formed in the EQVEGAN ERASMUS plus project, with the aim of developing and promoting training to meet the needs of the plant-based food industry.

2. The challenge (sector facing challenges)

Today, science and technology are evolving rapidly with many applications in the food industry, mainly in automation systems, process innovation and new sources of ingredients. The sector is undergoing a demanding digital transformation, centred on Industry 4.0, which aims to improve process efficiency and flexibility in production adapted to market demands. At the same time, the food industry is paving the way to commit to more sustainable production, with environmentally friendly products and processes, in alignment with circular economy principles.

Moreover, the market share of plant-based foods is increasing and competing with the market share of animal products. According to a statistic forecast model, the global market for

[1] https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/food-and-drink-industry_en

plant-based foods is growing steadily and will more than double by 2030[2]. Although impressive technological improvements have been made in terms of appearance, flavour and texture, yet more investment is needed in product development and enhancement to overcome barriers to consumption.

The industry is also facing an ageing workforce[3] which has an impact on production performance, along with major difficulties in attracting and engaging young workers.

Education and training offer, needs to address all the above issues and be up to date with the ongoing requirements of this rapidly evolving industry, coping with new trends in digitalisation, sustainability, technology and product development. Soft skill such as leadership, problem solving, teamwork or creating thinking are also part of the profile needs of today's workers. Urgent and collective action is needed to mobilise the stakeholders involved to support companies and maintain the sector's competitiveness.

3. Ambition

The proposed Alliance aims to exploit and disseminate the achievements and outputs of the EQVEGAN project “Qualifications & Competences for the Vegan Food Industry” and to build a strong partnership to ensure knowledge exchange and cooperation between members, but also with other relevant stakeholders covering all areas of expertise, such as academia, industry, research institutions, and other public and private organisations.

The partners are committed to jointly support the plant-based food industry to reskill and upskill its workforce and strengthen the sector competitiveness and innovation. Within the framework of the Alliance, training will be developed and updated according to regularly identified needs. To this end, cooperation will be promoted to engage members in finding solutions for skills gaps at national or regional level.

4. Proposed Actions

The EQVEGAN SSA has defined an action strategy in three main areas:

4.1 Continuous monitoring of skills needs

The Alliance will implement systematic and continuous monitoring to assess the evolution of the sector's skills needs in order to update the available training offer at national or regional

[2] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1280394/global-plant-based-food-market-value/

[3] https://www.foodprocessing.com/workforce/change-management/article/21436398/food-industry-still-looking-for-workers

level. Different methods to collect information from plant-based food companies will be considered, such as questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. Results will be periodically communicated to training institutions (within the EQVEGAN Alliance but not only). This activity also aims at establishing a close relationship with the food industry to facilitate effective and regular knowledge transfer.

Key performance indicators:

- Involvement of plant-based food companies on skill need mapping activities
- Countries covered on skill need mapping activities
- Food companies joining the Alliance

4.2 Improvement of the training offer

The Alliance will maintain and update the training materials and courses developed within the framework of the EQVEGAN project. Additionally, Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education members will design curricula and develop training according to the skill needs identified previously. Special attention will be paid to promote work-based and continuous learning.

To develop these activities, the partnership will promote institutional cooperation by periodically mapping funding opportunities, identifying interesting calls and selecting opportunities that are worth pursuing. Commercialization of the courses through the Iseki Food Association platform will also contribute to gathering funds to support the ongoing activities.

Communication campaigns will be carried out regularly to actively promote the new training offer developed by the Alliance members.

Key performance indicators:

- Alliance partners providing training activities
- Training activities/material and work-based learning opportunities developed in the framework of the Alliance
- Dissemination and engagement campaigns for the new developed trainings
- Persons trained and geographical coverage
- Trainees using the online training material developed by the Alliance
- Proposals submitted to funding programmes by Alliance partnerships

4.3 IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION AND FOSTER TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY OF WORKERS IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY SECTOR.

For this purpose the professional certification scheme developed in the EQVEGAN project will be implemented. The main objectives of this scheme are to support food industry professionals to demonstrate their competence, which will facilitate advancements in their career, increase their salary, open-up possibilities of mobility, and promote lifelong learning.

Key performance indicators:

- Dissemination and engagement campaigns for the EQVEGAN professional certification scheme
- Applications received and geographical coverage

The alliance is also committed to creating a forum to promote dialogue and give all members the opportunity to share their vision of the alliance and its future in the food sector.

FUNDING

To develop these activities, the partnership will promote institutional cooperation by periodically mapping funding opportunities, identifying interesting calls and selecting opportunities that are worth pursuing. A strong involvement in the Agrifood Pact for Skills is already a reality and it is expected to be a support to find and achieve the funding.

Commercialization of courses through the IFA platform will also contribute to gathering funds to sustain the ongoing activities.

FOUNDING MEMBERS

Contact and more information:

Email: office@iseki-food.net