Food and manufacturing:

**EIT IS SERVING UP TWO NEW INNOVATION COMMUNITIES**

Mathea Fammels, Head of Policy and Communications, explains why EIT has landed on food and manufacturing as the themes for its two new innovation communities, and talks about how innovators and entrepreneurs in Europe can apply to join this fledging initiative.

Congratulations on taking the first steps to launch two new innovation communities! Why did the European Institution of Innovation and Technology (EIT) decide to launch two more innovation communities in its most recent funding call?

We are looking for innovative solutions, but we are also looking into new ways of addressing topics. We are looking at educating and training entrepreneurs of tomorrow as well as changing behaviours and mindsets. We believe that all of these characteristics are very strong in these societal areas and this is why they have been picked as topics for our new innovation communities.

With this call, we are widening our portfolio to address two major societal challenges facing Europe. This is part of our long-term strategy for 2020. With these two innovation communities, we will bring our total number from five to seven, meaning that we will soon be working to tackle seven major societal challenges in Europe.

While we have identified many societal challenges that need to be addressed in Europe, EIT only picks areas to work in where we feel that our model of bringing together business, research and academia in a highly integrated partnership would be best suited.

How did EIT land on food and manufacturing as being two such priority areas?

Food and added-value manufacturing are areas that are highly important in terms of economic, social and environmental impact for Europe as a whole. For example, Europe currently holds about one-fifth of the global food and drink industry, and in 2010, the manufacturing sector accounted for 15.4 per cent of the EU’s GDP and over 33 million jobs.

What types of challenges are these industries facing?

Looking at food, the global food supply chain is facing a complex set of challenges on both the demand and supply side. By 2050, the planet will need to produce enough food and fibre to feed a population set to hit nearly 10 billion, in addition to more feedstocks for a potentially huge bioenergy market. There is also an urgent need to adopt more efficient and sustainable production methods while also adapting to climate change.

In the area of added-value manufacturing, there are many challenges the European manufacturing industry is facing when it comes to securing future global competitiveness. At the moment, increased competition, low-cost production in developing countries, scarcity of raw materials, a lack of skilled workforce, rapid advances in science and technology, and changing market needs are putting extreme pressure on Europe’s manufacturing companies.

Why do you think EIT’s model of bringing together business, research and academia is best suited to addressing these challenges?

We feel that the EIT approach is one that can contribute and secure the global competitiveness of these industries in the future because we are looking at the different aspects of the challenges facing them and using our strengths to best tackle them. For example, we are not only looking at business creation and acceleration of businesses, but also education. In education, we are looking for ways to incorporate entrepreneurship.
to ensure that the food and manufacturing industries get people with the skillsets they need to remain globally competitive.

What impact is EIT hoping to have through these innovation communities? Can you elaborate on the benefits you foresee them delivering?

One of the main objectives is to secure Europe’s competitiveness in these global industry sectors. The ‘human factor’ is very important to securing this global competitiveness. We cannot compete in Europe on costs and this is something we should not try to do; however, what we as the EIT can do is train the employees and entrepreneurs of tomorrow through our education programmes.

We can help them build an entrepreneurial mindset – which includes encouraging a risk-taking culture. We believe that through this, we can enable industry to remain competitive, be creative, think out of the box, come up with novel solutions that result in more sustainable, more environmentally friendly processes.

How long do people have to apply to join these new innovation communities?

The call is still open and it will close 14 July 2016.

You recently held an information day in Brussels to provide participants with information on the call and guidance to potential applicants in submitting high quality and successful proposals. Can people who were unable to attend the conference still access this information?

It is very important to us to have an open and transparent call process that provides all the information that interested partners need in a timely manner. That was one of the reasons we held this information day. We wanted to give people the opportunity to better understand EIT’s innovation communities model and how best to submit applications.

As such, those who missed our information day should visit our website and seize the opportunity to watch videos from the various talks and lectures that happened in Brussels: http://bit.ly/InfoDayEIT.

Does the EIT have any other innovation communities in the pipeline?

We are planning to launch one more innovation community in 2018 in the area of urban mobility. More than 60 per cent of the population in Europe is living in urban environments, and improving mobility of citizens in urban environments is crucial. Both public and individual mobility will remain in high demand in the future.

Moreover, urban mobility is important in the sense that it contributes to a low-carbon economy and move towards zero-carbon emissions. It is a very challenging topic that we feel is best tackled by bringing together business, research and academia.

OOHO! WATER YOU CAN EAT

There are billions of water bottles on this planet, and if you think about the effect these bottles are having on our climate, it is nothing short of astronomical. In fact, according to the European plastic industry, only about 22 per cent of plastic produced in the EU is recycled.

One of the ventures that recently came out of EIT’s Climate KIC – which is active in the area of climate change, adaptation and mitigation – was an idea that could massively reduce plastic waste: an edible water bottle. “This team’s thinking was that if you could not only drink water but then also eat the bottle, then there wouldn’t be any waste at all,” Fammels shares. “It’s a small thing, but it can have a major impact.”

The product is called Ooho! The project is from a company called Skipping Rocks Lab, and they won the Climate KIC UK Venture Award in 2015.