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BUILDING A NATIONAL EDUCATION EXPORT NETWORK FOR THE FOOD CHAIN - (FLEN)

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Introduction

A national education export network focused on the food chain (FLEN= Food Learning Education Network) was founded in the spring of 2016 in Seinäjoki. The network will focus on the whole food chain, including the reuse and recycling of side streams. This article provides a description of the members of the network as well as the tasks and aims of working as a consortium to establish a new form of cooperation.

Background

Several education export networks have been formed recently in Finland to develop skills for marketing and building export learning packages, both for international and domestic markets. Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) and Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) participated in the Learning Bridge – education export network project for Pirkanmaa during 2012-2014 to learn about the system for establishing a consortium for education export. At HAMK experience has also been gained through professional development for teachers and pedagogical change projects (Ryymin et al. 2016). Several expert education short courses in industrial microbiology and hygiene have also been implemented in the Baltic countries.

Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) has participated in several projects and consortiums on the topic of education export and food safety, some of which were implemented with other members of this consortium. In terms of the food chain, TAMK's expertise lies in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) procedures and knowledge of hygiene management. TAMK is also coordinating an ERDF 2014-2020 funded project, Urban Agriculture - Resource Efficient Business Opportunities, which began in May 2015 with the aim of promoting business opportunities for urban agriculture in the Tampere Region. The kind of urban agriculture dealt with in this project would meet the requirements for low-carbon and energy-efficient food production, more resource-efficient nutrient use and challenges related to the welfare of urban citizens. Knowhow concerning the possibilities and threats of professional urban agriculture will be increased through this project, which works as an innovation platform for different urban agriculture solutions. The project is being

implemented through cooperation between TAMK and an NGO, along with numerous collaborative entrepreneurs, urban agriculture farmers and authorities. The results of this project can also be used in education export.

JAMK University of Applied Sciences (JAMK) provides education services globally by offering tailor-made programmes to customers and by engaging in development processes in partnerships with vocational and higher education institutions. Cooperation is also implemented with other organizations both in the public and private sectors. JAMK's products and services cover all the study fields offered within its different schools.

JAMK has been participating in projects concerning research exchange and nutrition, and one of the latest projects it has been involved was Food4Growth project, funded by the Nordic Councils of Ministers. The overall purpose of Food4Growth was to establish a network to connect researchers in the Nordic countries and China in order to advance research and education within the areas of public health nutrition and clinical nutrition. The establishment of the network will contribute to the development of new, evidence-based interventions and innovations in the area of food service provision in public hospitals through strengthened research cooperation between Denmark, Finland, Norway and China. The network will aim, in the future, to harness the potential of hospital food and nutrition services to create value in terms of healthy and sustainable food production and consumption.

Savonia University of Applied Sciences (Savonia) provides education services through tailor-made programmes on topics such as water safety, the food chain, livelihood support / business concepts in Agriculture, farm product development, food systems and laboratory analyses. Savonia has implemented programmes in locations such as the Republic of Kosovo, where training of 27 agricultural specialists was carried out in 2011-2013, with both students and stakeholders assessing the project as being very successful. The students' satisfaction was evaluated using a web questionnaire and the stakeholders' satisfaction through six focus group discussions organised in different parts of the country. Up to 90 % (n=27) of the students found the training beneficial for their future career and all students were satisfied with the training.

Seinäjäski University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK) participated in the operation of the Future Learning Finland network in 2011-2012. The University was involved in development cooperation projects implemented in Albania, Kosovo, Uganda and Kenya, and the education

service strategy report was completed in 2015 by the University Consortium of Seinäjoki. In the first stage of the planning report, the organisation of the education services was designed, with a network model chosen as the organisation format. The region of Southern Ostrobothnia has been profiled as an expert in food systems and entrepreneurship, so the education service themes to be covered were chosen in the key relevant fields for the region.

Founding the consortium

In the autumn of 2015, SeAMK held a workshop to study the possibilities for working on education export together with several universities of applied sciences and research centres, as well as companies and other education institutes doing work within the field of the food chain. At the meeting a consensus on forming a consortium was reached and a decision to draw up a memorandum of understanding based on the results of the workshop was made. The first steering board meeting was held on 12 September 2016. After the workshop, each institute compiled their own relevant expertise, as well as any existing tailor-made packages for educating different types of organisations as samples. These were discussed at a second workshop, in order to establish which cooperation packages of expert education would be used in marketing and for all parties to learn from the expertise of the other institutes.

The first to sign the consortium memorandum were Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences Ltd., Häme University of Applied Sciences Ltd., JAMK University of Applied Sciences Ltd., Savonia University of Applied Sciences Ltd. and Tampere University of Applied Sciences Ltd. A national consortium on food chain expert education was founded in April 2016, and will later be expanded to include research institutes, universities, adult education institutes and companies, according to the needs and wishes of the clients.

Initial performance

The atmosphere within the consortium has been very positive from the beginning. A framework for the work has been identified and a network has been created to perform as a tool for cooperation. The next steps for the consortium will be:

1. To find financing. The consortium will try to apply for financing to build up its business plan.
2. To make pilot proposals. China was an initial target due to existing cooperation.
3. To widen the network. Based on the first workshops, the membership base will be widened to include research organisations, entrepreneurs and other organisations.

Business plan for the consortium

The consortium began to form its business plan using the Business Model Canvas. We identified customer segments, such as food industry and hygiene and safety authorities, as well as what kind of value will be added. The main focus will be on food safety in the food chain and tools to create healthy and safe foods. Trust and safety in the whole food chain is to be built up in the target countries, which will also require involvement with equipment and detergent suppliers and machinery and construction operators in order to establish a more complete package to sell.

The main steps

In the food chain consortium, the main steps will be:

- 1) To understand the background and needs of the client
- 2) To produce relevant marketing and sales material
- 3) To identify the consortium members and the opportunities the consortium can provide
- 4) To build up an efficient, flexible and confident action output
- 5) To build up overall supply chain management that reaches the customer.

With these methods the consortium will be able to create additional value for the client's business.

The key resources

The consortium discussed different resources including personnel, financial and material resources, and the variety of resources is wide within this consortium, which will make it easier to find resources for the outputs offered to clients. The connections with authorities and foreign sales contacts must start on a positive note, and in this respect some mandates have already been issued. Marketing and selling require more effort and innovation.

The ready, on-hand products

The consortium planned to start the collaboration with targeted short courses lasting for 2-3 weeks. The clients, for instance in Asia, could be authorities or industry or other organisations. Longer courses such as BSc or MSc level programs, will follow later when the needs have been identified.

During the workshops, an area common to the participants was found to be hygiene education, with all members of having slightly different angles regarding the aim: food industry, nutrition, food microbiology, cleaning etc. The education level of the Finnish Hygiene Passport, the qualification necessary to prove ability to work within hygiene regulations, and the Finnish Oiva-system, which provides inspection reports on safety and hygiene levels, gave a good start for collaboration on putting together a course package. The package will be formed in a way that allows all members of this consortium to share their knowledge and expertise to build a high quality education export product. The product will be based on well-known, high quality, safe food products like dairy, meat and convenience foods, and reliable delivery systems, as well as quality raw material, sustainable side stream utilisation and recycling systems.

Working as a network makes the education export more powerful in terms of high-quality education, brings together a variety of experts to build a high-quality product and gives support to each other when working side by side abroad. It provides a brand and gives new meaning to “Finnish food education export”.

Working as a network makes the education export more powerful, brings together a variety of experts to build a high-quality, sustainable product and gives security in working side by side abroad. It provides a brand and gives a new meaning to “Finnish food education export”.

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