



Centro Técnico Nacional
de Conservas Vegetales

LABORATORIO DEL EBRO

ain

FROM REGIONAL AWARENESS TO TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP



INFOCAN

***INCREASING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF CANNED
VEGETABLES SECTOR USING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES***



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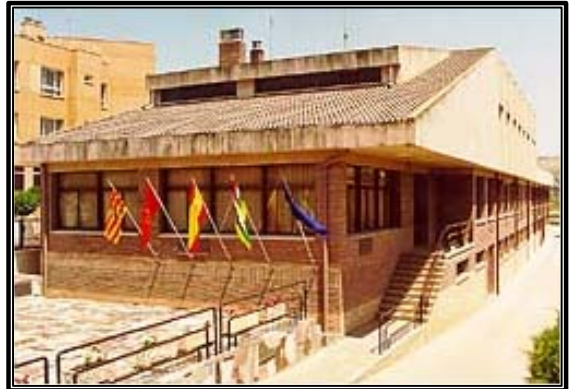


1. THE PARTNERSHIP. OVERVIEW OF THE CONSORTIUM

a) Centro Técnico Nacional de Conservas Vegetales (CTNCV)

It is the project Co-ordinator and Area Agent. It is a non-profit private laboratory supported by the own SMEs (116) whose main objective is to provide services to companies of the addressed sector (canned vegetables and other ones related). These services are aimed at supporting industries to develop technical or research activities that are over the capability of the own company. This Centre gathers a deep experience in different activities that cover from technical assistance (Analysis, Quality Assurance, legal, technical and economical information) to R&DT projects development of general or specific interest. This activity includes the implementation of Information Technologies in the addressed sector. Besides, it has been recognised as a National Technical Centre, so that the activity has been spread up to any company of the sector and is accredited as European laboratory (EN 45001) since 1997 by ENAC (EAL).

CTNCV collaborates in the development of R&DT activities with other Technological and Research Centres from Spain and other countries of the European Union. CTNCV has developed projects in collaboration with AIN (partner 2), ITGa and the Public University of Navarra at regional level, University of Salamanca (Castilla y León, Spain), CIDA (La Rioja, Spain), SIA (Aragón, Spain), AZTI (Bask Country, Spain) as well as Agrotec and the University of Bordeaux in France.



The above mentioned activities lead to CTNCV to a privileged position in order to co-ordinate the project. Besides, 15% of CTNCV associated companies are set up in other Spanish region that will make easier to extend the experience to other Spanish regions, taking into account that since the recognition of CTNCV as Technological Centre of National character, 52 non associated sectorial companies have become usual clients.

b) Asociación de la Industria Navarra (AIN)

Asociación de la Industria Navarra is a private Consortium of 150 multisectorial companies, covering all the regional industrial sectors, being the most important: car and car parts manufacturing, chemical, metal mechanics and agroindustrial, including several ones from the canned vegetables sector. It is localised, as well as the project Co-ordinator, in Navarre, in the Spanish region of the Valle del Ebro. AIN provides to companies with different kind of technical and consultancy services. Their activities include Engineering and technology development (Energy and Environment, predictive maintenance, CAD, surfacing technologies and software development), Human Resources and Consulting services in quality, economy and legal-labour.



AIN hosts the Euroinfo Centre of Navarra, that has access and currently works with many networks and databases related to R&DT.

It has a wide experience in different technical aspects as Information Technology systems implementation as well as in transnational project development involving industrial companies. Its role in the project will be mainly concentrated in supporting the Area Agent in all the phases



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of development, specially in those related with Internet applications implementation and to assist companies in the establishment of co-operative research activities.

Only 29% of the annual turnover come from services provided to associated companies. So, 71% of our clients are non-associated, being most part of them industrial companies set in Navarra, Bask Country or Madrid.

Companies from Food Processing field use also generic AIN services in training, legal labour consultancy, financial consultancy, etc., as any other company from other sectors.

2. THE OBJECTIVES AND STATE

The main characteristic of the sector addressed is that it is made up mainly by SMEs that are strongly concentrated in a given region, the Valle del Ebro. This kind of companies does not have, in general, enough resources allowing strong investments in R&DT activities and their access to the information networks is usually very limited or non existent at all.

Nevertheless, the access to legal, technological and commercial information is becoming more and more important because it can collaborate to counteract the problem of the small dimension and lack of resources and market knowledge by means of:

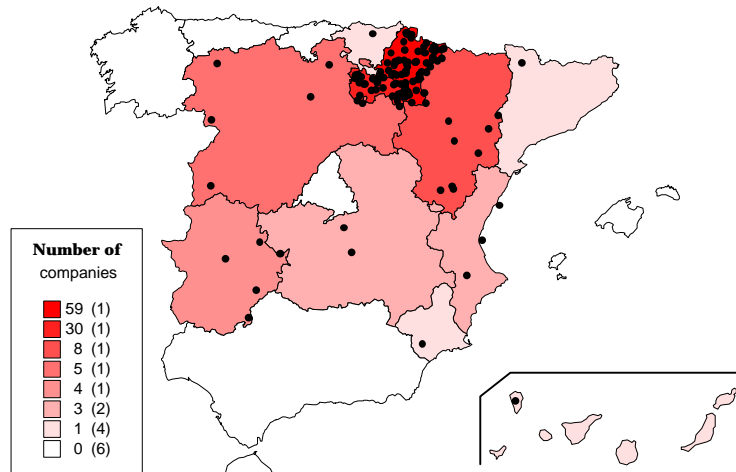


Figure 1. Distribution of associated companies of CTNCV

- ☑ Stressing the contacts will all those points where technological developments are taking currently place (Technological centres, Universities) and even, requests services that they are currently receiving in a faster way.
- ☑ Setting up synergy with other companies of the sector in order to reduce the costs of raw materials procurement, establishing distribution channels, new markets identification.
- ☑ Setting up international relationships with other companies of the same or other related sector in order to be able to launch complementary marketing actions, and, even, start co-operative R&DT projects.

The main objective of the project is to develop a set of actions aimed at supporting a sustainable development of industrial companies of the **canned vegetables sector of Valle del Ebro** by means of the use of Information Technologies. This will allow the development of co-operative and transnational activities these companies. Moreover, the developments and experiences acquired in the framework of the current project can be extended to the rest of the sectors in the field of Food Processing.

The project intention is to propose a prototype project based on the use of Information Technologies covering different matters, allowing to set up a model that could be extended at European level in other sectorial groups of companies with the same characteristics: concentration of SMEs in a given region (other sectors of food processing field, footwear, ceramics, ornamental stones, cork, etc.).



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Figure 2. Objectives of INFOCAN project

The main objective of the INFOCAN project is split into the following objectives:

- To help companies to achieve a critical mass to be able to answer to the market needs beyond they current possibilities by means of the use of innovative Information Technology possibilities for co-operative raw material (vegetables) procurement and management. This will be achieved improving the access of the companies to the information networks.
- To assist companies in the establishment of co-operative research by means of:
 - ☞ On line access to the Technological Centre (Sector Agent) facilities and, through it to other Spanish and European Technological Centres developing technology related to the sector.
 - ☞ Promotion of the use of currently available Databases containing the results of the projects related to the sector.
- To streamline communications between companies and Administration, reducing red paper in Legalisation, Environment Regulations and Industrial Security.
- To promote the use of Information Technologies for management activities:
 - ☞ Increasing production flexibility.
 - ☞ Supporting product and process innovation by means of on-line access to legal, commercial and technology available information, encouraging the contacts with technology suppliers.
 - ☞ Access to available research facilities.



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- On going and already available results of R&DT Projects.
- To support companies in accessing new markets using Information Technologies for promotion, launching complementary set of products in co-operation with other companies of Food Processing field and using available technology for electronic commerce and distribution.

3. THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION AND RELATED BENEFITS

World economy is becoming more and more globalised. Moreover, the industries of the European Union must work thinking in Europe as a unique trade so co-operation or at least communication with other European industries localised in other countries of the EU must be considered a necessary requirement to survive.

This project will permit SMEs localised outside the great industrial areas to collaborate to counteract the problem of the small dimension and lack of resources and market knowledge. They will be able to collaborate with other enterprises localised all over Europe in order to develop co-operative R&DT projects of common interest and, moreover, they are going to be capable to offer their products to any client worldwide. So they will be able to work in equality with bigger enterprises that have an easiest access to any kind of information relative to research results, marketing and trade opportunities, government funds and so on.

In the other side, results of this pilot project can be transposed to any other European sector of the same characteristics, gathering regional SMEs of a sector around information networks that let them interact with other groups all over Europe to finally constitute European networks.

This process conducts to higher levels of productivity, competitive and economical benefits both for the enterprises and for the regional development of the places where they are localised.

In the other side the access of this SMEs to information will benefit other sectors too. Enterprises that manufacture equipment for these SMEs or offer services as distribution, marketing, etc. will be able to easily approach this sector groups enhancing the possibility of making business together.

One of the aims of this project is to promote the participation of the industries of this sector in co-operative development projects through database searching and the support of the consortium in identification and management of the project.

Finally, these industries will be able to stress the contacts with European technological development facilities (Technological centres, Universities) and set up international in order launch complementary actions of R&DT.

4. THE IMPACT

The Canned Food Vegetables sector is constituted mainly by SMEs localised in rural regions traditionally dedicated to primary economical activities as agriculture. These regions have been characterised by a strong process of migration to urban regions due to the lack of employment opportunities in traditional sectors.

Moreover, the increasing degree of technical and scientific education of young people is stressing this problem because primary sectors do not offer opportunities of a professional career for engineers, chemists, etc.

Nevertheless, these SMEs constitute a great focus of regional industrial development, offering employment of diverse qualification, from workers to qualified technicians. In addition, the presence of these industries acts as an attraction fact for other related enterprises dedicated to provide them with equipment or services, ranging from mechanical industries to analytical



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laboratories. These last provide with high qualification employment so they can slow the migration process.

SMEs constitute a vital branch of Spanish industrial frame. Indeed, they constitute up to 92 % of the total number of industries, 75 % of employment and 66 % of economical activity. In addition, the canned food sector is an important engine for the survival of agriculture, an activity of the greatest interest both for Spain and Europe, because they provide the means of offering worldwide a production that, in other cases, will not find a sufficient market to be exploited.

For these reasons this is a very important sector for regional development but the small dimension of these enterprises puts them in disadvantage with other enterprises of greater entity and better localisation, so any action directed to increase their competitiveness will be of the greatest interest for these regions.

As it has been assessed, access to information technologies is a vital challenge for survival of this important sector of the Spanish and European economy