

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### IS 98033 - INFOCAN

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

The project INFOCAN has tried to increase the use of ICT among a traditional sector in Spain, the canned vegetables industries.

Companies have been asked about their more demanding needs and have been advised how ICT could help them. A package of services has been developed in order to satisfy those needs, including some e-services as electronic request of analytical services and results, technical assistance, etc.

The key issue of the project has been a bottom-up approach so the services developed have tried to change the way companies manage technical aspects of their activity, but not the activity itself.



#### **II.1. Context**

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.

#### **II.2. Objectives**

The project has tried to promote the use of these technologies in the daily work of the companies. For this purpose the key issue was to obtain the trust of the companies not only in ICTs in general but in the fact that these technologies could be adapted to their specific needs. The project has tried to show SMEs that the use of ICTs can help them to stress the contacts with all the points where technological developments are taking currently place (Technological Centres,

Universities) and even, requests services that they are currently receiving in a faster way (analytical, assistance, etc.).

The partners also thought that these technologies could help them to set up synergy with other companies of the sector in order to reduce the costs of raw materials procurement, establishing distribution channels, new markets identification and even set 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.

#### **II.3. Process**

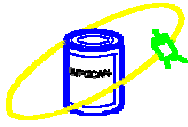
The objective mentioned above led the consortia to design an awareness raising strategy based on asking companies about their specific needs and giving them solutions based on ICTs that could save time and costs. In order to inform companies about ICTs in general and about INFOCAN project, we used a wide range of media, including a press release in the most important regional newspaper, news bulletins of CTNCV and AIN and letters encouraging companies to join the project sent by mail, fax and e-mail.

In order to diagnose the needs of the companies, including their technological resources and the more demanding applications and services, a closed questionnaire was designed (with choose an answer questions). This questionnaire summarised the services outlined by the partners in a previous application list (based on their knowledge of the sector). It was written in a non-technical language and some examples were included to illustrate the applications and services and ease a significant response.

The replies to this questionnaire constituted the point of departure of the design of the services developed during the project.

The partners also contacted selected companies in order to encourage them to participate in the project and solve any possible doubt about the project. Finally, the project was presented to a selected group of companies that gathered in the Management Board of CTNCV. Several representatives of both, regional and national Administration were present, including the Spanish Federation of Food and Beverage Industries (FIAB).

Once the services were developed, they were presented



to companies in a seminar open to any company in the sector. A significant number of companies (about 190) have received information through a leaflet and a brief letter explaining the services developed under INFOCAN.

Another key issue was to provide companies with an affordable ICT solution, so the project has not save efforts to negotiate with Telecommunications providers in order to reach a good proposal.

#### **II.4. Results, Impact and achievements**

The most effective way for involving this kind of companies is the personal contact as it gives the opportunity of explaining in detail advantages of ICT and solves typical doubts about this technology. In the other hand, the applications seminar, showing real possibilities and the specific advantages that INFOCAN gives to each particular company, is another effective tool to convince the most reluctant companies.

Thirty eight companies agreed to participate using pilot services of INFOCAN in the first stages of the project. Nevertheless, other companies not included in this group have decided to begin using the service, mainly the analysis e-service. Geographic distribution of these companies shows that most of them are gathered around the region of the Valle del Ebro.

The mean response to the different services proposed has demonstrated that those applications involving real solutions to daily problems (as analytical and technical assistance) are the most demanded ones.

Information Technologies aren't considered a good investment among small companies that aren't willing to innovate. A good way of solving this fact is targeting those companies more inclined to innovation and, moreover, adapting solutions to the problems they want to solve. Providing them with those applications companies introduces themselves, little by

little, in the use of these technologies. As they realise that they are saving time and resources by using the former applications, they are more interested in other more complex or "abstract" applications (as e-commerce or discussion fora). Moreover, companies are not easily willing to co-operate between them (problem of trust), so trying to build services that imply economical collaboration appears to be a very difficult task.

Another key issue has been the reliability of the consortia, constituted by non-profit centres, dedicated to give services. Thus they are sure that they are not going to "sell" anything but to help them.

Based on these results, the services developed have been the following ones:

- Electronic reception of analysis results.
- On-line assistance and request of information: information concerning legislation, technical matters and generic.
- Request of legal and technical assistance by means of IT.
- Setting up an electronic news bulletin devoted to the agro-food sector.

Besides, following the conclusions of the Versailles meeting (May 12, 1.999) CTNCV and AIN are developing a prototype aimed at facilitating the contacts between French and Spanish agro-food companies in order to prepare CRAFT proposals. CIRAL and ELINET projects will participate in the action.

The value of these services mentioned above depends on the upkeep of the service, which means its affordability for the users too (if the expenses of connection are too high the companies will refuse to use these technologies). We have received a good offer for connecting companies that includes much lower prices, a

wider range of services and the possibility of moving from BTN to ISDN improving the speed of their communications.

#### **II.5. Contact Details**

Project Name:

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

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