DIGIFABS

Digital Change Agents for Food + Beverage SMEs

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TPM IN AMSTERDAM

RESEARCH UPDATE

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND FLOOD RECOVERY

CULTIVATING THE FUTURE OF FOOD

DIGITAL INNOVATION IN SLOVAKIA

DIGIFABS SUMMER SCHOOL AND CHALLENGE 2025

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Recap of TPM in Amsterdam

DIGIFABS Consortium meets in Amsterdam

The second Transnational Partner Meeting (TPM) of the DIGIFABS project was hosted by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) on December 2nd and 3rd. Over twenty people gathered from the 14 project partners to present and review the latest research carried out in the project, report on work done to date and conduct workshop and strategy meetings in preparation for the Bootcamps and Summer School which will take place next year.

The meeting opened with a review of Work Package 3: Investigation, by Mike Russell of AUAS who is leading this Work Package. Mike outlined the progress achieved including a Literature Review of 96 articles, interviews with 84 educators and SME staff, identifying more than 50 Best Practices and analysing 24 Training Programmes. Mike and the Work Package 3 group have prepared a detailed Synthesis Report. The final part of this Work Package, a Student Skills Gap Analysis, is currently being finalized by the team members from Maynooth University. The findings of this comprehensive investigation will be published in the next few weeks and inform the activities and focus of the next phases of our project.

Next to address the meeting was Dominik Gisa of FH Münster, which leads Work Package 1: Project Management for DIGIFABS. Dominik updated the consortium on progress to date and how it aligned with the plan and future timeline for the project. He confirmed that all key milestones and deliverables were or are on track for timely delivery. There were further updates on the budget and confirmation and planning of dates for future meetings.

The final presentation on day one was from Paula Whyte of Momentum, who leads Work Package 2: Quality Assurance for the project. Paula reported on the quarterly surveys that have been carried out to assess quality assurance, pointing out key highlights as well as areas that have been identified by partners as needing some improvement. Paula also shared a survey to specifically assess the TPM at the end of the meeting which was completed on site, and a further survey to assess performance in the last quarter.

Day Two of the meeting opened with a co-creation workshop using the World Café format. The workshop focused on Work Package 4: Summer School & Challenge and Work Package 5: Bootcamps. The workshops were facilitated by Zohreh Pourzolfhagar of Maynooth University which leads Work Package 4, Jose Villagran of UIIN, which leads Work Package 5 as well as Dominik Gisa and Judith Helmer of FH Münster. These interactive sessions, in which all partners participated, saw lively discussion and a range of proposals that the Work Package leaders will now analyse to help them finalise plans for the next phase of the project.

The workshops were followed by Kiet Bronkhorst of Preneurz and Denise Callan of Momentum who presented progress of Work Package 8: Dissemination. Current achievements in reaching the target audiences on different platforms were presented. The partners discussed further avenues to increase awareness and interaction with our key target groups of students, educators and food and beverage SMEs.

The last session of the day was hosted by George Georgiou of ECECT presenting current thoughts on Work Package 9: Sustainability. The consortium discussed necessary steps to ensure sustainability of all project results, sharing ideas and thoughts on concrete opportunities, licensing options and the necessary conditions that need to be taken into account during the creation of materials.

partner with a current overview of the project, clarifying responsibilities for the upcoming tasks and project activities and jointly kick-starting the development of our bootcamp and summer school materials.

Speaking after the meeting, Project Management lead Dominik Gisa said “These in-person meetings are essential for our project and a great opportunity to deepen discussions and co-creating new ideas and closing open threads. The atmosphere and spirit of our two days was super active, energetic, and positive. Big thanks to Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences for hosting us and enabling such a creative setting.”

Author: Denise Callan, Momentum

RESEARCH UPDATE
Work Package 3: Investigation

Reviewing the Investigation phase of the DIGIFABS project

Mike Russell of AUAS is the leader of Work Package 3 for DIGIFABS. We recently spoke to Mike about his role leading this part of the project, what that role entails, and how that impacts the success of the project.

Can you please outline your role in the DIGIFABS project?

As AUAS project lead, my primary role was to orchestrate the contributions of 14 consortium partners throughout the Investigation phase. This proved challenging as project-related milestones and deadlines often overlapped with partners' running obligations within their own organisations.

How was this phase of DIGIFABS managed?

The project-related activities were managed within AUAS's Teams environment which, in addition to serving as a repository for meeting minutes and planning discussions, also served as a staging area for work-in-progress outputs prior to them being provided to consortium partners for review.

To ensure process and deliverable consistency across contributing consortium partners, a series of 'How to…" guides was created detailing how, for example, to conduct the literature review, or SME interviews. The overall methodology was set up in a methodology pack at the commencement of WP3. This methodology was iteratively tuned as the project advanced reflecting evolving insights, constraints, and opportunities as they presented themselves.

What were the key outputs from the Investigation phase of the project?

As well as the internal documents we prepared to support Partners' work on this Work Package we published several key outputs. On completing the investigation phase of the project we published:

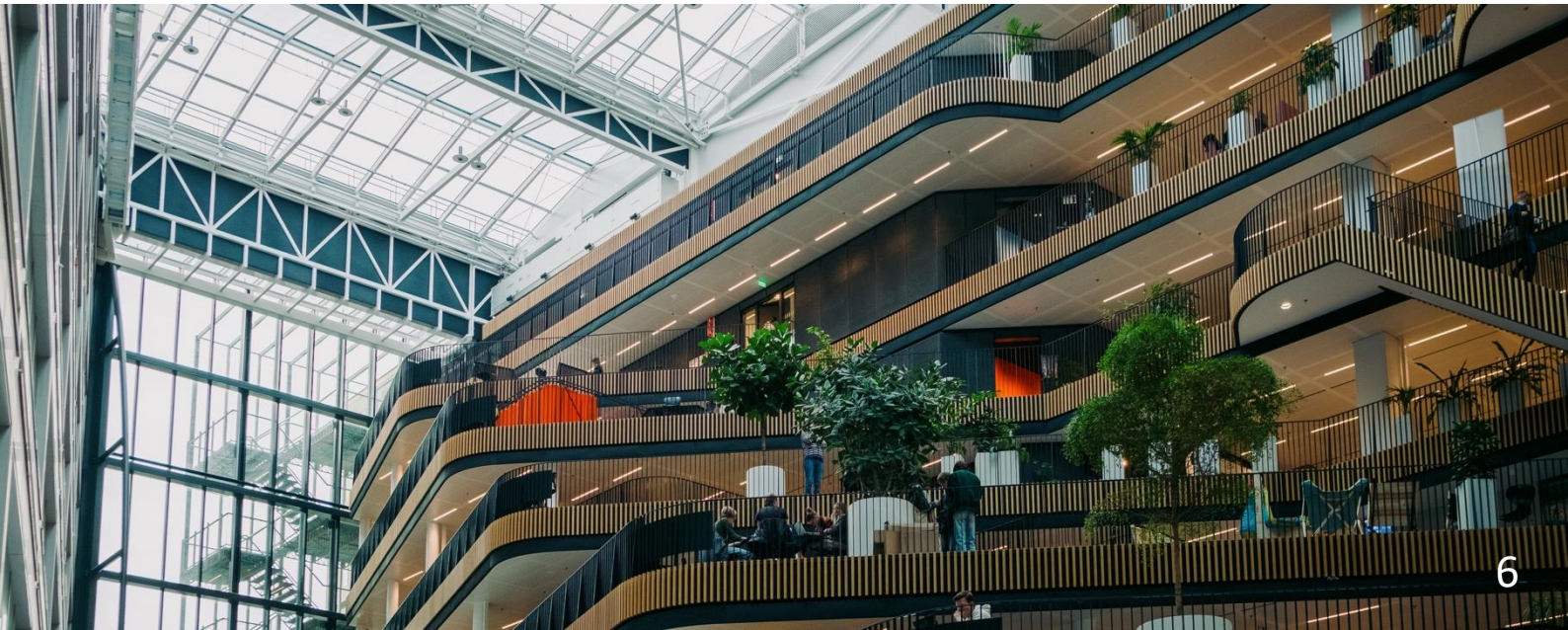
- *DIGIFABS - Training Program Analysis in the F&B Sector*: This output gathers insights in the form of a mini-case collection analysing 24 SME's successful digitalization efforts through training programmes within the F&B sector
- *DIGIFABS – Student Skill Gap Analysis:* This output outlines the findings of a skill gap analysis, highlighting the critical areas where digital skills and competencies need to be developed further through comparative analysis of the skills presumably possessed by students and the level of importance of those skills as perceived by industry experts and academia.
- *DIGIFABS - Synthesis of Literature and Interviews:* This output synthesises review literature (skill concepts and digital transformation maturity models) and synthesises interviews with SMEs and educators/trainers active in the F&B sector.

What impact do these key outputs have on the overall project?

In their totality, these outputs resulting from the Investigation phases, and the results and insights they contain, form the basis for conceptualising, designing, and delivering WP4 – The Summer School and Challenge, and WP 5 RDCCA Bootcamps to prepare Educators and SMEs for the 'SME goes Digital Challenge'.

The international Summer School will be held in September 2025. It targets a mixed group of 20 students per HEI with equal representation from the engineering (e.g., IT, process management, etc.), business (e.g. business administration, marketing, innovation management, etc.) and nutritional sciences fields (e.g. food chemistry, ecotrophology, etc.) and recruitment for that will start shortly.

The boot camps are split into the Educator's boot camp and the SME boot camp. They will take place as short international online sessions in a suitable setting for the target groups.



WORKPACKAGE 4 UPDATE: Summer School + Challenge

Leading DIGIFABS Through RDDCA Summer School and the SME Challenge

As part of the Erasmus+ funded DIGIFABS project, Innovation Value Institute (IVI) at Maynooth University (MU) in Ireland is spearheading Work Package 4 'Summer School and Challenges' (WP4), which aims to cultivate a new generation of Responsible Dynamic Digital Change Agents (RDDCAs) for the food and beverage (F&B) sector. Central to this initiative are two key components: the RDDCA Summer School and the SME Goes Digital Challenge. The DIGIFABS project seeks to equip students and SMEs with cutting-edge digital, green, and resilience skills, positioning them to tackle the evolving challenges of the F&B sector.

Participants will explore critical topics, such as sustainability and digital transformation, while gaining insights into the latest digital tools and trends relevant to SMEs. A strong emphasis is placed on promoting sustainable practices within digital innovation, ensuring students are equipped with the theoretical knowledge necessary for practical application.

The offline summer school, scheduled for September 2025 in Nitra, Slovakia, aims to emphasise experiential learning through immersive and hands-on activities. Students will delve into real-world challenges by analyzing and solving case studies that focus on issues faced by SMEs in the F&B sector, leveraging insights gained from the online coursework. Participants will also engage in on-site learning by visiting local SMEs, offering a firsthand perspective on how digital transformation is implemented in practice.

Additionally, a dynamic business simulation will provide an opportunity to synthesize their knowledge and apply it to simulated business scenarios, fostering practical problem-solving skills in a controlled, interactive environment. The offline and online components reflect DIGIFABS's broader mission: empowering SMEs to navigate digital transformation while promoting sustainability and resilience. By creating opportunities for students to collaborate with SMEs, IVI aims to catalyze real-world solutions that enhance competitiveness in the F&B sector.

In tandem with the summer school, the SME Goes Digital Challenge forms a cornerstone of WP4. This initiative directly engages SMEs, fostering collaboration between students, educators, and businesses. SMEs will benefit from actionable digital strategies and solutions co-created during the challenge, enhancing their capacity to thrive in a competitive market.

Currently in the conceptualization phase, the team at IVI is finalizing plans for both the online and offline programs. With Slovakia's Nitra region serving as a hub for the offline event, participants will gain invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities unique to SMEs in the F&B sector. As WP4 progresses, the DIGIFABS consortium looks forward to nurturing the next generation of RDDCAs and supporting SMEs in their journey toward digital excellence. Together, they aim to lay the foundation for a more innovative and resilient European F&B industry.

Author: Roshmita Kanungoe, Maynooth University

“A LITTLE PROGRESS EACH DAY ADDS UP TO BIG RESULTS”

WORKPACKAGE 5 UPDATE: Bootcamps

Preparing Educators and SMEs for the SME Goes Digital Challenge: The DIGIFABS Bootcamp

In an era where digital transformation is both a need and a challenge, the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector is under growing pressure to adapt to technological advancements. To make a positive impact, the DIGIFABS project has started the development of a bootcamp for university educators and SMEs working in the F&B sector. The aim is to prepare them for the 'SME Goes Digital Challenge'.

Conceptualising the DIGIFABS Bootcamps

Currently in its conceptualisation phase, the DIGIFABS bootcamps are being designed to match the needs and contexts of both university educators and SMEs. The bootcamp modules will cover various aspects of the F&B sector, including industry trends, green practices, nutrition, and resilience, as well as the concept of Responsible Dynamic Digital Change Agent (RDDCA Agent) as a role who can support the digitalisation of the companies and ensure they stay ahead of the curve. The main focus is to prepare participants through a mix of seminar-style sessions complemented by interactive workshops. The workshops aim to enhance the collaboration between universities and SMEs, encouraging knowledge exchange, networking and joint activities.

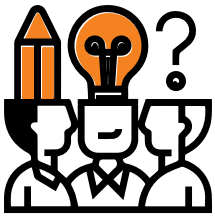
A feature of the DIGIFABS Bootcamps is its commitment to fostering an environment of collaboration. A special session within the bootcamp framework will revolve around preparing educators and SME representatives to work effectively together. Thus, the bootcamps aim at:

- **Equipping Educators:** Educators will get ready to act as facilitators during the 'SME Goes Digital Challenge', ensuring they have access to all they need in order to guide and support the students in addressing the SMEs' challenges.
- **Empowering SMEs:** SMEs will receive guidance and advice to communicate their needs and challenges effectively, ensuring their challenges are understood by educators and students, and can be addressed during the 'SME Goes Digtial Challenge'.

The SME Goes Digital Challenge

The SME Goes Digital Challenge is a challenge-based learning initiative that brings together multidisciplinary teams of university students, educators and SMEs. The initiative will encourage these teams to collaboratively identify and design solutions to the digitalisation challenges faced by SMEs in the F&B sector.

The bootcamps will prepare educators and SMEs for the challenge, while a different DIGIFABS activity, the Summer School, will prepare students for it, thus ensuring that all participants are ready to play their part.



The Importance of Partner Collaboration

The development and implementation of the DIGIFABS Bootcamps requires a strong alignment between UIIN, the leader of the activity, and the rest of the consortium, especially FH Münster, the project coordinator, and Maynooth University, the leader of the Summer School. The bootcamps, scheduled to be piloted and delivered online in the summer of 2025, will be a crucial milestone in the journey towards achieving DIGIFABS goal: empowering SMEs in the F&B sector to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to respond to rapid digital advancement in the sector.

Stay tuned for the latest developments in this and other DIGIFABS activities!

Author: Jose Villagran, UIIN

CONSORCI DE LA RIBERA

How digital transformation can support SMEs recovering from severe flooding

In a few hours, the equivalent of a year's worth of rain fell in some areas, causing large floods that devastated entire towns, leaving thousands of people trapped. In some places more than 600 liters per square meter were recorded. The rainfall, which was accompanied by strong winds and tornadoes, was caused by a meteorological phenomenon known as High Level Isolated Depression (DANA) that has affected a large area of the south and east of Spanish territory.

Dana in Valencia already affected 130,000 homes. The government's first estimatation put the damage caused by DANA in infrastructure in Valencia at 2.6 billion euros. The economic impact of DANA on trade will be around 1,843 million euros. Camara Valencia estimates that the catastrophe has affected more than 5,200 retail establishments, of which 3,500 would have severe damage. The most affected are those in the service sector, although the agri-food industries have recorded significant damage to citrus and rice. Around 30% of Valencian cooperatives, a sector with "strong presence" in the territories most damaged by DANA, have been affected by the catastrophe.

Approximately 30 cooperatives have reported losses, impacting nearly 11,000 workers. The agricultural sector is particularly affected, with around 25,500 hectares of insured farmland damaged across 50,000 parcels, including crops like citrus, kaki, and vineyards. Infrastructure such as irrigation systems and rural roads also sustained severe damage. Although the real impact is still being evaluated, it is expected that there will be losses in future harvests and damage due to business closures. The damage caused in terms of cultural heritage, such as barracks, century-old bridges, churches, works of art, etc., has not yet been able to be calculated.

How technology can play a crucial role in efficiently assessing damages and supporting recovery efforts.

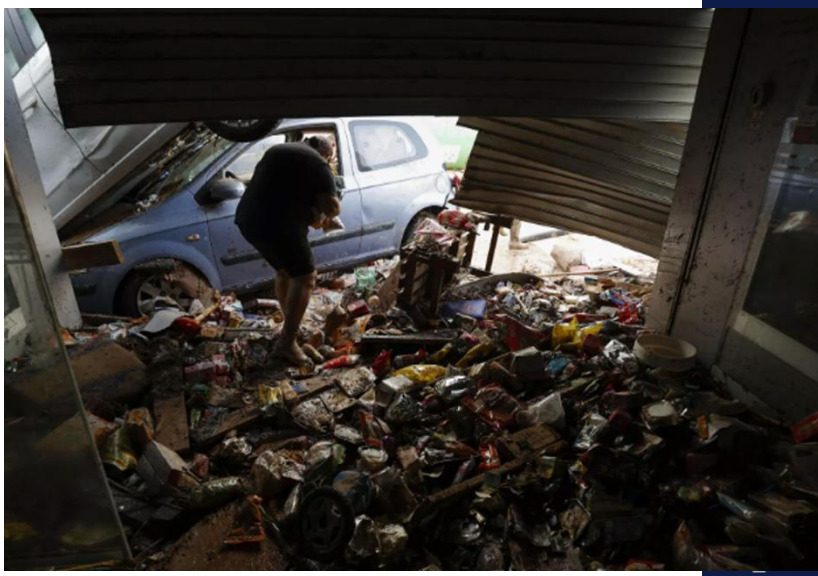
Satellites of the European Copernicus program have been key to analyzing the floods in Valencia. With the Sentinel satellites and its Emergency Management Service, they have generated detailed maps that identify the most affected areas, such as Hoya de Buñol, Ribera Alta and L'Horta Sud, helping to prioritize emergency actions and reconstruction.

Moreover technology and innovative bussines practices can significantly improve resilience and recovery times for affected regions. Therefore, for immediate and short-term responses, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and drones have helped to map the affected areas. Drones have helped assessing damages to infrastructure, crops, and urban areas without risking human safety. GIS has integrated this data to create visualizations that aid in resource allocation and response planning. Moreover, Cloud-Based have helped SMEs to back up critical systems and data and has allowed businesses to maintain customer and financial records, apart from allowing employees to work remotely.

Challenges for recovery and Funding

Efforts for recovery are underway, with organizations evaluating damages and the Valencian Chamber of Commerce providing workspaces for affected businesses. Long-term reconstruction and financial aid will be pivotal in mitigating the disaster's impact.

The Council of Ministers approved new measures within the Immediate Response, Reconstruction and Relaunch Plan for the areas affected by DANA, with a main focus on the agricultural sector. The Ministry of Agriculture will allocate 444.5 million euros to support affected farmers and ranchers, benefiting 49,000 producers and the recovery of 70,000 damaged hectares. The measures include direct aid for a total of 200 million euros to compensate for production losses of more than 40%, as well as 1and agricultural machinery. In addition, financing lines with 60 million euros and measures have been established to guarantee the supply 80 million to restore farms of food to the affected areas. ICO credits for 1,000 million euros will also be activated for the agri-food sector.



European Union has approved that Member States can use funds from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to support farmers, foresters and companies affected by recent natural disasters, such as DANA in Spain, floods in central and eastern Europe, and fires in southern Europe. Countries will have the flexibility to provide emergency aid financed 100% with unused funds from the 2014-2020 period, with a maximum of 42,000 euros per beneficiary. The measure seeks to facilitate recovery and reconstruction in the affected areas.

Author: Pilar Pérez, Consorci de la Ribera

BIA Innovator Campus

Cultivating the Future of Food: How BIA Innovator Campus Shapes Digital Pioneers in F&B

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the food and beverage (F&B) industry, embracing digital innovation is key to achieving sustainability and growth. At the forefront of this transformation is the BIA Innovator Campus, a state-of-the-art hub dedicated to fostering innovation and supporting food businesses in the West of Ireland. Through its involvement in the DIGIFABS project, BIA Innovator Campus is playing a crucial role in shaping the next generation of digital pioneers in the F&B sector.

The Role of BIA Innovator Campus in DIGIFABS

The DIGIFABS project is a collaborative initiative aimed at enhancing digital, resilience, and innovation skills in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the F&B sector. BIA Innovator Campus, as part of a consortium of 14 partners from higher education institutions, vocational education and training (VET) organizations, businesses, and network organizations, contributes significantly to the project's mission of creating Responsible Dynamic Digital Change Agents (RDDCAs).

Empowering Digital Change Agents

BIA Innovator Campus is dedicated to empowering digital change agents through multidisciplinary learning, practical training, and collaborative innovation. The campus provides a dynamic, learner-centered environment where individual potential is nurtured and cultivated.

At BIA Innovator Campus, students, educators, and SMEs from diverse fields such as business administration and food technology come together to exchange ideas and co-create innovative solutions. This multidisciplinary approach is central to the DIGIFABS project, enabling participants to gain a holistic understanding of digital transformation in the F&B sector.

Innovation and Sustainability

Innovation and sustainability are at the core of BIA Innovator Campus's mission. The campus serves as a breeding ground for new ideas and sustainable practices in the F&B industry. Through its involvement in the DIGIFABS project, BIA Innovator Campus promotes the integration of digital technologies that enhance efficiency, improve product quality, and reduce environmental impact.

National Centre of Excellence

As a national center of excellence, BIA Innovator Campus offers a one-stop shop for everything food businesses need, from farm to fork. The campus provides full business support across all aspects of food production, ensuring a more rounded approach to sustainability. This includes technical innovation, commercial support, mentoring, training, peer support, and networking opportunities.

BIA Innovator Campus is committed to fostering a vibrant community of digital innovators. Through networking events, seminars, and collaborative projects, the campus connects students, educators, and industry professionals, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and the creation of valuable partnerships. This community-driven approach not only enhances the learning experience but also ensures the sustainability and scalability of digital transformation efforts in the F&B sector.

Meet the Team

Michelle Kelly holds the role of Project Coordinator at BIA Innovator, where she oversees the execution and management of multiple EU projects. This role requires meticulous attention to detail in managing deliverables, budgets, and stakeholder relationships across Europe. Her experience has honed her skills in strategic project documentation, impactful communication strategies, and hosting and attending international events—all of which are critical to ensuring the effective management of multiple projects.

Emilia Furey is a Project Manager at BIA Innovator, where she manages numerous EU projects including Erasmus+ and InterReg focus. She has expertise in specialty food retail management for SMEs in Irish Food Industry and has excellent attention to detail in all aspects of project management, including budget control and managing tight deadlines.

Michelle Kelly

Emilia Furey

Conclusion

The BIA Innovator Campus is a cornerstone of the DIGIFABS project, driving the development of digital pioneers in the F&B industry. By providing a multidisciplinary learning environment and fostering innovation and sustainability, the campus shapes the future of food. As the F&B sector continues to evolve, the contributions of BIA Innovator Campus will be instrumental in ensuring that SMEs are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a digital, sustainable, and dynamic world.

Author: Michelle Kelly, Emilia Furey, BIA EU Project

SUA

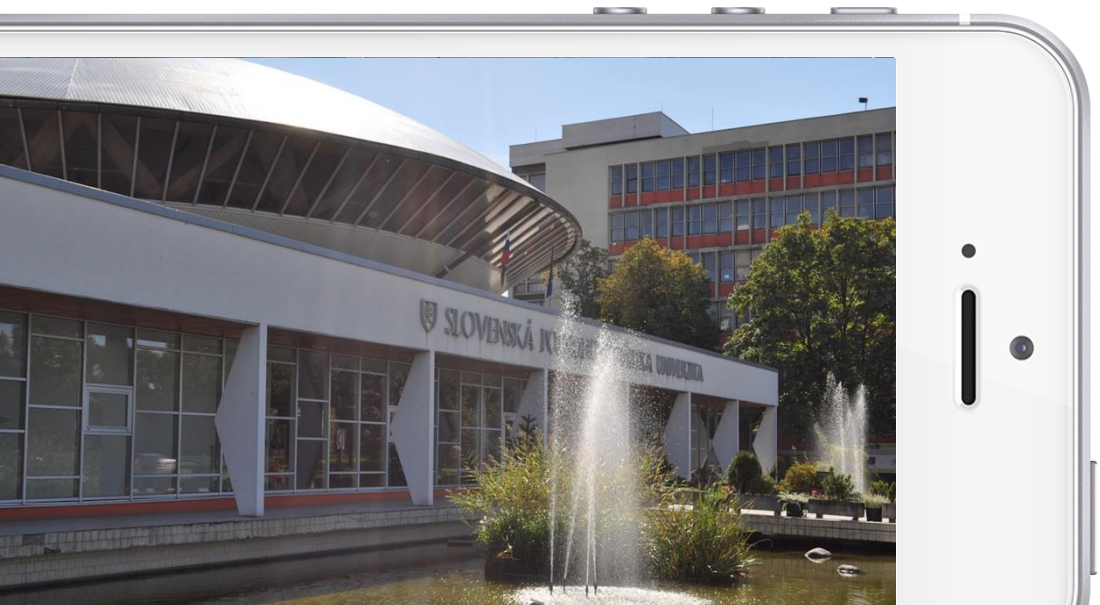
Transforming the Food & Beverage Sector in Slovakia through Digital Innovations

The importance of digitalization in the food and beverage sector is constantly growing. Modern technologies, automation and digital solutions play a key role in optimizing processes, increasing efficiency and improving sustainability. The Slovak F&B sector, which is one of the traditional sectors of our economy, lags behind the EU average in terms of the use of modern technologies. The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI 2024), as well as a surveys conducted within the DIGIFABS project (www.DIGIFABS.eu), show that only around 14% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Slovakia integrate digital technologies. Other challenges for the digitalization of the Slovak food and beverage sector include:

- **Financial barriers** : Around 70% of SMEs cite lack of financial resources as the main obstacle to digitalization.
- **Lack of qualifications** : Only 30% of employees in the sector have the necessary digital skills.
- **Conservative approach** : Smaller businesses often view digitization as a risky investment.

The Faculty of Engineering of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, in cooperation with New Edu, n.o., has been intensively contributing to the development of this area for several years through education, research and practical solutions that address the current needs of the sector. Their joint activities include:

- **Education of professionals:** the offer of study programs within formal and non-formal education focused on digital technologies, automation and related areas ensures qualified professionals for the needs of the market.
- **Research and innovation:** participation in various schemes and research projects aimed at implementing Smart solutions in the sector, such as smart sensors, digital twins or systems for traceability and food safety.
- **Collaboration with practice:** both institutions actively collaborate with businesses and organizations to improve processes and implement new technologies. They organize workshops, seminars and focus groups to share knowledge and best practices. practices .
- **Technological infrastructure:** in addition to the faculty's modern laboratories, where students and researchers have the opportunity to experiment with new technologies and develop tailor-made solutions for practice, the Faculty of Engineering and New Edu, n.o, at the end of 2024, together with two other organizations, Free Food, o.z. and TBS, a.s. opened the Innovative Center for the Prevention of Food Waste and Losses, where they are dedicated to researching the impact of technologies such as AI, machine learning, the Internet of Things, etc. on reducing food waste.



DIGIFABS as a platform for change

In addition to the DIGIFABS's project aims, for the Slovak F&B sector, the DIGIFABS project provides a unique platform to support digitalization through the development and testing of prototypes. The faculty has already announced the first topics for diploma and dissertation theses, through which it involves students in practical projects, where they test digital solutions directly on real challenges of companies. Together with organizations such as New Edu, n.o. or the Rural Youth Parliament in Slovakia, it organizes workshops and educational courses aimed at training SME employees in the field of digitalization and implementation of innovative technologies in food and beverage production. In addition, it is building a network of technology partners, research organizations and universities, where favorable conditions for innovation are created.

Digitalization is essential for improving the competitiveness of the Slovak food and beverage sector. Both Slovak partners of the DIGIFABS project - the Faculty of Engineering of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra and New Edu, n.o. - play an important role in this process, providing professional education, research and practical solutions. Thanks to projects such as DIGIFABS, the F & B sector has the opportunity to adapt to the challenges of the digital age and use its full potential for the future.

Author: Zuzana Palkova, SUA

DIGIFABS SUMMER SCHOOL AND CHALLENGE 2025

We're excited to invite 100 students from across Europe to join the DIGIFABS Summer School & Challenge 2025! This fully-funded program offers students from fields like engineering, business, and design the chance to gain hands-on experience in digital transformation within the Food & Beverage (F&B) sector.

What's in it FOR YOU?

- **Future-Proof Your Career** with cutting-edge digital skills and a certification in digital innovation.
- **Real-World Industry Experience** by solving challenges for SMEs and pitching your solutions to industry professionals.
- **Fully Funded Opportunity**: Free travel, accommodation, and meals at the Slovak University of Agriculture, Nitra, Slovakia.
- **Network Across Europe**: Connect with peers and experts from across the continent.

Who Should Apply?

Students in **Food Science**, **Tech & Engineering**, **Business**, and more are welcome! If you're passionate about digital innovation, we want you.

Important Dates:

- **Online Pre-School**: August 25–29, 2025
- **Summer School**: September 3–10, 2025
- **SMEgoesDigital Challenge**: October 2025 – January 2026

With only 100 spots available, register now and secure your place!

For more details, visit: DigiFabs Summer School & Challenge 2025.

We can't wait to see you there!

DIGIFABS

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