DIGIFABS

Digital Change Agents for Food + Beverage SMEs

IVI SUMMIT AND TPM IN MAYNOOTH

MEET OUR PARTNERS NEW EDU AND AUAS

DIGITAL MATURITY MODEL UNVEILED

THE ROLE OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

ISSUE 3

09.09.2025

www.digfabs.eu

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them

CONTENTS

www.digifabs.eu

DIGIFABS AT THE IVI SUMMIT

Authors: Roshmita Kanungoe & Markus Helfert, Maynooth University

Accelerating Digital Transformation in Food & Beverage

The DIGIFABS project was well represented at the Innovation Value Institute (IVI) Summit 2025, held on 11–12 June at Maynooth University, showcasing its commitment to driving digital transformation in the food and beverage (F&B) sector. With over 300 attendees from across Europe, the summit focused on the theme: "What is possible by 2030? Accelerate Change with Fair and Responsible Use of AI, Data and Digital Transformation."

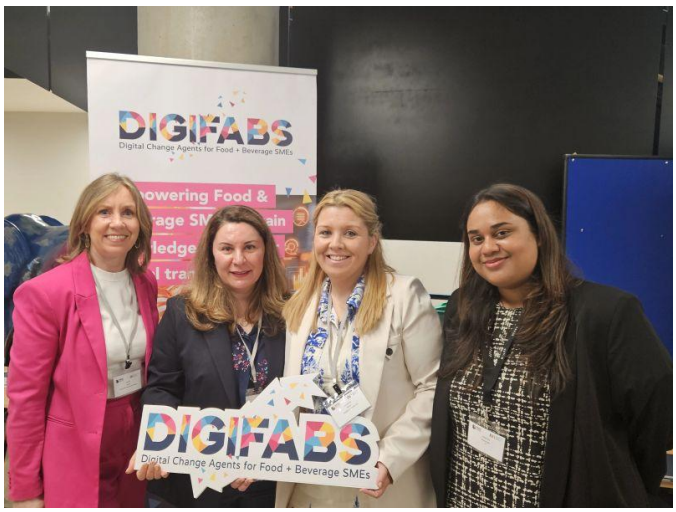
Roshmita Kanungoe from Maynooth University facilitated a flagship workshop titled "Transforming Food & Beverage: Addressing Digitalisation Challenges Across Europe,". Among the speakers was consortium member Denise Callan from DIGIFABS partner Momentum, who spoke about the DIGIFABS project and how it is supporting students, educators and SMEs to collaborate and address Digital Transformation challenges in the Food and Beverage Sector. The session featured expert speakers who discussed the digital evolution of the F&B industry—from start-ups to legacy businesses—highlighting strategies for sustainability, resilience, and competitiveness. Topics included:

- • Building the food start-up ecosystem
- • Digital support for SMEs
- • Workforce upskilling
- • R&D for industry innovation

The panel emphasised the importance of collaborative ecosystems and smarter value chains, addressing both opportunities and challenges in digitalisation.

Beyond the workshop, DIGIFABS maintained a strong presence with a dedicated stand, engaging attendees and promoting initiatives like the SME Goes Digital Challenge. The summit reinforced DIGIFABS' role in shaping the future of digital transformation in the F&B sector.

Save the date for next year's IVI Summit: 10–12 June 2026.



DIGIFABS AT TPM AT MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY

Authors: Roshmita Kanungoe & Markus Helfert, Maynooth University

Strengthening Collaboration for a Digital Future

Following the IVI Summit, the DIGIFABS consortium reconvened at Maynooth University for a two-day Transnational Project Meeting (TPM). Hosted by Markus Helfert and Roshmita Kanungoe, the meeting brought together 14 consortium partners from academia, SMEs, and government agencies to plan the next phase of the EU-funded Knowledge Alliance project.

The TPM focused on:

- Final preparations for the SME Goes Digital Challenge
- Planning for Summer School 2025, offering immersive Industry 4.0 experiences
- Reviewing achievements and refining strategies

Interactive workshops allowed partners to co-design solutions around:

- SME recruitment
- Cross-border partnerships
- Communication and impact showcasing

The collaborative energy at Maynooth was evident, with partners sharing regional insights and aligning on a clear roadmap for the future. DIGIFABS continues to address digital skills gaps through bootcamps, summer schools, and support for SMEs adopting digital tools. The TPM reinforced the consortium's commitment to sustainable digital transformation and its readiness to deliver lasting impact.

Stay informed by visiting www.digifabs.eu, following DIGIFABS on social media, and subscribing to the e-zine.

DIGIFABS BOOTCAMP WRAP UP

Author: Jose Villagran, UIIN

As we work on the development of the DIGIFABS Summer School and prepare for its implementation, the DIGIFABS project has achieved one of its main milestones: the delivery and implementation of the Online RDDCA Bootcamp for Educators and SMEs.

This late spring, the DIGIFABS consortium concluded months of work during which we built the structure for the bootcamp, developed the content and delivered the sessions throughout four weeks.

The bootcamp caught the attention of many educators and SME representatives, and a total of 115 people registered to participate in the live sessions and potentially take part in the future implementation of the SME Goes Digital Challenge, a challenge-based learning initiative that will bring together students, educators and SMEs to tackle challenges and identify opportunities for digital transformation.

The bootcamp was structured across four weeks, with the first week of content being pre-recorded by the consortium to provide an introduction to the bootcamp, the project and the topics that would be the foundation for the upcoming sessions. The next three weeks featured 2 hours of live sessions every Wednesday, where a daily average of 45 attendees from academia and the SME world gathered to dive deeper on topics such as green trends, nutritional aspects and resilience in the food and beverage industry, as well as to discuss and exchange insights.

Thus, the first day of live sessions was an invitation to explore green trends shaping the food and beverage sector, learn from real cases and discuss common challenges. The second day of live sessions put the focus on the concept of resilience and the role it plays in the SME context, as well as its connection to digitalisation. The resilience deep dive was followed by a session on the foundations of university-SME collaboration, which put the emphasis on the benefits of collaborating and showcased cases on how other organisations are doing it.

One week after that, the bootcamp concluded with a deep dive on the nutritional aspects of the food and beverage sector, helping participants understand how nutritional trends and renewed consumer priorities are shaping and impacting the way the sector is evolving. The bootcamp ended with an introduction to the SME Goes Digital Challenge and a semi-structured speed dating networking where participants could speak to each other, ask questions and exchange perspectives.

Reflections in Ireland Set the Stage for DIGIFABS Summer School and Challenge Launch

With the bootcamp finalised, the consortium reconvened in Maynooth, Ireland, for the third Transnational Partner Meeting hosted by the DIGIFABS project. There, we had a joint reflection session to understand and align on what went well, what could be improved in future iterations and any learnings that the consortium should carry forward and consider throughout the implementation of the DIGIFABS Summer School and SME Goes Digital Challenge. With that, the consortium passes an important milestone and is set to successfully deliver the upcoming stages of the project implementation, those being the DIGIFABS Summer School that will prepare students for their participation in the SME Goes Digital Challenge, in the same way that the Bootcamp prepared the educators and the SME representatives to fulfil their role during the Challenge.

Summer is here, but our partners don’t stop the work, and the consortium has its mind set on this fall, where everything shall be ready for the implementation of the Challenge at the regional level.

Stay tuned for future updates!

DIGIFABS DIGITAL MATURITY MODEL UNVEILED

Author: Jose Villagran, UIIN

Bridging Academia and Industry: DIGIFABS Unveils Digital Transformation Pathways for SMEs at UIIN

Amsterdam was the city chosen to host the 2025 UIIN Conference, a landmark event dedicated to exploring new ways of bridging the gap between academia and industry. This year's theme, *"Reimagining Universities for Talent, Innovation and Impact",* set the tone and placed university-industry collaboration at the centre of discussions on transformative solutions to today's global challenges. Over the course of three days, more than 450 participants from across the globe gathered to exchange knowledge, showcase best practices and explore innovative approaches to collaboration. The sessions featured case studies from universities and companies around the world, illustrating how partnership can be a powerful driver for social and economic impact.

Representing our consortium, Mike Russell from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences spoke during a session on university–SME partnerships. He shared early findings from our investigation and synthesis phase, with a focus on how higher education and SMEs can work together to build long-term, sustainable engagement.

Mike's presentation focused on the early-stage findings our project, specifically the outcomes from its investigation and synthesis phase. We introduced the concept of the Responsible Dynamic Digital Change Agent (RDDCA), a professional who embodies a mix of digital fluency with responsible, forward-thinking and agile leadership qualities. These change agents, he explained, have the potential to become the driving force behind sustainable digital innovation within SMEs.

One of the central outputs of this initial project stage is our Synthesis Report, whose outcomes Mike shared with the audience. This report is grounded in two key research components: a systematic literature review of 96 peer-reviewed scientific papers and interviews with key stakeholders, including SME managers, industry experts and academic professionals. These sources provided detailed insights on the barriers and opportunities that SMEs in the food and beverage sector face in adapting to technological change.

A key feature of the report, and the main focus of Mike's presentation, was our Digital Transformation Maturity Model developed for SMEs in the F&B sector. This model synthesises the findings from both literature and stakeholder interviews into a structured framework designed to guide SMEs through their digital transformation journeys. It categorises digital capabilities and provides a base to help organisations assess their progress and determine next steps for development.

The Digital Transformation Maturity Model is built around 28 dimensions that influence digital readiness and capacity.

These dimensions cover a range of organisational and technical factors, including leadership, governance, process digitalisation, data usage, cloud integration and infrastructure. Our model enables SMEs to reflect on their current status and plan more strategically for the future.

The model is structured around five levels of digital maturity, which describe the evolution of a company's digital capabilities:
1.Initial: Activities are ad hoc and undocumented
2.Repeatable: Processes exist but are not yet standardised
3.Defined: Operations are standardised, documented, and consistent
4.Managed: Processes are both standardised and actively monitored
5.Optimised: Systems are fully integrated and continuously improved

These levels allow SMEs to identify where they currently stand and what specific areas they must develop to achieve higher levels of maturity.

In addition to presenting the framework, Mike emphasised the critical role of education in advancing digital transformation within the F&B sector. He highlighted the need for an educational culture that integrates theory and practice through hands-on projects, challenge-based learning, and direct engagement with industry. Universities, he argued, must equip students not only with digital skills but also with a mindset aligned to real-world business needs and innovation challenges.

To support this, Mike advocated for stronger university–industry partnerships that create opportunities for students to work on practical problems faced by SMEs. These collaborations help keep academic programs relevant to market demands while also providing SMEs with access to a new generation of digitally literate talent.

The recommendations shared during the session also encouraged SMEs to take an active role in their own digital transformation. This includes investing in digital tools, upskilling staff and creating internal structures that support change, which in turn improves SMEs competitiveness and strengthens regional innovation ecosystems.

As the conference concluded, our presentation stood out as an example of how targeted research, cross-sector collaboration and thoughtful educational design can work together to address the complex challenges facing small businesses in a digital era.

MEET OUR PARTNER: AUAS

Author: Anita Ghans, AUAS

Supporting Student-Led Innovation in F&B Through the DIGIFABS Project

As the European food and beverage (F&B) industry undergoes rapid digital transformation, collaboration between higher education and SMEs is more vital than ever. We are proud to introduce one of our key partners in the DIGIFABS project: the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS), an institution known for its forward-thinking educational approach and deep commitment to sustainability and entrepreneurship.

Together with Preneurz and 12 other partners across Europe, AUAS plays a central role in DIGIFABS, an Erasmus+ funded initiative aimed at bridging the digital skills gap in the F&B sector. At the heart of this effort is the DIGIFABS Summer School + Digital Challenge, a unique program that brings students and SMEs together to co-create digital solutions for real-world challenges in the industry.

AUAS: Innovation Through Applied Learning
AUAS (Hogeschool van Amsterdam) is one of the Netherlands' largest universities of applied sciences, with over 45,000 students and a strong focus on practical, interdisciplinary learning. The institution fosters close ties between research, education, and industry, especially in areas like business innovation, circular economy, and digital transformation.

Within DIGIFABS, AUAS contributes its educational expertise and its extensive European network to design and deliver challenge-based learning opportunities for students and SMEs alike. AUAS staff and researchers help develop program content, coach student teams, and connect SMEs from across the Netherlands with talented, international students through the SME Goes Digital Challenge.

DIGIFABS and the Digital Challenge

DIGIFABS (Digital Change Agents for Food and Beverage SMEs) equips future professionals with digital, sustainable, and entrepreneurial skills to support SMEs in their digital transformation.

The program includes:
• Online Pre-School – Introduces students to emerging tech (AI, IoT, blockchain), sustainability, and digital leadership.
• Summer School in Slovakia – A week of workshops, expert sessions, and team-building hosted by the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra.
• SME Goes Digital Challenge – Students apply their skills to real Dutch F&B SMEs, supported by AUAS facilitators, industry coaches, and digital experts. This is led by Preneurz (Amsterdam) through its MasterChallenge platform.

Connecting Education and Enterprise

The AUAS–Preneurz partnership reflects DIGIFABS's mission: bridging education and business. It combines AUAS's research and student engagement strengths with Preneurz's SME innovation network.

For SMEs, this means:
• Fresh insights into digital transformation
• Actionable, tailored solutions
• Access to international student talent

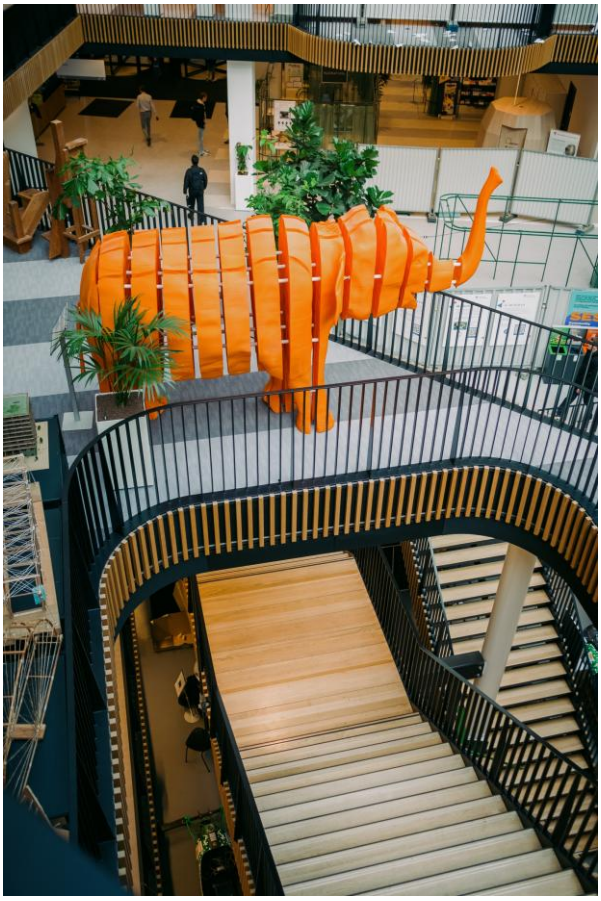
For students:
• Real business cases
• International teamwork and networking
• Coaching from industry experts
• A chance to contribute to sustainable innovation in the food system

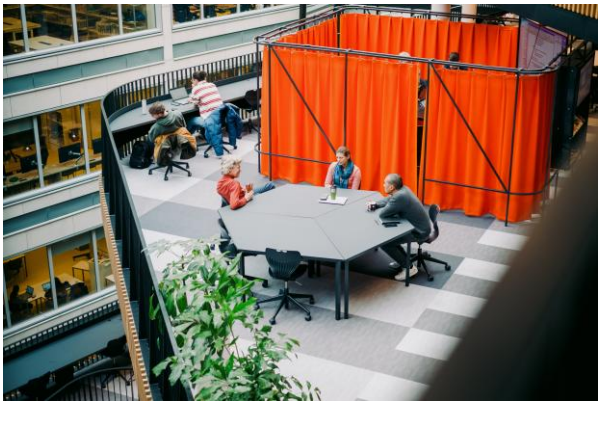
Who Are the Students?

Participants come from across Europe, studying subjects like business, IT, AI, food science, and sustainability. They are proactive, globally minded, and eager to create value in the F&B sector.

Why It Matters and How to get involved

Digital transformation is essential but challenging for SMEs. DIGIFABS offers a collaborative, low-barrier way for companies to explore new ideas and connect with motivated young professionals.
So, are you a Dutch F&B SME? Join the SME Goes Digital Challenge to explore fresh ideas, engage with top talent, and boost your digital readiness..





MEET OUR PARTNER: NEW EDU

Author: Miriam Žitňákov, New Edu

Based in Nitra, Slovakia, New Edu is a forward-thinking research and training organisation dedicated to empowering communities through innovative education, particularly in agriculture and food sectors.

With a strong focus on sustainability, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation, New Edu develops practical learning programs that support rural development and green innovation.

Leveraging decades of experience in national policy and European cooperation, New Edu plays a pivotal role in vocational and professional development. It is a key contributor to EU-funded initiatives like DIGIFABS, which help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) transition toward Industry 4.0.

Regional Impact and Strategic Location

New Edu is headquartered in Nitra, a historic city and agricultural hub in Slovakia. The region hosts the Slovak University of Agriculture and a growing ecosystem of agri-tech startups and SMEs. Despite its strengths, Nitra faces challenges in digital readiness and workforce development, particularly among younger generations. New Edu addresses these gaps by fostering digital skills and sustainable career pathways.

Driving Innovation through DIGIFABS

As Slovakia's national SME partner in the DIGIFABS project, New Edu accelerates digital and green transitions through hands-on learning. The organisation leads several work packages, including:

- **SME Recruitment and Coaching:** Personalised support through the "SME goes Digital Challenge."
- **Bootcamps and Summer School:** Training in Industry 4.0 tools and sustainability, hosted at the Slovak University of Agriculture.

These initiatives are grounded in New Edu's extensive local networks and commitment to making digital transformation accessible to even the smallest rural enterprises.

Meet the Team

- Šimon Srnka (left) – Technical Expert, responsible for developing accessible educational content and supporting curriculum design
- Ing. Miriam Žitňáková, MSc. (middle) – Project Manager and Dissemination Expert, specialising in communication strategy and outreach.
- Ing. Viktor Palko (right) – Director and Project Manager, known for his expertise in stakeholder engagement and digital storytelling.

Looking Ahead

New Edu continues to bridge policy and practice, ensuring inclusive growth across rural Europe. Through projects like DIGIFABS and Horizon 2020's FoodRUs, the organisation remains at the forefront of sustainable innovation, helping shape a resilient and competitive rural economy.

THE ROLE OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Author: Foteini Georgiou, ECECT

Revolutionising the Food Supply Chain

The food supply chain is one of the most critical sectors in the global economy. From farms to tables, it relies on a complex network of producers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers working together to deliver food in optimal condition. DIGIFABS recognizes that despite its importance, traditional food supply chains face persistent challenges, including inefficiency, food waste, limited transparency, and sustainability concerns. As global food demand continues to rise, DIGIFABS promotes digital innovations as practical solutions to address these challenges and to build a more resilient, sustainable food system.

The traditional food supply chain has operated relatively unchanged for decades, relying on manual processes and fragmented systems. This lack of integration has led to several pressing issues:

Inefficiency: Without advanced technology, food producers and distributors often face challenges in managing inventory, optimizing storage, and ensuring that products reach the market in a timely manner. This inefficiency often results in delays, product loss, and higher costs

Food Waste: One of the most critical issues in the food supply chain is food waste. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), approximately one-third of all food produced globally is wasted. Food spoilage, often caused by poor storage, lack of temperature control, and inadequate transportation logistics, contributes significantly to this problem.

Transparency: As food travels through various stages of the supply chain, from farm to table, consumers have little insight into where their food comes from or how it was produced. This lack of transparency creates concerns around food safety, ethical sourcing, and sustainability

Sustainability: The food supply chain is responsible for a significant portion of global greenhouse gas emissions, with energy consumption, packaging, and transportation all contributing to its environmental footprint. Reducing this impact is crucial for building a sustainable future

These challenges highlight the need for a digital overhaul in the food supply chain. Digital technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and drones are emerging as game-changers, providing innovative solutions that can address these inefficiencies and enhance sustainability.

The Role of Emerging Technologies in DIGIFABS

DIGIFABS promotes the adoption of digital technologies to address key challenges in the food supply chain, including inefficiency, food waste, limited transparency, and sustainability concerns. Through its activities, DIGIFABS supports SMEs, educators, and learners in implementing practical solutions that make the food system more resilient, efficient, and sustainable.

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Demand Forecasting and Inventory Management

DIGIFABS helps SMEs use AI to forecast consumer demand and optimize inventory. Aligning production with market needs reduces overstocking, understocking, and waste. Research by Mallesham shows that AI-driven predictive models enhance operational efficiency and align supply with demand.

2. Blockchain for Traceability and Transparency

DIGIFABS encourages blockchain to track products from farm to table. This enhances transparency, strengthens consumer trust, and helps prevent fraud. The Secure Food Project (2023) highlights how blockchain improves supply chain resilience and food safety.

3. Internet of Things (IoT) for Real-Time Monitoring

IoT sensors are deployed across farms, warehouses, and transport to monitor temperature, humidity, and freshness. DIGIFABS supports SMEs in using this data to reduce spoilage and waste. The World Economic Forum (2024) notes IoT's potential to make food production more efficient and sustainable.

4. Robotics for Food Processing and Packaging

DIGIFABS promotes robotics to automate sorting, packaging, and quality control. Automation reduces labor, minimizes errors, maintains hygiene, and allows SMEs to scale production while ensuring consistent quality.

5. Drones for Precision Agriculture and Delivery

Drones monitor crops, optimize irrigation, and collect environmental data. DIGIFABS helps SMEs use drones to improve yields, reduce resource use, and enable faster, more sustainable delivery. According to the World Economic Forum (2024), drones enhance productivity and sustainability throughout the supply chain.

Through these technologies, DIGIFABS equips SMEs, educators, and learners to meet growing challenges in the food supply chain while promoting sustainability and resilience. Digital transformation is not a trend—it is essential for the future of the food industry, and DIGIFABS provides practical guidance to make it achievable.

MODERNISING INNOVATION EDUCATION IN F&B SECTOR: DIGITAL TOOLS AS KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS

Author: Katarzyna Łobacz, Szczecin University

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, innovation management is essential for organisational growth and competitiveness. Yet, higher education often lags behind in preparing students with the practical skills needed to manage innovation effectively. Despite the availability of advanced digital tools, their integration into academic curricula remains limited, creating a disconnect between education and industry demands.

Digital platforms have transformed innovation management by streamlining processes, enhancing collaboration, and improving decision-making. Tools like ClickUp centralise idea collection and organisation, using features such as tagging, project boards, and dashboards to prioritise innovations. HypeInnovation supports real-time collaboration, enabling teams to share feedback, assign tasks, and track progress. Platforms like Ideanote simplify evaluation through scoring systems and feedback loops, helping identify high-potential ideas. Meanwhile, Brightidea facilitates implementation with tools for resource planning, timeline management, and performance tracking.

The Food and Beverage (F&B) sector exemplifies the impact of these platforms. With shifting consumer preferences and sustainability pressures, innovation is vital. Platforms such as Brightidea and Ideanote help companies develop new products, optimise packaging, and streamline supply chains. For instance, market analysis tools identify trends like plant-based foods, while platforms like Monday.com enhance cross-functional collaboration from R&D to logistics.

Sustainability efforts also benefit from digital innovation tools. Companies use them to monitor resource use, reduce waste, and improve transparency. In packaging, platforms foster collaboration on eco-friendly solutions. In food service, tools like ClickUp support the design and testing of new service models, including delivery systems and in-restaurant technologies.

Despite these advancements, most university programmes still focus on traditional theories, offering limited exposure to platforms like Braineet, Ideawake, or InnovationCloud. Innovation is often taught in isolation from project management and digital transformation, failing to reflect the integrated nature of modern workflows.

To address this gap, higher education must embrace digital transformation. Universities should integrate digital platforms into curricula, form partnerships with software providers, and offer interdisciplinary courses. Real-world applications—such as case studies, team projects, and industry collaborations—will better prepare students for the demands of innovation-driven sectors like F&B.

By modernising innovation education, academic institutions can equip future professionals with the tools and mindset needed to thrive in a digitally enabled, innovation-centric economy.

DIGIFABS PRESENTED AT REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER MEETING

Author: Paula Whyte, Momentum

Exploring Digital Regional Stakeholder Meeting

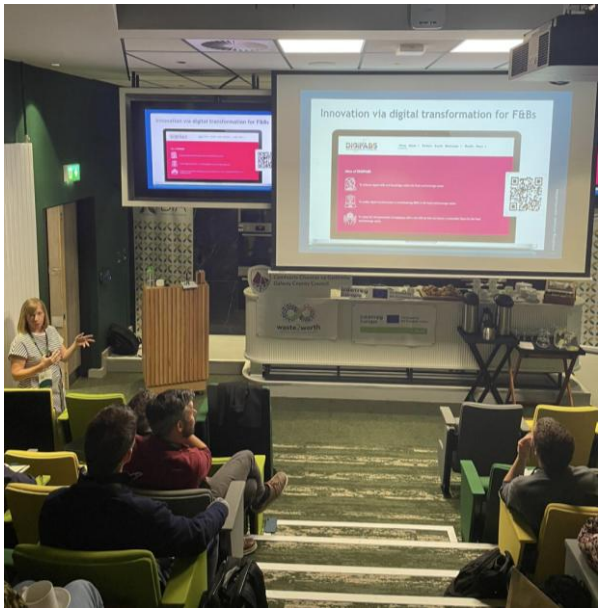
In June, Paula Whyte from Momentum had the pleasure of speaking at a Food & Beverage Regional Stakeholder Meeting held at the BIA Innovator Campus in Galway – a fellow partner in the Erasmus+ DIGIFABS project. The event focused on one of the most pressing issues in the food & beverage sector today: food waste.

With more than 20 engaged participants from across the region – including representatives from Galway County Council, the Galway Climate Action Team, Atlantic Technological University (ATU), the University of Galway, waste management bodies, food system innovators, and local SMEs – the session provided a powerful platform to explore how we can collaboratively reduce food waste through smarter strategies and shared learning.

The Importance of Education & Awareness

A key theme that emerged from our discussions was the critical role of education and awareness creation in addressing food waste. From primary schools to universities to SME upskilling, participants echoed the need for more integrated, meaningful education across all levels.

As part of the session, Paula introduced the DIGIFABS project, which explores how, through education, digital tools and innovative technologies can be harnessed to tackle sustainability challenges – including in reducing food waste within the food & beverage sector.



Tech-Enabled Circular Thinking

Attendees reflected on current and growing SME practices – such as the repurposing of surplus or imperfect ingredients – which provide an ideal entry point for embedding food systems thinking into everyday operations and learning. There is a growing need for small producers and F&B SMEs to optimise these practices using digital tools – from inventory tracking systems that flag surplus in real time, to IoT sensors that monitor shelf life, and data dashboards that help forecast demand and minimise overproduction.

These technologies empower SMEs to make smarter, faster decisions about what can be salvaged and transformed into value-added products like soups, sauces, or baked goods. Showcasing this kind of tech-enabled circular thinking offers powerful, real-world examples of how innovation and sustainability can go hand-in-hand.

The DIGIFABS project aims to strengthen digital readiness and resilience by equipping learners and stakeholders with the skills to use tools like IoT, data dashboards, 3D printing, and more to enhance business operations, including reducing waste across the food value chain. This aligned perfectly with the discussions on the day.

A Fitting Venue for Innovation

The fact that the event was hosted at the BIA Innovator Campus, a DIGIFABS project partner, made the introduction even more relevant. BIA's mission to foster innovation and support regional SMEs mirrors DIGIFABS' goals – bridging traditional food practices with cutting-edge digital approaches.

Looking Ahead: Building Momentum for DIGIFABS

It was inspiring to see such strong engagement from regional stakeholders, many of whom expressed a clear interest in the DIGIFABS project and its potential applications. Attendees were particularly curious about how digital tools could be integrated into their own operations or educational programmes – whether through pilot initiatives, bootcamps, or business-led experimentation. The conversations reflected a growing appetite for innovation and a shared recognition that digital solutions can play a pivotal role in tackling sustainability issues.

Looking ahead, this event served as an excellent opportunity to promote the DIGIFABS project, build awareness, and generate interest in its resources among key regional players. The enthusiasm and positive feedback set a strong foundation for further collaboration, increased resource uptake, and broader project impact.

We're excited to continue building on this momentum as DIGIFABS evolves – empowering food educators and innovators with the skills and tools needed to drive smarter, more sustainable practices across the sector.

DIGIFABS

Digital Change Agents for Food + Beverage SMEs

Follow Our Journey

www.digifabs.eu

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them