

Annual report Swiss Food Research – 2018

Summary:

Swiss Food Research successfully continued to expand and strengthen the innovation ecosystem in 2018. The number of members increased from 70 to 113. Two new innovation groups (Proteins4Future, Nonthermal preservation) were founded to exchange ideas and work on concrete, future-oriented topics. In 2019, the Bioconversion innovation group will also be launched.

With these new innovation groups, the important questions concerning the use of non-meat-based protein sources, alternative preservation (HPP, UV, E-Beam, PEF, etc.) as well as the possibilities offered by fermentation for new foods or utilization of by-products will be addressed jointly. A total of 9 innovation groups are active. More than 70 projects have emerged from these innovation groups in recent years.

The Agro-Food Innovation Forum, held for the first time, was a great success. The aim of the forum is to bring all participants of the agro-food industry together and to promote the exchange of content. The focus is on promising start-ups and their exchange with companies and research organisations. The aim is to further develop the content of the start-ups and promote cooperation with partners. The next Forum 2019 will take place on 21 March at the Technopark Zurich.

Cooperation with the other clusters and organizations (Competence Network Food Industry and Food & Nutrition Cluster, SGLWT and SVIAL) was further intensified. Together with SGLWT and SVIAL, the conference on 1 February 2018 on genome editing was held very successfully. The next event with the topic Superfood was held on 1 February 2019.

The year 2018 was also marked by "change and modernisation" - Swiss Food Research has become completely independent in administrative terms since March 2018 and manages all business processes itself - we now act like a small company. Also the face to the outside was completely renewed - we got a new website, which is available in 3-languages. One can find there a lot of information about the Agro-Food Innovations Ecosystem, and important to note also an extensive overview of all events interesting for the industry.

2019 will be an important year for Swiss Food Research. The further development and expansion of the "Swiss Innovation Eco-System" is the core task for the future.

The importance, performance and added value of innovation networks in this area are undisputed. The task now is to ensure their contribution to the entire value chain in the future as well. This requires new models of cooperation and financing. In a common approach, the entire agro-food industry can succeed in creating a unique and sustainable differentiation for Switzerland in the market.

As a member you can support this throughout the connections you have and thus make use of the chance that is offered to the Agro-Food segment. Only in a joined approach we can strengthen the Swiss Innovation-Eco System.

What happened in 2018 – More information in detail

Swiss Food Research is highly attractive - We welcome new members!

The importance of the network is recognised throughout the industry and we were able to welcome 37 new members in 2018. Established companies from the SME sector, numerous start-ups and large companies (Hilcona, Nestec SA) as well as other research institutions (CSEM, SIB) found the values of Swiss Food Research convincing and became members. The network currently has 113 members and is represented throughout Switzerland. Alone from French-speaking Switzerland, 11 members have been added. The Migros companies (Bina, Delica, Jowa, Micarna), the start-ups Wood and Field and HPP Competence, the companies Geska AG, AF Toscano, Geeup and the ETH research institution Empa have already registered for 2019.

We are active and crosslinked throughout Switzerland

11 new members from Western Switzerland and the Ticino were welcomed as new members. The strengthening of our team in Western Switzerland allowed us to visit numerous companies, and research organisations, and to establish new contacts. Together we manage to respond to the diverse needs of our customers.

With the cluster Food & Nutrition we worked together on 2 projects. Within the project AgriInnotool events and workshops were carried out. The aim was to bring interested partners together for this project. The project is led by ZHAW and was submitted to the FOAG.

Communications in the form of newsletters have been bilingual since 2017 and the new website is available in three languages. Special attention should be paid to the event calendar – it now provides information on a wide range of events relevant to the Agro-Food community, being national or international.

From the idea to product - innovation groups generate new ideas and put them into practice

The innovation groups form the basis for generation of new research and development projects in the respective area. There are 8 innovation groups active and two new groups were founded in 2018. The groups have now been established and within this year 6 projects were generated which are being pursued further within the framework of Innosuisse projects or other suitable funding bodies..

Active groups are: Cereals and bakery products, insects as feed and food, coffee, food packaging, aquaculture, digitization, Proteins4Future and Nonthermal preservation. The new innovation group Bioconversion is launched in 2019.

There are now 9 platforms available to generate new ideas for projects and a total of approx. 130 companies are involved in these groups

New projects for the Swiss economy in cooperation with the research sector

Innosuisse, BLW and BLV

The various national project funding schemes are a valuable and effective tool for promoting innovation. A total of 14 projects were supported by our network. In addition to these projects, which are more oriented towards companies, AgriQnet also supports innovative agricultural enterprises.

AgriQnet - an initiative of FOAG, supported by Swiss Food Research, SBV, VQS, Agridea

<https://agriqnet.ch/de/was-ist-agriqnet/wer-ist-träger.html>

To promote innovation in agriculture and among farmers, FOAG launched the AgrIQnet support programme. The tender resulted in 20 applications, of which approx. 25% are directly funded. Swiss Food Research was able to contribute its experience from the SFR calls in a very helpful way. With the support of Swiss Food Research, 20 projects were initiated. In the joint review (BLW, SBV, Agridea, VQS and Swiss Food Research) all projects were discussed and the projects worthy of funding were identified and proposed to FOAG for funding. 5 projects will receive final funding and suitable support options will be evaluated for a further 5.

Swiss Food Research Calls

Innovative ideas are the basis for innovations. To enable ideas to be tested at an early stage, Swiss Food Research promotes project ideas within the framework of Swiss Food Research Calls. In the tender 2018, 6 calls were received. These were evaluated together with an expert from the university. A total of 4 proposals are supported.

Since the introduction of the Research Calls as a separate funding for the promotion of innovative ideas in 2013, 90 projects had been submitted and evaluated. 51 projects received a funding of 460'000 CHF and 70% of the funded projects were continued. The Research Calls are thus a central element in the promotion of innovative ideas, and for the initiation of new projects.

Events – Working & Networking

12 meetings were held with the different innovation groups. Some groups met twice, others only once. The groups bring companies and research together and an average of 30 participants per meeting can be expected.

The first Agro-Food Innovation Forum took place in Lucerne on 5 June 2018. An event organised jointly with the Kompetenznetzwerk Ernährungswirtschaft. The forum was a great success with 100 participants and will be held regularly. The aim of the forum is to bring together start-ups, companies and research institutions. It is aimed primarily at the members of the organising networks and thus represents a special benefit for their members.

Together with SVIAL and FIAL, the SVIAL CEO Business Event was held on the subject of crypto currency. Another cooperation event was held on the subject of innovations for the dairy industry. Together with the two major professional associations SVIAL and SGLWT, a conference was held on genomediting and breeding in agriculture.

The conference Brennpunkt Nahrung has established itself as the central conference for the agro-food industry. Swiss Food Research is a member of the Conference Board and co-organises the start-ups and Innovation theme within the conference.

In addition to the events, Swiss Food Research published several articles on various topics in the relevant media.

Swiss Food Research is recognised in the market and its perception has increased again since 2017.

The international participation in an event of the National Innovation Agency in Thailand deserves a special note. Swiss Food Research was invited as keynote speaker to report on the innovation Eco Systems in Switzerland. On 2 days, presentations were held on the topic of Innovation Eco System and discussions were held with upcoming start-ups in the food sector. In November the international Innovation Symposium Food Innopolis took place, to which Swiss Food Research was invited as well as other international speakers.

<http://foodinnopolis.or.th/en/home/>

Networking & Partnerships

Cooperation with Impact Hub - Kick Start Accelerator:

Cooperation with the start-up Facilitator Impact Hub the Accelerator Program Kick Start began in 2016. In 2018 already for the 3rd time Swiss Food Research participated as an expert and in the start-up selection jury.

Cooperation with Mass Challenge - EIT Food - Fan:

In 2018 Mass Challenge was involved in the selection of the start-ups as an expert and juror. 40 applications were evaluated and participated in the selection of the start-ups to be included in the 2018 programme.

Swiss Food Research thus participates in the national and international start-up scenery of the agro-food industry and thus maintains valuable contacts. This will give start-ups access to the Swiss Food Research innovation network.

Cooperation with SVIAL

SVIAL is the Swiss professional association of food scientists and agronomists. It comprises 1700 members. The strategic cooperation between SFR and SVIAL has been established at the operational level and several joint events have been held.

Cooperation with other clusters

In the agro-food sector, there are three regional networks supported by SECO and the cantons:

- Kompetenznetzwerk Ernährungswirtschaft - Eastern Switzerland to Zurich Region
- Cluster Food & Nutrition - Region Fribourg, Bern, Wallis - driven by Fribourg
- FoodPlus - Zurich Region

These networks have different focuses, some of which complement and some overlap with those of Swiss Food Research. This results in duplications and competitive situations that are not conducive to the economic interests of non-profit organisations. At the network level, cooperation is therefore sought and successfully implemented on a selective basis, as for example in case of the Agro-Food Innovation Forum.

Unfortunately, the incentive and subsidy systems of the Confederation and the cantons do not support cooperation, but rather encourage the actors to safeguard individual interests, which could be placed above the overall objective of supporting the agro-food sector and the national economy.

Organization & Internal

Developing strategy further and putting it into action is core for growth and the transition to subsequent independence. With the new funding period, the focus of Swiss Food Research is clearly on growth. This will only be possible because the corresponding financial resources are now available and activities no longer have to be financed from the reserves (higher funding amount since 2017). In terms of personnel, Swiss Food Research was expanded by the appointment of Benjamin Rohrer as Innovation Manager for Western Switzerland (0.6 FTE).

On a mandate basis (0.2 FTE) Swiss Food Research is supported by Marina Helm in the area of Marketing & Communication. Both persons started on 1 May 2017 and since then contributed substantially to the success.

In February 2018, the entire personnel and IT administration was separated from ETH Zurich. For this purpose, numerous evaluations of services and their new acquisition had to be carried out (IT providers, accounting, payroll accounting, personnel administration).

Swiss Food Research has become completely independent in all administrative matters since March 2018 and now carries out all business processes itself. In total, Swiss Food Research employs 1.4 FTE who have to carry all activities (including administrative). This requires very lean structures and a highly efficient workforce.

Communication

In 2018 the entire communication was redesigned. This includes mailing with the professional mailing system MailChimp, event management with a professional registration and ticketing system (Eventbrite, Ti.To) and the creation of a completely new website.

Due to limited resources, it is necessary to use highly efficient IT systems that allow effective communication with as little effort as possible.

Swiss Food Research must communicate at various levels:

- Information on current events via mailing
- Registration for events
- Ticketing and billing / payment of participation fees
- Access to information via website for different stakeholders - different access rights
- Communication in different languages - German/French and/or English

It is also important, that the members make use of these communication channels. All information is provided in a digital manner. Emails are mainly sent via the mass mailing program Mailchimp. Individual email are hardly sent anymore. **Everyone is therefore kindly asked to pay attention to the information that is send by email – being it as Newsletter or as “mass mail”. Otherwise you may miss important information.**

Outlook & Future

The further development and expansion of the Innovation Eco System is the core task for the future and safeguards the raison d'être of Swiss Food Research by creating clear added value for all participants in the agro-food value chain.

The Innovation Eco System covers all stages of the innovation life cycle, starting from promotion of ideas to successful implementation in the market. The innovation lifecycle includes many dimensions and interrelationships that need to be taken into account.

A sustainably working innovation eco-system will drive the agro-food value chain forward. Building on what already exists and linking all elements together provides the basis for a strong eco-system. To achieve this goal also political support is needed. A public-private partnership that expresses the will to build and maintain an innovation eco- system in a sustainable manner for the agro-food sector is key to a successful future of that important segment.



26.02.2019, Peter Braun
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