

# EIT Food RIS Consumer Engagements Labs

Consumers co-creating innovative  
food products

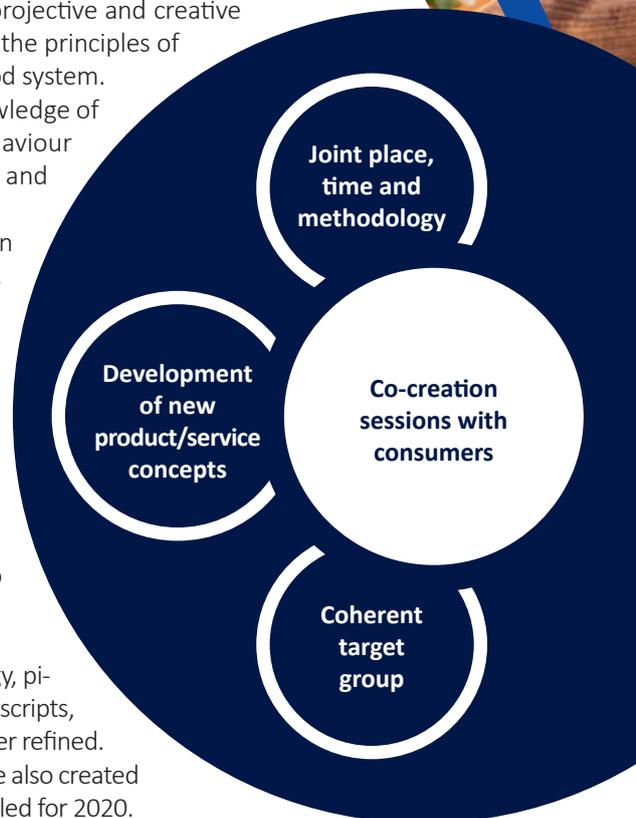
**Consumer Engagement Labs** are co-creation workshops for the food industry. They are an innovative form of cooperation between food producers and consumers – in case of the 2019 pilot Labs, the Labs participants were seniors, consumers aged 65+, and local companies representing different segments of the food industry: retailers, producers and innovative start-ups. The consortia also included scientific institutions and NGOs. The goal was to jointly create a new, exciting food product that would meet the requirements of target consumers.

**Why CEL is special?** Because CEL works in a different way than traditional focus groups and consumer surveys, typically used in market research by the food industry, and brings tangible benefits. CEL is based on a sophisticated methodology, in which participants use various projective and creative techniques to develop ideas of new, yet non-existing products. It draws on the principles of design thinking and gamification to address challenges of the European food system. The methodology was developed by University of Warsaw, relying on knowledge of specialists in anthropology, psychology, socio-gerontology, consumer behaviour and innovation management, and was further validated with academic and industrial partners.

Pilot Labs were organized in October and November 2019 in four European cities: Badajoz, Spain; Kaunas, Lithuania; Poznań, Poland; Oeiras, Portugal. In total, 20 organizations – companies, scientific institutions and NGOs – from 4 countries were working together with consumers to stimulate the co-creation of new products.

**What are the benefits of CEL for participating companies?** Besides new product ideas, companies gained insights about specific needs and behaviour patterns of their target consumers, access to co-creation methodology and support in commercialisation processes. Local consumers were empowered as serious discussion partners for leading food companies, being able to use their wisdom, nurture creativity and make friends with other participants.

**What is created?** First and foremost – the innovative co-creation methodology, piloted and ready to deploy in multiple commercial and societal contexts. Lab scripts, toolsets and guidelines had been tested in the field in four countries, and further refined. They can be easily adapted to other consumer segments. The participants have also created new, often fascinating, food products – with four market introductions scheduled for 2020.



**How does CEL work?** Every Lab involved about 15-20 consumers aged 65-85, and three local companies. The participants had been very carefully selected to ensure diverse composition within each group. Companies were also having complementary competencies including small innovative start-ups, established food producers and large food retailers. Researchers used multiple techniques to engage consumers, establish psychological attachment and stimulate their creativity. For example, participating seniors were shown a photograph of an anonymous consumer – unknown to them – and they had to envision his/her age, education, daily occupations, shopping patterns and food-related habits. These personas were points of reference during the Lab, with participants attributing to them different needs and wants in order to better understand the senior market.

There was a few days break between two consecutive days of each Lab. Consumers used this time to carry out an ambitious home assignment, becoming “market researchers”, who visit local supermarkets and further reflect on purchasing habits and shopping list of the imagined personas. This period has further stimulated the development of genuinely innovative product ideas – because creativity needs time to flourish. The second day of the Lab consisted in generating various new product ideas under the watchful eyes of facilitators and researchers coordinating the process. Consumers spent several hours playing serious games, moving between rooms and creative activities, and concluded the process with a list of products that they consider most exciting and commercially viable. The grand finale was a presentation in front of a panel of corporate experts – senior consumers were pitching in a manner similar to startup competitions, and the session was followed by a long roundtable, where consumers and companies entered into a dialogue to jointly refine the most promising ideas. Every Lab aimed at developing several innovative product ideas, from which one was chosen by local companies for commercialization. Commercialisation planning and launch of new products were further elements of the methodology, and University of Warsaw offered the local companies advice and support to help them transform consumer ideas into tangible products.

**Who organizes CEL and who finances it?** CEL was developed by the University of Warsaw, which also managed the project and oversaw the coordination of Labs in local countries. The project was funded by EIT Food under the Horizon 2020, the European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, as part of EIT Regional Innovation Scheme.



**What is the future of CEL?** In 2020, the project continues – the Labs will take place in 6 countries of Central&Eastern and Southern Europe. “We are constantly working on improving our co-creation methodology, testing it in new geographical contexts and applying to other consumer groups. This is a cutting edge in the innovation management research. Furthermore, we’re assembling an impressive body of knowledge about behaviours of senior consumers and challenges that companies face while cooperating with consumers” – says prof. Krzysztof Klinecicz from University of Warsaw, leader of the project.



EIT Food RIS Consumer Engagement Labs website:

[www.timo.wz.uw.edu.pl/cel](http://www.timo.wz.uw.edu.pl/cel)