

Synergies with EIT Food for prospective EIT Higher Education Initiative applicants

Who we are

EIT Food is Europe's leading food innovation community, established by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Its core mission is to transform the European food system to make it more sustainable, healthy, and trusted by consumers. EIT Food achieves this by connecting major players - start-ups, companies, research centres, and Higher Education Institutions - across the entire food value chain through the Knowledge triangle model. The organization focuses its efforts on three major challenges, known as EIT Food's strategic missions: achieving Healthier Lives Through Food, transitioning to a Net Zero Food System, and enhancing Food System Resilience¹, driving change through programs in education, entrepreneurship, value delivery, and thematic alignment on biotech and resilient agriculture.

Strategic alignment with the EIT Higher Education Initiative (HEI) Call for Proposals 2026

The EIT Higher Education Initiative Call for Proposals 2026 aims to strengthen the role of Higher Education Institutions as key drivers of manufacturing and deep-tech innovation to increase innovation, entrepreneurship and economic competitiveness in Europe. To achieve this, the Call focuses on three interconnected policy objectives that support the development of talent, institutional capacity and innovation ecosystems. EIT Food may directly support these objectives through its long-term mission and European-wide infrastructure. Our work is guided by the EIT Food Strategic Agenda 2021–2027² and aligned with major EU priorities, including the European Competitiveness Agenda³, New Innovation Agenda⁴, the Farm to Fork Strategy⁵, Food 2030⁶, the Clean Industrial Deal⁷, the EU's Union of Skills⁸, the EU's Start-up and Scale-up Strategy⁹, and valorisation policy¹⁰, many of them emphasised in this Call for Proposals. EIT HEI applicants must align with EIT Food's three main strategic Missions¹:

1. Healthier Lives Through Food:

- Objective: To enable consumers to make healthier choices and actively tackle diet-related Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).
- Key Priority Areas: Protein Diversification and Optimizing Nutrient Density.

¹ <https://www.eitfood.eu/missions>

² <https://www.eitfood.eu/about-us>

³ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness_en

⁴ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda_en

⁵ https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf

⁶ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/environment/bioeconomy/food-systems/food-2030_en

⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/clean-industrial-deal_en

⁸ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/union-skills_en

⁹ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2f76a0df-b09b-47c2-949c-800c30e4c530_en?filename=ec_rtd_eu-startup-scaleup-strategy-communication.pdf

¹⁰ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy_en

2. Net Zero Food System:

- Objective: To facilitate the transition to climate neutrality in the food system by measuring and actively reducing CO2 equivalent emissions.
- Key Priority Areas: Regenerative Agriculture, Sustainable Packaging, and Waste Reduction.

3. Food System Resilience:

- Objective: To improve food security, ensure food safety, and establish dependable, digitally-enabled food supply chains that are resilient to shocks.
- Key Priority Areas: Traceability, Food Integrity, and Supply Chain Transparency.

What we do

EIT Food delivers concrete services, programmes, and opportunities across the full agri-food value chain. A full overview of activities is available at: <https://www.eitfood.eu/>. EIT Food creates impact aligned to the missions through four interconnected pillars:

1. **Education:** The Education pillar equips students, researchers, professionals, entrepreneurs and farmers with the knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial mindset needed to drive innovation and transformation across the food system. Through a portfolio of degree programmes, professional training opportunities and entrepreneurship initiatives, EIT Food supports learners at every stage of their career journey. Our flagship degree programme, the EIT Label Master in Food Systems (MFS), provides a multidisciplinary understanding of the food value chain and innovation processes, preparing graduates to address complex food system challenges. Alongside this, we offer a wide range of professional development opportunities, including short courses, workshops and training programmes designed to help individuals and organisations upskill and reskill in areas such as regenerative agriculture, food safety and digital farming. Programmes such as GROW support farmers and agricultural professionals in adopting more sustainable practices while strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of their businesses. Entrepreneurship is embedded across our educational activities. Through initiatives such as the Global Food Venture Programme (GFVP) and the Inspire Programme, participants develop entrepreneurial, innovation and problem-solving skills while gaining practical experience in turning ideas and research into real-world solutions. Complementing these activities, the Biotechnology Academy and Resilient Agriculture Academy bring together industry, academia and innovation partners to address critical skills gaps and prepare talent for emerging challenges and opportunities in the food system.
2. **Value Delivery:** Value Delivery manages a portfolio of innovation activities that focus on high-potential, mission-aligned food systems challenges. Through collaborative innovation funding programmes, we build a pipeline of actions that target real market and impact driven needs. By connecting these projects, programmes and skills developments, we support innovations and start-ups to move from single actions, towards bigger joined-up solutions in our Thematic Scaling programmes of Resilient Agriculture, Protein Diversification and Biotechnology.



3. **Thematic leadership in Biotechnology and Resilient Agriculture:** EIT Food maintains thematic leadership in two interconnected and critical areas of modern food system transformation: Biotechnology/Protein Diversification and the development of Resilient Agriculture.
 - i. **Thematic Leadership Area in Biotechnology:** Through this focus area, EIT Food drives transformation in the food system by scaling alternative proteins and agrifood biotech solutions. HEI partners have opportunities to develop specialised training programmes, support biotech entrepreneurship, collaborate with industry on emerging biotech technologies, and equip learners with skills in areas such as entrepreneurship in synthetic biology, precision fermentation, biomanufacturing, or regulatory science.
 - ii. **Thematic Leadership Area in Resilient Agriculture:** Through this focus area, EIT Food supports the transition towards more sustainable and climate-resilient farming systems through innovations such as regenerative agriculture, precision farming, digital technologies, or initiatives such as Future Harvest. HEI partners can engage through the development of entrepreneurship education in regenerative agriculture, or industry collaborations that address key challenges related to soil health, biodiversity, food security, and climate adaptation.
4. **Entrepreneurship:** The EIT Food Business Creation portfolio supports agrifood start-ups throughout their entrepreneurial journey, from venture creation to scale-up. Through programmes such as Seedbed, EIT Food Accelerator Network (FAN), RisingFoodStars, EIT Food helps startups validate technologies, accelerate product development, strengthen investment and commercial readiness, and access investors, corporates and research partners.

EIT Food and the EIT Higher Education Initiative (HEI)

EIT Food has been a delivering KIC within the EIT Higher Education Initiative since the Initiative's inception in 2021. We have supported projects, spanning 39 countries and 170 partners, on themes of food system innovation, agri-food product valorisation, and deep tech. In addition to supporting and monitoring project grants, EIT Food leads the design and organisation of project implementation activities (e.g., co-creation sessions) aiming at securing long term-sustainability and impact of HEI projects beyond funding.

Relevance of EIT Food for the EIT Higher Education Initiative (HEI) Call for Proposals 2026

The **EIT Higher Education Initiative (HEI) Call for Proposals 2026** emphasises the development of manufacturing and deep-tech innovation capabilities within higher education institutions, alongside stronger connections between academia, industry and innovation ecosystems. As Europe's leading innovation community for the food system, EIT Food can support consortia in addressing the three Policy Objectives of the Call while ensuring relevance to food systems innovation and sustainability challenges.

Supporting Policy Objective 1: Cultivate Europe's manufacturing and deep-tech innovation talent

EIT Food contributes to the development of innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership skills across all stages of the talent pipeline. Through its educational programmes, training initiatives and industry engagement activities, EIT Food can support consortia in:

- Embedding entrepreneurship, innovation and intellectual property (IP) competences within academic programmes.

- Developing future-ready skills in areas relevant to deep tech in food systems, including biotechnology, resilient agriculture, digitalisation, food innovation and sustainability.
- Connecting students, researchers and academic staff with entrepreneurs, start-ups and industry experts.
- Supporting the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and innovation capabilities that enable learners to create societal and economic impact.

Supporting Policy Objective 2: Strengthen HEIs as institutional drivers of manufacturing and deep-tech innovation, from lab to market

EIT Food has extensive experience supporting higher education institutions in strengthening their innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems. EIT Food can support consortia in:

- Embedding innovation and entrepreneurship more effectively within institutional strategies and educational programmes.
- Strengthening links between education, research and innovation activities.
- Supporting the creation and growth of start-ups and early-stage ventures.
- Facilitating collaboration between HEIs and external stakeholders to accelerate innovation and market uptake.

Supporting Policy Objective 3: Connect HEIs to regional and sectorial manufacturing and deep-tech innovation ecosystems

One of EIT Food's key strengths is its extensive network of partners across industry, academia, research and innovation. Through this network, EIT Food can support consortia in:

- Building strategic partnerships between universities, research organisations, industry, start-ups, investors and public authorities.
- Connecting HEIs to regional, national and European innovation ecosystems.
- Supporting cross-sector and cross-border collaboration that strengthens innovation capacity and impact in the EIT Food community.
- Enabling the exchange of knowledge, best practices and opportunities across the wider EIT Food community.

EIT Food may help consortia ensure that their proposals reflect strategic alignment with EIT Food strategic missions while strengthening the innovation capacity of HEIs. EIT Food can contribute its sectoral expertise, innovation infrastructure, and ecosystem-strengthening experience to HEI-led consortia.

Contact:

For more information on our programmes, please visit: <https://www.eitfood.eu/>. For any questions on the strategic alignment of your proposal with EIT Food, please contact: lauraborge@eitfood.eu

