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Cross regional European project set up to support Food Exports for SME's in the food and drink sector hailed a success.

AAFE, the EU-funded food and drink programme for SMEs, which ran from June 2017 has ended with an evaluation meeting held in Bordeaux France on 31 May 2023.

Represented locally by the Northern Ireland Food & Drink Association (NIFDA), the innovative AAFE programme provided extensive training and mentoring to food and drink SMEs across the Atlantic Area regions of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, France, Spain, and Portugal.

With a total budget €1.8 Million over the project lifetime aimed at assisting Food and drink SME'S undertake market study tours and trade missions across five European markets, and to help provide further training and support services for SMEs, helping them to analyse their current status and formulating recommendations for action towards developing exports.

Michael Bell, Executive director Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association says the AAFE project has delivered considerable benefits to the participating companies.

“Through this project local NI companies were provided with Export training, research and insight on the processes and actions required to undertake international business development. We hope that this project will encourage other SMEs to consider implications and possible opportunities from exports for their companies,” Michael said. “The project adopted a practical approach and highlights both the benefits and challenges that need to be considered. We hope that it has provided a foundation for SMEs who are looking at building their business and expanding into new markets.”

The AAFE project was aimed at food and drink manufactures from across five regions. Benefiting from a pioneering €1.8million EU INTERREG funded programme which has been helping boost the sector by creating a collaborative partnership for growth in this crucial area.

Atlantic Area Food Export achievements were,

182 Food companies participating

4 Sector specific clusters

90 Individual Internationalisation plans created.

5 Business to business conference meetings

13 International Market trade missions Incl.,

London International Wine fair – London IFE -Anuga – Sial -Biofach (2) Scandinavia Market -Nordic Market- Benelux (2) Belgium and the Neatherlands

Further information on the project can be found at <http://atlanticfoodexport.eu/>

Ends

Pictured – Members of the AAFE group.

About AAFE

AAFE is an innovative programme which has brought together the collective skills and experience of regional representative bodies from Spain, France, Portugal, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.

The eight partners from across the Atlantic area region are cooperating to develop a

Atlantic Food Export is a project supported by the EU under the Atlantic Area Interreg Programme involving partners from 7 European regions. The project aims to improve competitiveness and increase exports of AA food sector SMEs primarily by encouraging business cooperation initiatives, such as export consortia. The project activities are intended to help the participating SMEs to overcome some of the barriers to internationalisation arising from their small size, structure, skill set or lack of resources. The partners are Chambre d'Agriculture de la Dordogne (France), ASINCAR (Asturias, Spain), Cámara de Comercio de Sevilla (Spain), Cámara Municipal de Vila Nova de Famalicão (Portugal), Cork City Council (Ireland), Northern Ireland Food & Drink Association (Northern Ireland), BIC Innovation (Wales).

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