

Contribution Of Research To Innovation Management In The Traditional Fruit Production

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Introduction

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are facing different challenges such as pressures on environmental resources, rise of downstream power and trade liberalization. Remaining competitive by implementing innovations could be a strategic solution. Research provides substantial inputs for innovation. In the public sphere, national research institute and Higher Education Institutions such as Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) conduct basic and applied research.

The study's goal is to measure the contribution of these researches to innovation by focusing on collaborations existing in Swiss traditional fruit production network.

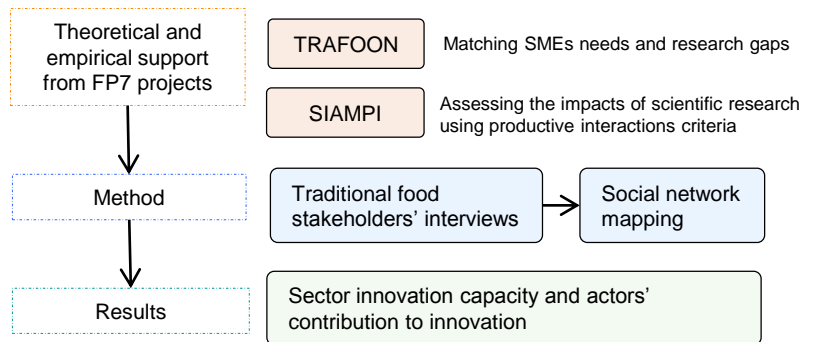
Method

The study is realized in the Swiss canton of Valais with apricot value chain actors. Informal collaboration, innovation management, economics and network theories shape the research, with the basis of two European projects: TRAF00N* and SIAMPI**.

* Traditional Food Network to improve the transfer of knowledge for innovation

** Social Impact Assessment of Productive Interactions between science and society

Figure 1. Research design



Preliminary results

19 Swiss apricot actors are interviewed in production (40%), transformation (20%), trade (14%) wholesaling (10%), nursery (4%), shipping (3%), storage (3%), sorting (3%) and packaging (3%). They all innovate by implementing mainly product innovations and marketing innovations. New varieties answering consumers' expectations, crop management (phytosanitary products) and improvement of direct selling thanks to internet communication are the main topics in collaborations' links.

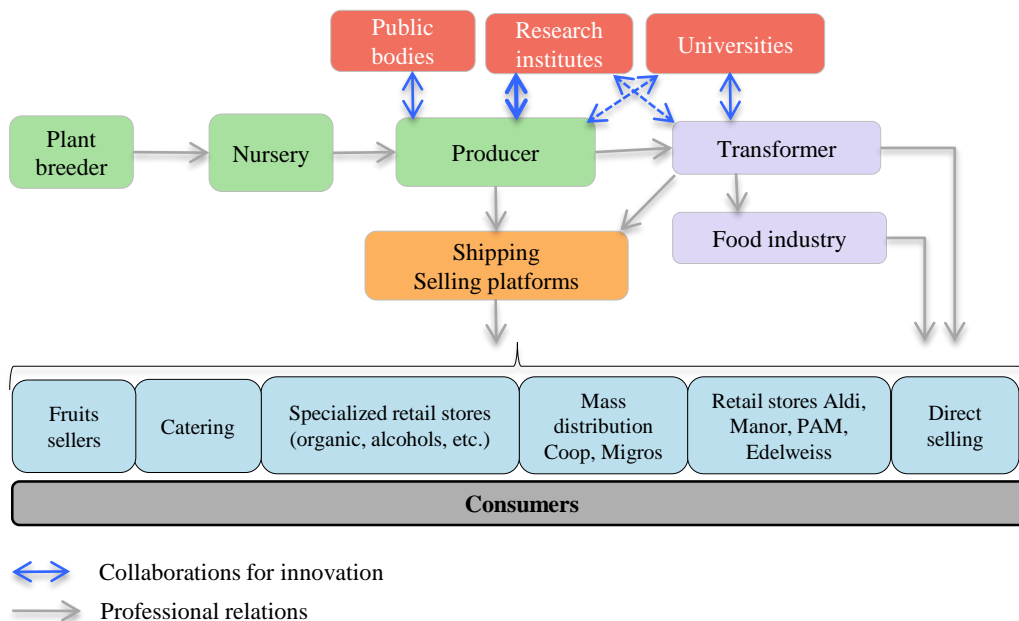
Figure 2 depicts innovation diffusion by collaboration mean.

Exclusively informal collaborations exist between the different actors of the value chain. Stakeholders cited the Swiss Federal Research Institute (Agroscope) and the Cantonal Office of Arboriculture as frequent partners involved in collaborations.

Agroscope is key to transfer knowledge and plays the gatekeeper role from science to market. Contrarily, collaborations with UAS are not frequent. There is a gap between production and university innovation contribution to the traditional food sector.

Political and public bodies interfere with agricultural vulgarization that induces close relationships between the research and the practice sides.

Figure 2. Innovation by collaboration in Swiss fruit production chain



Conclusions

Informal collaborations between fruit actors allow implementation of innovations. Research institute and the Higher Education Institutions Valais-Wallis help market players to innovate to a little extent. Exploiting more intensely current collaborations and exploring new ones should be the focus on future projects, in order to incentivize innovations.