

Into Seinäjoki

## A survey of cooperation opportunities between food and agritech sector in Seinäjoki and Tartu regions

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## CONTENT

|   |    |
|---|----|
| CONTENT   | 1  |
| Introduction  | 2  |
| South Ostrobothnia, The Food Province   | 3  |
| Food and Agrotechnology Business in South Ostrobothnia                            | 4  |
| Food Business in South Ostrobothnia   | 4  |
| Grain, meat and dairy production  | 4  |
| Local Food Brands   | 4  |
| Food Innovations  | 4  |
| Agrotechnology Business in South Ostrobothnia                                     | 5  |
| Agricultural Machinery  | 5  |
| Agrotechnology Innovations  | 5  |
| Sustainability and Circular Economy Solutions                                     | 5  |
| Support and Infrastructure  | 6  |
| Regional Development Programs   | 6  |
| Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK)                                  | 6  |
| Overview of Tartu County food region  | 7  |
| Questionnaire   | 9  |
| The results of the questionnaire in Tartu   | 11 |
| Potential cooperation in Food and Agritech Business                               | 12 |
| Electronic survey for the local companies   | 12 |
| The results of the survey in South Ostrobothnia                                   | 15 |
| Summary: Concrete actions to add cooperation and support the growth in both areas | 16 |
| Sources   | 17 |

## Introduction

The survey of cooperation opportunities between food and agritech sector in Seinäjoki and Tartu regions has been implemented as part of “Towards more sustainable logistics and new cooperation between the Seinäjoki and Tartu regions” -development project, organized by Into Seinäjoki, the business development center of Seinäjoki.

The areas of Tartu and Seinäjoki have many common development interests and ongoing projects which aim to create cooperation for both businesses and public sector operators. Diverse actions have been taken from visiting Start Up -events such as sTARTUp Days in Tartu, to participating in EU -projects, such as Circular FoodShift in the Baltic countries

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/circular-foodshift/>.

Food and agritech -sector has been **identified to have a strong and growing business potential in both areas**. The interest in concrete development actions was investigated by sending a short survey to the companies. The replies were not many, but still **showed clearly which are the most interesting issues to the companies and how to proceed with the development plans**.

## South Ostrobothnia, The Food Province

South Ostrobothnia's strong food production lays the foundation for wide-range development in the food sector.

The Food Province Network works together in research, development, innovation and education towards stronger co-operation and benefits for both private companies and public sector, and in the end, for the whole South Ostrobothnia. Food and agritech has been chosen to have a remarkable role in the EU- and national level and also local development programs.

In the Food Province, research, development, innovation and training activities takes place close networks and cooperation bodies. The food theme is present in the topic selections of the research groups and in the emphasis of the education programs. The food sector can be seen as a strong emphasis in the development programs of Southern Ostrobothnia. In the provincial program, the rural program, the tourism strategy, the Leader program and also in the development strategy of the regional center Seinäjoki, food has been placed strongly in the center.

(<https://lehti.seamk.fi/kestavat-ruokaratkaisut/etela-pohjanmaan-vahva-elintarvi-ketuotanto-luo-pohjan-ruokasektorin-laaja-alaiselle-kehittamiselle/>, 2021)

(<https://ruokaprovinssi.fi/>, 2022)



## Food and Agrotechnology Business in South Ostrobothnia

South Ostrobothnia is known for its agricultural heritage and a vibrant food industry, with agrotechnology playing an increasingly strong role. Here's an overview of both sectors in the region:

### Food Business in South Ostrobothnia

South Ostrobothnia is **one of Finland's leading agricultural regions**, producing for example a remarkable share of the country's grain, meat and dairy products. The region's flat terrain, fertile soil and favorable climate make it well suitable for farming.

#### Grain, meat and dairy production

The region is a major hub for dairy and meat production, with a well-established infrastructure for processing and distribution. Companies like Atria and Valio, both belonging to Finland's largest food companies, are located in Seinäjoki, focusing on meat processing and ready-made food products.

#### Local Food Brands

The region is known for its high-quality, locally produced food products. There is a growing trend of promoting local food brands that emphasize organic and sustainable farming practices. The range of these products is wide and varies from large companies, like beloved dairy producer Juustoportti or bakery Pirjon Pakari, to small ones who mainly operate through direct sales at local markets and shops.

#### Food Innovations

Seinäjoki has great facilities for food innovations and references of developing innovative new food products and for example alternative protein sources. The region supports these initiatives through local food incubators, by applying suitable fundings and managing the development projects.

## **Agrotechnology Business in South Ostrobothnia**

### **Agricultural Machinery**

The region has a wide range of companies specializing in agricultural machinery and equipment. These businesses produce tractor parts and equipment, harvesters, and other machinery essential for modern farming. The focus is on developing efficient, durable, and technologically advanced equipment that meets the needs of farmers in Finland and in the export markets abroad.

### **Agrotechnology Innovations**

South Ostrobothnia has a lot to offer to support innovations in agrotechnology. Local universities, other educational and research institutions collaborate with businesses to develop new technologies that can improve agricultural productivity and sustainability. This includes smart farming solutions and use of renewable energy applications in agriculture.

### **Sustainability and Circular Economy Solutions**

The agrotechnology sector in the region is also focusing on sustainability as it is also one of the development themes of the region. This has been implemented, for example, by creating circular economy models where waste products from farming are reused or recycled. An example from practice; biomass from farms is being used to produce bioenergy, reducing the dependence on fossil fuels.

## Support and Infrastructure

South Ostrobothnia's food and agrotechnology businesses are closely linked, as both sectors derive from the region's strong agricultural base. Both are also focusing on innovations and growth.

### Regional Development Programs

The regional public sector, along with development organizations, offers support to businesses in these sectors through funding, training, and infrastructure development. This helps the companies to develop their business by giving resources for generating innovations, export, and sustainable practices in agriculture and food production.

- Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia ([https://epliitto.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Smart\\_Specialisation\\_Strategy\\_summary\\_ENG\\_WEB.pdf](https://epliitto.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Smart_Specialisation_Strategy_summary_ENG_WEB.pdf))
- Into Seinäjoki (<https://intoseinajoki.fi/en/development-projects/>)

### Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK)

SeAMK is a key player in developing the region's food and agrotechnology sectors. It offers specialized programs in agriculture, food technology, and business. It also runs research projects that support local industry innovation and cooperation.

- Circular FoodShift in the Baltic countries  
<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/circular-foodshift/>

## Overview of Tartu County food region

Finland is the first largest export partner in Estonia. In 2023 the value of goods exported by Finland was about 3.07 billion euros and the value of goods imported from Finland was 3.29 billion euros, trade deficit was of 217 million euros. (Statistikaamet, Soome...).

The most important business sectors in Tartu County, both in terms of sales revenue, exports and jobs, are wholesale and retail trade, processing industry and construction. Agriculture is important in Kastre, Luunja, Nõo and Peipsiääre municipalities. In summary, the county's entrepreneurship is diverse, and together with a strong base of public sector institutions, the region is clearly second in Estonia in terms of development prerequisites after Harju County. (Tartu County Food strategy 2022-2030...)

Tartu county food industry is strong and versatile. Tartu county food network's particularity is the existing potential of science and innovation based on universities and development organisations active in the field. Tartu county network is different from other similar networks due to its broad reach and diversity, it includes the representatives of large and small producers, caterers from both urban and rural areas, public institutions (including universities), event organisers and many more. In addition, Tartu county has favourable natural conditions and a sufficiently large local market.

The food sector of Tartu county and the corresponding business is sufficiently large, diverse and distinctive, the county has both strong producers of raw materials (from vegetables to fish), processors of various food fields (from beverage manufacturers to cheeses), large and small companies, etc.

[Tartu County Development Association \(TAS\)](#) is the coordinator of the Tartu county food network. The basis for the activities is the implementation of the Tartu county food strategy and action plan. In order to implement the Tartu county food strategy, TAS will carry out the following projects: LEADER joint projects "Tartu county series of food events and the development of food



network”, “Development of Tartu county food area”, “Short supply chains” with the support from Agricultural Registers and Information Board (PRIA).



[The Association of Municipalities of Tartu County](#) participates in the project of the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme. The project [BSR Food Coalition](#) connects local farmers and public authorities to ensure regular access to organic food meals at schools, and thus a continuous demand for healthy food supply

Food production and agriculture are important fields both in South Ostrobothnia region as well as in Tartu County.

A survey was conducted to map whether and in which areas companies would be interested in cooperation and joint development. The questionnaire is distributed in parallel in South Ostrobothnia and Tartu County.

The questionnaire was sent to approximately 150 people in Tartu County food network list. During the period of two weeks of collecting the answers the result was 6 answers in total. The answers show that there is interest in cooperating with Finnish partners. Probably the link missing here is the know-how on how to find trustful export-import partners.

## Questionnaire

### Tartumaa toidu- ja põllumajandusettevõtete koostöö arendamine Lõuna-Pohjanmaa ettevõtetega

Toiduainete tootmine ja põllumajandus on olulised valdkonnad nii Soomes Lõuna-Pohjanmaa piirkonnas kui ka Tartumaal.

Käesoleva uuringu eesmärk on kaardistada, kas ja millistes valdkondades oleks ettevõtetel huvi koostööks ja ühiseks arenguks. Küsimustikku levitatakse paralleelselt Lõuna-Pohjanmaal kui ka Tartumaal.

Oleme väga tänulikud, kui leiate 2 minutit allolevale küsimustikule vastamiseks.

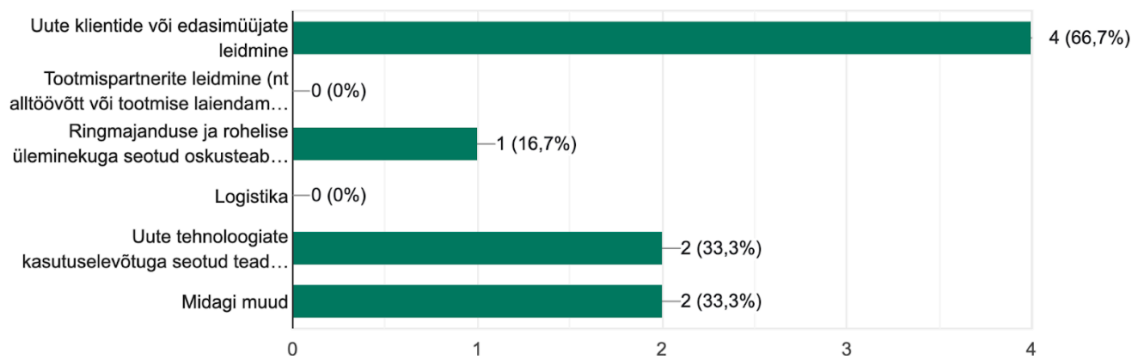
Ootame tagasisidet hiljemalt 27. septembriks.

Küsimustik on koostatud LEADER koostööprojekti "Ärisuhte, turismi ja lennuliikluse arendamine Tartu ja Seinäjoki piirkondade vahel" raames.

Aitäh!

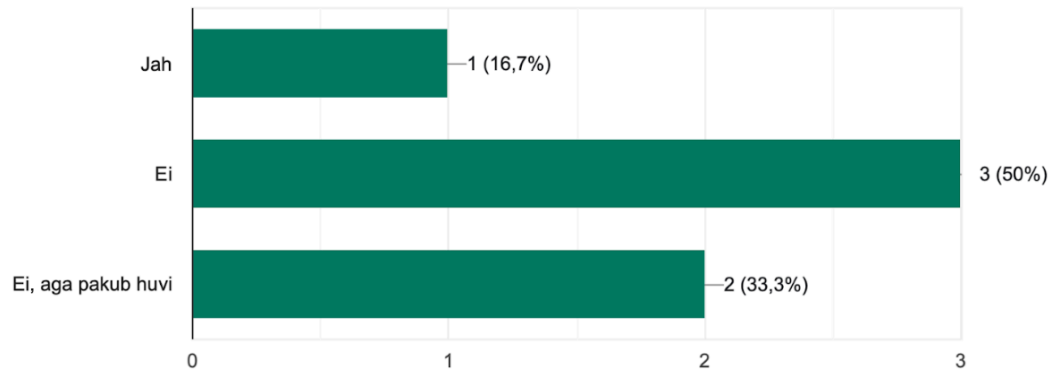
#### 3. Millised järgmistest teemadest teile huvi pakuvad?

6 vastust



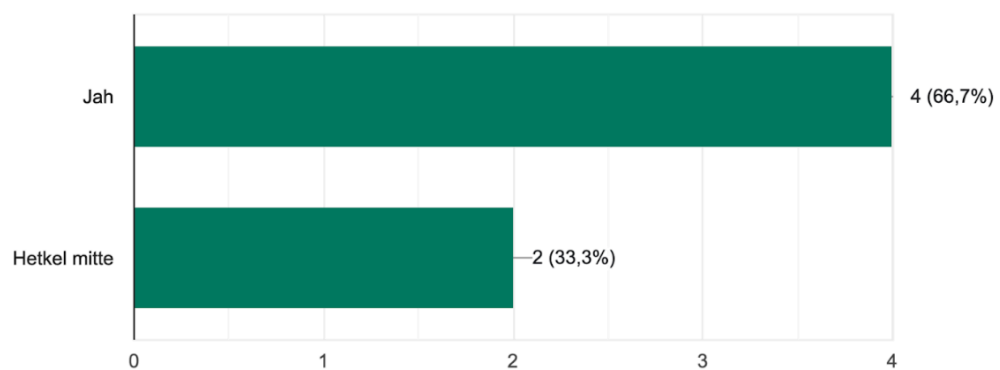
#### 4. Kas teie ettevõttel on praegu äri- või muu koostöö Soomega?

6 vastust



#### 5. Seinäjoki ja Tartu piirkonna vahel toimub juba mitmekesine koostöö. Kas soovite, et hoiaksime teid kursis eelseisvate sündmuste ja projektidega?

6 vastust



## The results of the questionnaire in Tartu

Which of the following topics are interesting to your company?

- 66,7% of the companies were interested in finding new customers or resellers
- 33% were interested in sharing knowledge and expertise related to new technologies (workshops, seminars, exchange programs)
- 33% were interested in something else
- 16,7% were interested in sharing circular economy and green transition know-how (e.g. carbon footprint calculation)

Does your company currently have business or other cooperation with Finland?

- 16,7% of the companies have already business or cooperation with Estonia
- 33,3% of the companies were interested in cooperation with Finland

Cooperation between the Seinäjoki and Tartu regions is already implemented in many ways. Would you like us to keep you informed about upcoming events and projects?

- 66,7% of the companies are interested in upcoming events and projects between the areas

To conclude this questionnaire, 1 out of 6 already has business or other cooperation with Finland and 2 were interested in it. Most (4/6) were interested in finding new customers or distributors and 2 out of 6 were interested in sharing knowledge and experience related to the introduction of new technologies (workshops, seminars, exchange programs) or something else. Most people (4/6) who answered the questionnaire were also interested in

keeping them informed of upcoming events and projects when it comes to cooperation within Tartu County and South Ostrobothnia.

## **Potential cooperation in Food and Agritech Business**

There is a lot of potential to develop the cooperation between South Ostrobothnia and Tartu also in the Food and Agritech sector. This could take place in different levels, such as doing business together, technical research and development between companies and educational & research centers and applying for EU regional development funds together. Collaboration between these regions could bring up **opportunities to grow businesses, create innovations and promote the food and agritech industries.**

### **Electronic survey for the local companies**

Part of this study was a survey which was sent to local food and agritech companies in both regions. The goal was to find out if the companies already had some cooperation within these areas, and which concrete actions would be interesting for them. Generally it is very difficult to get answers to any kind of survey, so there were only a few exact questions and a possibility of an open answer and the survey was sent twice in both areas.

In South Ostrobothnia the survey was sent to 39 food and agritech companies. Even though the amount of answers was small, the feedback was positive and there was clearly interest for actions.

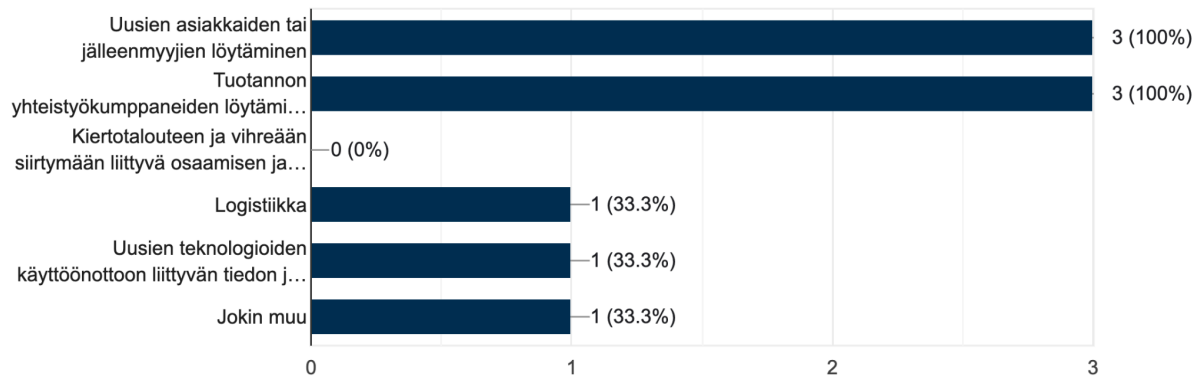
## Ruoka- ja agroteknologiayritysten yhteistyö Tarton alueen kanssa

Ruokatuotanto ja agroteknologia ovat vahvoja toimialoja sekä Etelä-Pohjanmaalla että Tarton alueella Virossa.

Tämän kyselyn avulla selvitämme, löytyykö kiinnostusta yritysten yhteiseen kehittämiseen, ja millä osa-alueilla. Kiitos, että olet mukana!

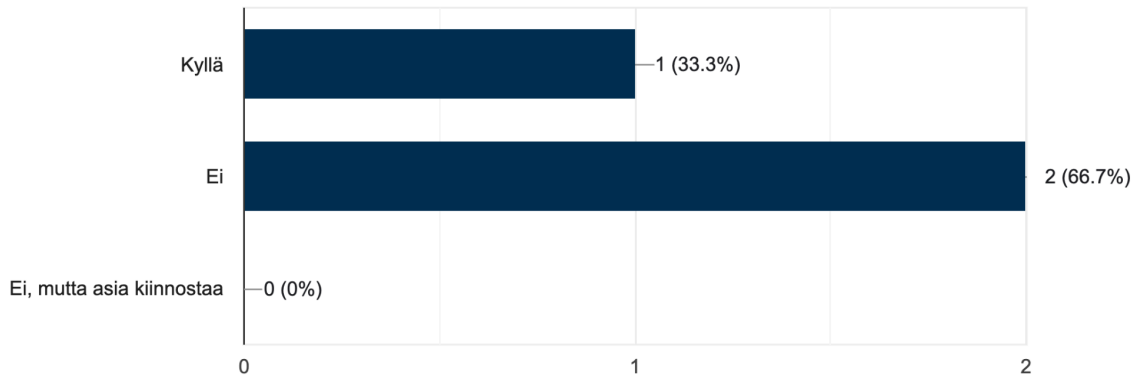
### Mitkä seuraavista aiheista ovat teille kiinnostavia?

3 responses



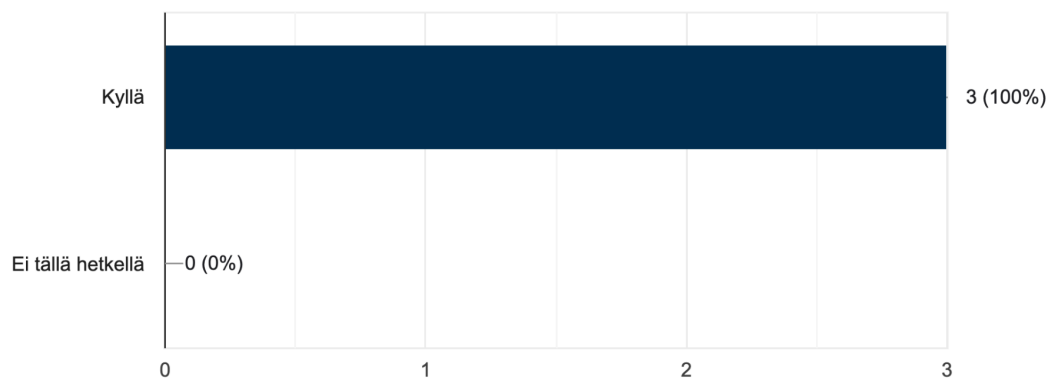
Onko yrityksellänne tällä hetkellä liiketoimintaa tai muuta yhteistyötä Viroon?

3 responses



Yhteistyötä Seinäjoen ja Tarton alueiden välillä toteutetaan jo monella tavalla. Haluatteko, että pidämme teitä ajan tasalla tulevista tapahtumista ja projekteista?

3 responses



## The results of the survey in South Ostrobothnia

Which of the following topics are interesting to your company?

- 100% of the companies were interested in finding new customers or resellers
- 100% of the companies were interested in finding partners for production (e.g. subcontracting or expanding production)
- 33% were interested in cooperation in logistics
- 33% were interested in sharing knowledge and expertise related to new technologies (workshops, seminars, exchange programs)

Does your company currently have business or other cooperation with Estonia?

- 33% of the companies have already business or cooperation with Estonia

Cooperation between the Seinäjoki and Tartu regions is already implemented in many ways. Would you like us to keep you informed about upcoming events and projects?

- 100% of the companies are interested in upcoming events and projects between the areas



## Summary: Concrete actions to add cooperation and support the growth in both areas

### Promoting businesses

- supporting companies in **finding new contacts**: customers, resellers or other partners
- sorting out exact demand and supply for subcontracting and expanding of the production

### Educational sector: technology & knowledge exchange, research & development

- Supporting the role of universities and research institutes in Tartu and South Ostrobothnia
  - such as the University of Tartu, the Estonian University of Life Sciences, Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences and University Consortium of Seinäjoki
- organizing activities focused on agricultural technology, sustainable farming practices and food innovations. These could be **workshops, seminars or practical projects to enable the knowledge exchange between the regions**. These events could focus on for example the latest trends in agritech, best practices in sustainable farming, and opportunities for cooperation.

### Development Funding

The regions are already participating the same EU-level development projects, such as Circular FoodShift in the Baltic countries

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/circular-foodshift/>, and by **making systematic cooperation in preparing and applying for fundings** would be an excellent way to support innovation in the food and agritech sectors.

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