



Greening Agrifood in Social Economy



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Call for Interest: Specialised Advisory Services for Social Economy SMEs on Greening Agrifood

(„Call for Interest - Advisory Services”)

GRAINS-WP4-2024-001-UPD1

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Greening Agrifood
in Social Economy

Content

1. AIM OF THE CALL	2
2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE GRAINS PROJECT	2
3. OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL	3
4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERA	4
5. APPLICATION PROCEDURE	6
6. DEADLINE AND EVALUATION	7
7. AGREEMENT SIGNATURE	7
8. COMPLAINT	8
9. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS	9

1. AIM OF THE CALL

This **Call for Interest** is launched within the framework of the [GRAINS project](#) to select 40 Social Economy SMEs (beneficiaries) for the **provision of advisory services** aimed at enhancing their environmental sustainability.

Through this call, the GRAINS project will select **40 participants** from Social Economy SMEs in the agri-food sector to receive support via specialised advisory services for the implementation of their project. This support includes **advisory services** designed to assist the beneficiaries to adopt sustainable practices within their operations. The assistance will be provided through **personalized consultations and on-site visits**, enabling the SMEs to access expert guidance on improving their operations and reducing their environmental impact.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE GRAINS PROJECT

GRAINS - Greening Agrifood in Social Economy, is a project funded by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency.

The GRAINS project aims at building the capacity of social economy SMEs in agrifood by providing trainings, access to tailor-made services and financial support on sustainable practices and on how to reduce their environmental footprint, namely:

- Supporting the transition towards sustainable and environmentally friendly practices and production processes;
- Promoting the adoption of sustainable technologies and innovations;



Greening Agrifood
in Social Economy

- Building the capacity and competitiveness of social economy SMEs through knowledge transfer and skills development about sustainable practices;
- Fostering transnational cooperation, best practice sharing, and promoting sustainable practices through awareness-raising efforts.

The GRAINS project is implementing for social economy small and medium enterprises a capacity building programme (1) focused on business needs and innovation as well as on specific operations of agri-food supply chain, a mentorship and coaching programme (2), an **advisory support programme (3)** to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise from experts and practitioners, as well as a financial facility programme (4) that will provide subsidies ([Financial Facility Program](#)). This Call for Interest is published within the GRAINS' **Advisory Support Programme**.

The project runs between 1 October 2023 and 30 September 2025.

More information about the GRAINS project is available on the project website: <https://www.diesis.coop/grains/>

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

The primary objective of the present Call for Interest is to identify **40 Social Economy SMEs in agrifood** to receive **advisory services** related to improving the capacity of their transition to a green business model by improving efficiency.

The advisory services focus on addressing specific challenges related to greening social economy SMEs in agri-food, supporting them in adopting more sustainable practices and improving their environmental performance. It can include:

Mapping Funding Opportunities: Identifying various funding sources available for sustainable initiatives, such as government grants, impact investment funds, or corporate sustainability programs.

Assisting in the application process and providing guidance on eligibility criteria to secure funding for projects or expansions.

Support to Obtain Certification on Labels: Guiding SMEs through the process of obtaining certifications like Fair Trade, Organic, or B Corp certification to demonstrate environmental or social responsibility.

Assisting in integrating sustainable practices into operations to comply with certification standards.

Support in Developing Local Green Markets: Offering insights and advice to develop local green markets.

Advisory services on carbon footprint reduction: Providing specialized advice and recommendations to enterprises on energy efficiency, water consumption, soil conservation and reducing food loss and waste, adopting eco-packaging and unpacked rules, etc...

Further objectives:

- Enhancing Sustainability to help social economy SMEs in agri-food enhance their commitment to environmental and social responsibility.
- Promoting Growth and Expansion that align with sustainability goals and certifications that can open up new market opportunities.
- Improving Market Access in supporting the development of local green markets
- Reducing Environmental Impact through advisory services on carbon footprint reduction as well as adopting sustainable packaging practices.

The call will be open from the **28 March 2024** to the **15 June 2024** (5 PM Brussels time).

The list of selected beneficiaries will be published on 15 July 2024.

Through this Call for Interest, the GRAINS consortium invites SMEs in agrifood to apply for tailor – made **advisory services**. The services are provided free of charge for the successful beneficiaries. The services may be provided in English or one of the following languages: German, Romanian, Italian or Ukrainian.

Note that the application to this call does not entail an automatic right or guarantee to be selected.

4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be considered as beneficiary, the applicant needs to fulfil the following requirements:

- Must be registered in the European Union member states or in Ukraine,
- Qualifies as a Social Economy SME¹,
- Performs their productive activities within the agri-food sector.

¹ For the definition of the SMEs please refer to: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-definition_en



Greening Agrifood
in Social Economy

DEFINITIONS

Social Economy [SME definition](#) in the Call for Proposal (SMP-COSME-2022-SEE): *Greening social economy SMEs and entrepreneurs in the proximity and social economy ecosystem through transnational co-operation.*

99.9% of the companies in the Proximity & Social Economy (P&SE) ecosystem are SMEs, with a significant part being micro enterprises and starts-ups. This ecosystem employs 22,9 million people and accounts for 6.54% of EU value added (EUR 791 billion). Actors of the proximity and social economy are pooled under this ecosystem given that they often share common characteristics (i.e. local anchorage and short value chains) although the features of these entities vary to a certain extent. In particular, this call will target social economy SMEs and entrepreneurs operating in this ecosystem, and will benefit proximity initiatives such as Local Green Deals but also support the development of sustainable practices (e.g. 15-minutes city, ecofriendly last mile delivery and short food supply chains) at local level.

Social Economy entities definition in the Social Economy Action Plan (Communication from the Commission 'Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy', COM(2021)

"The social economy covers entities sharing the following main common principles and features: the primacy of people as well as social and/or environmental purpose over profit, the reinvestment of most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interest of members/users ("collective interest") or society at large ("general interest") and democratic and/or participatory governance.

Traditionally, the term social economy refers to four main types of entities providing goods and services to their members or society at large: cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations (including charities), and foundations. They are private entities, independent of public authorities and with specific legal forms. Social enterprises are now generally understood as part of the social economy.

Social enterprises operate by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and often innovative fashion, having social and/or environmental objectives as the reason for their commercial activity. Profits are mainly reinvested with a view to achieving their societal objective. Their method of organisation and ownership also follow democratic or participatory principles or focus on social progress. Social enterprises adopt a variety of legal forms depending on the national context."

Applications that are in one of the situations listed below are excluded:

- a) They are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- b) They or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgement of a competent party of a Member State which has the force of res judicata;
- c) They have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means that the contracting party can justify including by decisions of the European Investment Bank and international organisations;
- d) They are not in compliance with their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting party or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
- e) They or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them have been the subject of a judgement which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organization, money laundering or any other illegal activity, where such an illegal activity is detrimental to the Union's financial interests;
- f) They are subject to an administrative penalty for being guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the contracting party as a condition of participation in a procurement procedure or failing to supply information, or being declared to be in serious breach of their obligation under a contract covered by the budget;
- g) They have a conflict of interest in connection with a possible contract; a conflict of interest could arise in particular as a result of economic interests, political or national affinities, family or emotional ties or any other relevant connection or shared interest.

5. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Social Economy SMEs in agrifood that want to apply to this Call for Interest are invited to submit their application through [this link](#) , filling in all required fields.

The applications must be written in English (applications partially written in another language are not eligible and will be automatically excluded and marked as ineligible).

All the information provided should be complete and valid. After the submission, all the applicants will receive a confirmation email with the registered date and time of the submission.

6. DEADLINE AND EVALUATION

This Call for Interest is open until **15 June 2024** (5 PM Brussels time).

Submitted applications will be evaluated by a Selection Committee coordinated by [Consorzio Ruini Impresa Sociale](#) (CRIS), the partner which coordinates this task within the GRAINS Consortium. The evaluation will be carried out under appropriate ethical conduct, without conflict of interest and will respect the confidentiality of the information received. All the evaluators will have to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) with CRIS to ensure the confidentiality of received information.

The evaluation will be done on two levels, namely:

- **the eligibility check, to verify if conditions set in the call for proposal are met:**

Eligibility requirements	
1	The application is complete, readable and entirely written in English.
2	The application has been submitted within the deadline (scheduled on 15 June 2024 5 PM Brussels time).
3	The application has been submitted by a Social Economy SME in agrifood.

- **the technical evaluation, to be done according to the following set of criteria:**

Technical requirements	
1	Relevance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with the specified objectives and greening priorities outlined in the Call. • Evaluation of the direct impact of the required service on the Social Economy SME.
2	Innovation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the degree of creativity and innovation of the SME of the advisory service required.
3	Impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the potential impact, feasibility, and sustainability of the required service considering resource availability and logistical aspects.

The list of the selected beneficiaries as it is foreseen will be published on the [GRAINS webpage](#) by the 15th of July 2024. Each beneficiary will be notified by e-mail.

7. AGREEMENT SIGNATURE

Once a Social Economy SME applicant has been selected to receive advisory service, a specific Agreement will be signed between the awarded Social Economy SME and GRAINS national partner performing the **advisory service** within 14 days from the notification. The Agreement will include information on the required service including the type of service and schedule when the service will be provided / received.

By signing it, the Social Economy SME Beneficiary accepts the **advisory service**, and the GRAINS national partner agrees to implement the advisory service and to report on the performed activity to the GRAINS Consortium. From the starting date, the service must be completed within 6 months maximum. The services may be performed by intra-consortium experts and/or external experts including the network of [Euro Coop](#).

National partners:

- Diesis Network ([DIESIS](#)), established in Boulevard Charlemagne 74, Brussels 1000, Belgium,
- Associazione Generale Cooperative Italiane ([AGCI](#)), established In Via Nazionale 243, Roma 00184, Italy,
- Consorzio Ruini Societa' Cooperativa Consortile Impresa Sociale ([CRIS](#)), established in Via Nazionale 243, Roma 00184, Italy,
- Charitable Organization Platform for Social Change ([PSC](#)), established in Kniaziv Koriatovychiv Street, Kamianets Podilskiyi 32302, Ukraine,
- innova eG ([innova eG](#)), established in Breitenfelder Str. 12, Leipzig 04155, Germany,
- Asociatia Centrala Pentru Legislatie Nonprofit ([CLNR](#)) established in sos. Iancului Nr.19, Bl.106b, Sc.B,Et 3 Ap 51 Sect, Bucuresti 024094,Romania.

8. COMPLAINT

For any complaints regarding the results of this Call, please contact GRAINS Consortium at this mail address: grainsproject@diesis.coop within 3 days after the announcement of the results, communicating the following information:

- Applicant's name and contact details;
- The object of your complaint;
- Information and evidence of the alleged breach.

The GRAINS coordinator will examine the complaint based on the information brought forward by the applicant, will assess the case, and decide whether the complaint is justified or not and will inform the applicant on the decision taken.

If the complaint is considered justified, the Selection Committee will re-evaluate the project application and the related assessment part, subject to the complaint providing an updated assessment.

The final decision on the complaint will be communicated to the applicant in writing within 20 working days from the date of submitting the complaint. This decision will be final, binding to all parties and not subject to any further complaint proceedings within the programme if the complaint is based on the same grounds.



Greening Agrifood
in Social Economy

9. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

a. DATA MANAGEMENT

Personal data and information are provided in the application form for the immediate purpose of allowing a full and successful evaluation of applicants and for providing specific **advisory services** to Social Economy SMEs. This includes:

- Name and contact details of the applicant (telephone number, postal address, address, internet website)
- Name and details of the contact person (e-mail, telephone number)
- VAT Registration Number of the company

In case of successful application for receiving services the following additional information of all beneficiaries is required:

- Information about the grant recipient's representative (name and surname, position, telephone number, email address, signature).

The persons whose personal data is processed have the right to access and correct their own personal data. For this purpose, they must send any queries about the processing of their personal data to the following email address: grainsproject@diesis.coop. Data will be processed in compliance with applicable EU and national laws on data protection.

The General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679/EU) guarantees that the processing of data is carried out in compliance with the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as the dignity of the data subject with particular reference to confidentiality, personal identity and the right to data protection. By applying, the applicant agrees to the storage and use of their personal data for the execution of the GRAINS objectives and work plan. Submitting an application for the GRAINS Call implies full, complete and unreserved acceptance of these regulations.

b. VISIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

For dissemination and use of results generated through the **advisory services** from the GRAINS Consortium, the Social Economy SMEs beneficiaries must credit the GRAINS project through proper citation and visibility of the EU emblem and GRAINS logo and the EU disclaimer.

Should you have any questions on the GRAINS project in general, please contact us on grainsproject@diesis.coop. If you have specific question related with this Call, please contact CRIS on consorzioruini@agci.it.

Brussels, 08. 04. 2024