MEMBER

Alimentta

Living Lab Alimentta | Spain

Through a transdisciplinary and action-oriented approach, Alimentta combines research, stakeholder engagement, policy advocacy, and demonstrative projects. Its work focuses on key areas such as agroecology, sustainable fisheries, healthy diets, and participatory governance. By connecting science, practice, and policy, Alimentta helps promote a fairer and more sustainable food systems from the ground up.

Aim

Alimentta's goal is to generate transdisciplinary and practice-oriented knowledge, actively contributing to the transition towards sustainable and resilient food systems in Spain.

This involves action in four main areas: outreach, aimed at making scientific and practical knowledge accessible to a broad range of stakeholders through clear, evidence-based communication; co-production of knowledge and advisory work through collaborative research and technical support developed alongside key actors across the food system; policy advocacy, focused on shaping public agendas and influencing policy through evidence-informed proposals and multi-level networking; and the implementation of transformative projects, by designing and applying participatory research methodologies, governance tools, and innovations that drive systemic change on the ground.

Advocacy priorities include increasing the production of organic legumes to support a more sustainable and diversified agricultural model; strengthening small-scale sustainable fisheries to protect both the livelihoods of coastal communities and marine ecosystems; promoting healthy and sustainable consumption patterns that underpin a shift toward fairer and more ecological food systems; and supporting family farming and artisanal fishing by reinforcing their role through aligned and responsible consumption.

Background information

Alimentta was conceived in 2019 as a think tank to accelerate the transition towards sustainable food systems in Spain. Its actions are organised around three main streams:

1) the co-production of high-quality scientific knowledge on topics such as the agroecological transition, sustainable fisheries and marine ecosystems, recommendations for a healthy, sustainable diet and participatory governance models;

2) stakeholder mobilization, and participation in territorial projects linked to the food system transformation - for instance, through the implementation of agroecology-based local agri-food systems;

3) political incidence actions and initiatives, which often involves operating within networks.

Alimentta is steered by 10 partners - seasoned researchers in their fields (agronomic engineering, agroecology, soil health, agrarian history, biology and marine ecology, health and nutrition), a team of technicians, 29 collaborators and

a broader community of practice from the quadruple helix - involving producers, SMEs, consumers and consumer associations, distributors, policymakers and other agents relevant to the food chain. Alimentta's biggest strengths lie in its trans-disciplinary approach to the sustainable food transition, its vast network of collaborators and its political influence.

Funding structure

Alimentta's funding model combines structural, project-based, and service-derived sources. Its core structural funding is provided by the Fundación Daniel y Nina Carasso, which ensures long-term stability and strategic continuity. Project funding is secured through competitive grants and support from various public and private entities, such as the Fundación Biodiversidad and the Spanish National Agency for Innovation, among others. Additionally, Alimentta generates service-based income through consulting, training, and advisory services aligned with its mission.

Activities

- **Foodtransitions Project.** Promoting the ecological transition in Spanish cities by fostering sustainable food systems that ensure access to healthy food for all.

Source: Alimentta

- **Albarrio** – Activating community role models in healthy and sustainable food at the neighbourhood level.

Source: Alimentta

- **Healthy and Cancer-Preventive Gastronomic Offer** – promoting a healthy and cancer-preventive gastronomic offer in collective canteens.

Source: Alimentta

- **Via Sabia –** Building Bridges Between Knowledge Systems for Better Climate Change Adaptation in Agrarian and Marine Systems.

Source: Alimentta

- **Trigo-Lab Innova.** Promoting the development and market integration of traditional wheat varieties adapted to arid and semi-arid climates in Andalusia by mobilizing stakeholders across the wheat value chain.
- **EcoGastronomic innovation.**
- **Strategy to create Biodistricts in Andalusia.**

Methods, stakeholder engagements and tools

Alimenta overall offers a protocol or framework for the dynamisation and coordination of territorial Living Labs, although each specific case will have its own needs and, therefore, slight variations in the methodology. The co-creation methodology that Alimentta uses is based on the Design Thinking Cycle of Design

methodology that Alimentta uses is based on the Design Thinking Cycle of Design Thinking for Sustainability. It comprises three main processes, each of which contains two separate steps:

1)"Understanding" Phase

This phase comprises all preparation aspects - learning as much as possible about the topic meant to be addressed, mapping all relevant actors, that could or must be involved in the project, set objectives and establish a solid action plan to meet them.

Source: Alimentta

The understanding phase comprises at least the following two steps:

Step 1.1. Empathize. A pre-project period to research the state of the art in the topic of interest. It's also the time when the first mapping activities occur. This phase is normally conducted by part of Alimentta's internal team (the Board of Directors, Technical Team and General Assembly). Here, it is decided which Working Groups (and relevant researchers) should be involved in the development of the project. Once this is defined, relevant internal and external collaborators are identified and engaged. 1:1 conversation may happen, as well as one or two joint meetings to present the project, get familiar with the team, and each contributor's needs, expectations and capacity.

Step 1.2. Define. This step typically comprises a few consecutive meetings (1-3) to explore the topic in-depth by combining existing skills and capabilities, to identify challenges, user needs, future scenarios, set objectives, and draft an action plan to meet them.

2) "Exploration" phase

This is the main core of the co-creation process, where the solutions/products/services to be delivered by the Living Lab are ideated, developed, turned into reality and adjusted. There are two major steps here:

Step 2.1. Ideate. This step is mainly related to one or more brainstorming workshops aimed at the thoughtful development of solutions, products and services. At an early stage, it will involve researcher meetings. At a later stage, the involvement of all actors of the quadruple helix. Different resources will be used to gather their input, depending on the project's features (1:1 meetings, collaborative workshops, online or physical surveys or interviews, etc). The result would be all the necessary steps to turn ideas that would cater to users' needs into reality.

Step 2.2. Prototype. This is where the ideas developed materialize into items or projects. The final output should be something ready to be tested on the ground. This phase will also collect the observations of different stakeholders and incorporate them into the final prototype.

3) "Implementation" phase

In this phase, the conceptualised idea is tested on the ground and adjusted if necessary to achieve maximum functionality. New problems are normally identified here, leading to adjustments in the methodology. This is, of course, a collaborative testing process in which it is more crucial than ever to gather feedback from all actors involved. This phase necessarily includes the following steps:

Step 3.1. Test. The project/item is tested on the ground in a real-life setting. The project team will meet intensively to integrate the messages gathered in the previous stage and in the collective validation processes in order to make the appropriate adjustments.

Step 3.2. Validate. To gather the opinions of the quadruple helix actors regarding the development of the project, mixed techniques will be used: 1:1 input (reports, interviews, meetings), citizen consultation processes, and collective evaluation workshops (including techniques such as the traffic light).

Of course, both processes feed into each other, and the number of workshops may vary depending on the direction of the project. In parallel with the above

steps, a continuous evaluation process will also be put in place. Once the final output is validated, the delivery and exploitation phase will begin. This phase is also relevant from a collaboration perspective, as the most appropriate channels for dissemination would only be found thanks to the users' feedback.

Source: Alimentta

A variety of techniques are used to co-create research and innovation. Workshops and participatory dialogues are the centrepieces of user engagement - in which a combination of facilitation approaches, some of them based on the Design Thinking process, are used to ignite participation, discussion and creativity. Users' needs and feedback are often collected in these physical or online workshops or dialogues, but also using mixed techniques such as interviews, surveys and fieldwork. Besides the cycle explained in the previous section, Alimentta often employs participatory action-research methodologies in those projects seeking to ignite systemic change towards the agroecological transition, such as the establishment of ALAs. These methodologies allow us to design, together with farmers and livestock breeders, management proposals and technologies adapted to their socio-economic and environmental conditions and including both innovation and traditional knowledge. Alimentta, and members of the Agro-ecosystems and Food Chains Working Group have more than three decades of experience in designing, deploying and assessing participatory research methodologies. Four main steps can be distinguished:

1) participant observation (fitting within the "Understanding" phase, requires the

researcher's immersion in the reality to be studied, with high levels of interaction with the project subjects - interviews, life stories, site visits, recorded dialogues, etc-),

2) Participatory research (fitting in the "Exploration" phase, implies the establishment of working groups together with the project subjects/users to formulate a project proposal, identifying the problems to be sorted out and suggesting solutions),

3) Participatory action (fitting within the "Implementation" phase, involves the creation of local networks to collaboratively put in practice the suggested solutions, mobilize resources and exchange knowledge, among others) and

4) Evaluation phase (based on the follow-up of indicators).

Achievements

Production of research materials:

- White Paper on Sustainable Food in Spain
- The Carbon Footprint of the Hake Agri-Food Chain in Spain
- Following the Trail of Skipjack Tuna in the Food System
- Transcending Capitalist Growth Strategies for Biodiversity Conservation
- The Agri-Food Chain of Tomato in Spain
- Nutritional Analysis of the Spanish Population: A New Approach Based on Public Consumption Data

Demonstrative projects on the ground:

- **Governance Model for Andalusian Biodistricts:** Led the technical design of agroecological biodistricts promoted by the regional government, defining actor roles, co-creation mechanisms, and advisory committee operations.
- **Trigo-Lab Innova:** Reviving and promoting traditional wheat varieties in Andalusia, connecting farmers, millers, bakers, and researchers. Project Details
- **Eco-Culinary Incubator in Cuevas del Becerro:** Creation of healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate recipes involving local communities.

Production of outreach materials: Policy briefs, infographics, videos, and

podcasts targeting diverse audiences, including policymakers and a broader audience:

- 10 Keys to Understanding Climate Change Adaptation Needs in Farming and Fishing. Illustrated publication;
- Actions to Strengthen Climate Change Adaptation in the Agri-Food System. Toolkit with 18 recommendations.

Training and dialogue spaces: Organization of seminars, multi-actor meetings, and scientific workshops focused on a just and sustainable food transition:

- IX International Agroecology Workshop in Seville January 2023;
- Vía Sabia territorial workshops in February and April 2025;
- Capacity-building activities for farmers, local markets, administrations as part of the Biodistricts Initiative in Andalusia.

Advocacy actions:

- Manifesto for Sustainable Fishing in Spain
- Decalogue for Healthy and Sustainable Eating
- Manifesto for Legumes: The Smartest Protein
- Position papers: Family farming, School Canteens Royal Decree, etc.

Publications

- Alimentta's podcast series ¿Cómo comemos? (¿"How do we eat?")
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Agricultural Systems and Its Link to Climate Change.
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Fisheries Systems and Its Link to Climate Change.
- Building Bridges Between Knowledge Systems. Literature review on traditional ecological knowledge and testimonies from the primary sector.
- Agroecological Transition Scenarios in the Spanish Agri-Food System

Source: Alimentta

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