EIT Food/Seedbed Venture Catalyst Call for Startups/2026

EIT FOOD

Leuven, Belgium

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eitfood.eu

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## History of Changes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| V1.0 | 28/05/2026 | Initial version |

## Call Fact Sheet

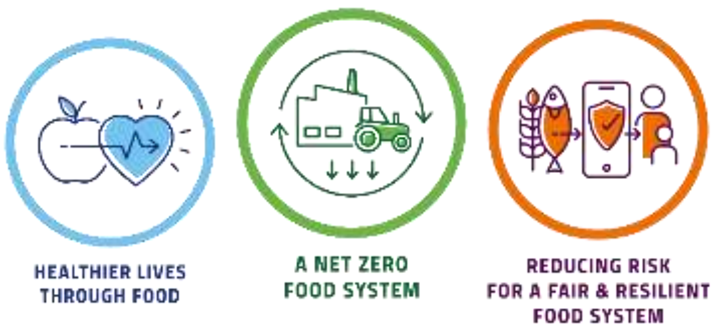
| | |
|---|---|
| **Title of Call** | Seedbed Venture Catalyst Call for Startups |
| **Objective and Scope** | Supporting founders of new agrifood venture projects developed by Seedbed Venture Catalyst's Venture Builder programmes |
| **Call Deadline** | Cutoff 1 - 12:00 CET 1st July 2026<br>Cutoff 2 - 12:00 CET 12th August 2026<br>Cutoff 3 - 12:00 CET 23rd September 2026<br>Cutoff 4 - 12:00 CET 4th November 2026<br>Cutoff 5 - 12:00 CET 16th December 2026<br>Cutoff 6 - 12:00 CET 27th January 2027 (Call ends) |
| **Available Funding** | 480,000 EUR<br>Maximum 30,000 EUR per venture project |
| **Project Duration** | Six months (with implementation between July 2026 – January 2028) |
| **How to apply** | MyEITFood Portal |
| **Contact Information** | ian.collingwood@eitfood.eu |

## 1. Introduction

EIT Food is the world's largest food innovation community, creating connections right across the food system. Supported by the European Union (EU), we invest in projects, organisations and individuals which share our goals for a healthy and sustainable food system.

We have built a unique not-for-profit business to carry out transformative programmes in skills, education, entrepreneurship, start-up investment and communications. We deliver these programmes in partnership with our members to create a culture and build a community which sees the long-term value in the food innovation we fund.

**Our Missions**




EIT Food´s Missions respond to major societal challenges within the food system. The alignment of our chosen challenges towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and EU policy is detailed in our main funding strategy document agreed with EIT (European Institute of Innovation & Technology). For more about our Missions-led approach please visit our website.

# 2. Call for startups to Seedbed Venture Catalyst

This Call is for startup teams created by the Venture Builders in the Seedbed Venture Catalyst programme. Seedbed Venture Catalyst is a part of the programme Seedbed (19198-26).

The Venture Builders that are included in the programme are found here: https://www.eitfood.eu/entrepreneurship/launch-seedbed-venture-catalyst

## 2.1. Description of Activities

This call provides funding to support founders who have reached a point in their venture building journey where they need external financial support to overcome hurdles and blockages that are impeding their progress.

Examples of ways the funds could help include production of a test batch of a novel ingredient, negotiation of contracts, securing IP, hiring or paying a co-founder to enable them to remain in the programme, or purchasing equipment for a test lab facility.

In all cases the funds are intended to help the founder make the jump from a promising project in a programme to a legitimate startup that can generate revenues and attract external investment – as defined in KPI EITHE04.4.

## 2.2. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

All **EIT Food funded** projects should achieve relevant Core Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). For Seedbed Venture Catalyst the main KPIs are:

| Code | KPI | KPI Definition |
|---|---|---|
| [EITHE03.1] | Supported start-ups/scale-ups | Number of start-ups and scale-ups supported by KICs for at least 2 months in year N, provided the KIC's services contribute to the company's growth (including potential growth) |
| [EITHE04.1] | Start-ups created | Number of start-ups established in year N as a result / based on the output(s) of KAVA(s), or start-ups created for the purpose of an innovation project to organise and support the development of an asset (but not later than three years after the completion of KAVA). |
| [EITHE04.4] | Start-ups created of/for innovation | Number of start-ups established in year N as a result / based on the output(s) of KAVA(s), or start-ups created for the purpose of an innovation project to organise and support the development of an asset (but not later than three years after the completion of KAVA) having financial transactions of at least 10 000 EUR for services/products (result of the KIC KAVA) sold to customers. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| [EITHE06.1] | Investment attracted by KIC supported start-ups/scaleups | Total EUR amount of private and public capital attracted within year N by supported start-up/scale-ups (per country) that have received KIC business creation services support of total duration of at least two months, within a maximum of three years following the last received KIC KAVA support activity. |

**Please note:** At the end of the funding period, EIT Food requires specific structured data and documentation to verify the achievement of KPIs. Grantees must report their KPI achievements through the grant management tool and ensure that all required structured data and supporting evidence is submitted in accordance with the guidelines provided (see EIT Food KPI Guidance Document for details).

### 2.3. Deliverables and Milestones

Grant recipients must submit project deliverables. For this activity there are two deliverables and one final milestone:

A. Deliverable 1 - Interim project report & evaluation survey

B. Deliverable 2 - Evidence of coaching support

Final milestone: Proof of KPI EITHE04.1, EITHE04.4 and/or EITHE06.1 achievement by six months.

Grant recipients have obligations on communication, dissemination and visibility rules. Please see Article 17 of the Model Grant Agreement and EIT Food's Brand Guidelines.

Grant recipients must adhere to EIT Food Intellectual Property´s (IP) Policy which complies with the IP provisions outlined in Article 16 of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement.

## 3. Founder profiles

### 3.1 Role

The role of the founders selected in this call is to contribute to the shift towards a more sustainable, resilient, healthy and fair food & agriculture system. Teams and founders are expected to use the funds to overcome obstacles that block their path towards creating a viable, investable startup in the agriculture and food.

By supporting these projects before they become companies, we will create a better pipeline of viable and investable businesses that can transform the food and agriculture system and deliver the Impact goals of EIT Food across its Missions and Themes.

### 3.2 Profile

This call will provide funds for teams and founders who have already made significant progress during their respective Venture Builder programme. This means they have demonstrated to the Venture Builder's internal evaluation panel(s) that they have the necessary commitment, talent, technology and drive to create a startup that could survive and grow into a viable food and agriculture business.

Examples of progress milestones and project characteristics we like to see include:

- A strong, stress-tested relationship between 2 or more co-founders who are committed to working on the project full time once it becomes a startup
- The co-founders bring complementary and relevant skills and experience to the project
- The project has defined a clear market or sector application for their idea or technology
- validating the problem they are solving with real-world users
- The project has made significant progress in validating the problem they are solving with real-world users
- The project has made significant progress in validating the core technology or innovation that will deliver the solution they will be selling
- The project has identified viable IP, technology or knowledge that they can secure access to

Only projects that are not yet incorporated as companies and that are currently enrolled in a venture building programme will be eligible for this call.

Applicants should be able to show how our funding will substantially de-risk their projects and make them more investor-ready. They should explain what relevant milestones or actions the funding will enable them to achieve that would have been out of reach without our support.

## 4. Funding

The total budget for this call is €480,000. Founders will receive a subgrant of up to €30,000 to fund their costs. The project can run from July 2026 to January 2028 and should have six-month duration.

There is a 6 million EUR limit per participants from Member States of the European Union (EU) and from Horizon Europe Associate Countries for the whole 3-year Grant Agreement. Legal entities from non- Horizon Europe Associate countries can participate in consortia but are limited to funding of 60 000 over 3 years for a Grant Agreement. This funding is implemented under GA 101269771. In those limits are included all the EIT Funding awarded to an organization across all the activities and prizes for the 3-year grant agreement.

The Subgrant is based on pre-fixed lump sum and value for money. All costs, including co-funding, need to comply with Horizon Europe regulations regarding the eligibility of expenses. Please refer to Article 6 of the Model Grant Agreement and the Annotated Model Grant Agreement.

Participants are not permitted to give a subgrant to another third party.

Participants may not use funds to pay for any services from the Venture Building programme with which they are associated

The total lump sum contribution will be disbursed in instalments. The first instalment is 50% of the total subgrant value and is paid when the contract is signed. Later instalments are conditional upon the delivery of the deliverable mentioned below.

The deliverable is associated with proportional cost allocation and deduction rate. In cases where deliverables are not completed or only partially fulfilled, a deduction will be applied up to the amount associated with the incomplete deliverable.

**Deliverable 1: Progress report and feedback survey**

- Allocated Value: €25,000 (83% of the lump sum)

**Deliverable 2: Proof of coaching costs**

- Allocated Value: €5,000 (17% of the lump sum)

Delivery date for both deliverables: Three months from project start date.

Final milestone: Proof of KPI EITHE04.1, EITHE04.4 and/or EITHE06.1 achievement by six months.

The lump sum is intended to support a broad set of activities aligned with Horizon Europe and EIT Food priorities. It can cover:

- Subsistence costs of co-founders engaged in bringing the venture to life. External experts (e.g. legal, regulatory, or IP), outsourced product development, pilot project costs, test batch creation, software tools, fundraising support, and other operational services that drive business growth. Coaching or expert mentoring.
- In-person attendance at critical meetings with partners, investors, and pilot collaborators within Europe.

All applicants must comply with the applicable Horizon Europe procurement rules, particularly the principles of fair competition, equal treatment and avoidance of conflict of interest.

### 4.1. Financial Sustainability

The funds provided to startups under this programme will improve the pipeline of de-risked startups that eligible to receive investment from EIT Food Investment activities. Improving likelihood of investment returns represents a contribution to Financial Sustainability.

Other EU funding is not an eligible source of co-funding under this scheme.

## 5. Call Timeline and Application

### 5.1 Timeline

This funding opportunity follows the timeline below:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Call Open Date | | 28th May 2026 |
| Call Deadlines | Cutoff 1 | 12:00 CET 1st July 2026 |
| | Cutoff 2 | 12:00 CET 12th August 2026 |
| | Cutoff 3 | 12:00 CET 23rd September 2026 |
| | Cutoff 4 | 12:00 CET 4th November 2026 |
| | Cutoff 5 | 12:00 CET 16th December 2026 |
| | Cutoff 6 | 12:00 CET 27th January 2027 |
| Evaluation | One week after each cutoff date | |
| Communication of results to applicants | Within one week of evaluation | |
| Standstill period, Onboarding and Contracting | 30 days | |
| Indicative start of implementation | Immediately after standstill period/ At least 5 weeks from Cutoff Date | |

The standstill period is a set time after funding selection for appeals, final administrative checks, and compliance in the award process. The project cannot start before this period. The standstill period of 30 days applies to this call.

## 5.2 Application Submission

Applications must be submitted via MyEITFood Portal, no later than the call deadline.

# 6. Eligibility, Evaluation and Selection Process

## 6.1 Eligibility

This call is open to mono-beneficiaries/individuals who have progressed through the initial stages of the Venture Builder programme in which they are enrolled. Please read Annex 1, in addition to the following eligibility criteria:

| Applicant Eligibility | Each applicant must: |
|---|---|
| | • Be registered as a participant in a current cohort or programme of one of the programmes run by a Seedbed Venture Catalyst participant (see Annex for list).<br>• Not yet be incorporated as a legal entity. |
| Application Eligibility | Each application must: |
| | • Be complete, with all mandatory application documents uploaded (Budget, as per EIT Food's Template, available on the website).<br>• Be submitted on time via our submission template.<br>• Be fully written in English. |

**Equal opportunity:** The call is open to all applicants, including those without an existing partnership agreement with EIT Food. All members of the KIC Partnership (as defined in the Partnership Agreement) shall have equal opportunity to participate in this funding opportunity.

## 6.2 Evaluation Process

All submitted applications will undergo an eligibility check and evaluation to determine their feasibility and suitability for funding opportunity.

During the eligibility check, if EIT Food identifies obvious or technical errors in a proposal, applicant will have the opportunity to correct or resubmit their proposal within three (3) calendar days following the call submission deadline. Such errors may include system malfunctions, typos, or missing supporting documents.

The correction window is intended to ensure that these issues do not unduly affect the evaluation of otherwise eligible proposals. Please note that this opportunity is strictly limited to rectifying technical errors and does not permit substantive modifications to the proposal content.
The evaluation will be conducted by a minimum of 1 external evaluators and 1 internal evaluator, based on the criteria below.

Applications will be evaluated based on the application form contents. If evaluators have additional questions or require clarifications the applicant may be invited for a short interview with the evaluators.

All external evaluators have been selected in an open and transparent process. All evaluators, both internal and external, are trained extensively on the European Union´s Code of Conduct for Evaluators, namely on the importance of transparency, fair treatment of all applicants, confidentiality and how to avoid conflict of interest. Evaluators must contractually agree to recuse themselves in the event of a conflict of interest. EIT Food aims for representation of either women or men not falling below 40% as a parity threshold within evaluation committees.

### 6.2.1. Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria and weighting will be used in the assessment:

| Criteria | Sub criteria | Score |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Excellence (30%)*** | Does the project team show tangible progress during the time they have been involved in the Venture Building programme?<br>Does the project have a clear explanation of how the funds would enable them to make significant progress towards clear goals, especially those related to investor readiness? | 1-5 |
| ***Impact (30%)*** | Does the co-founding team include people from groups that are traditionally under-represented in entrepreneurship?<br>Is the project likely to make a meaningful contribution to EIT Food Missions and Themes within the EU? | 1-5 |
| ***Quality and efficiency of the implementation (15%)*** | Is the budget and spending plan realistic?<br>Will the expenditures help the project achieve its stated goals?<br>Does it represent good value for money? | 1-5 |
| ***KIC portfolio strategic fit and compliance with the financial sustainability principles (25%)*** | Does the project fit with the aims of EIT Food portfolio and does it present a reasonable probability of receiving future investment? | 1-5 |

External evaluators will score Excellence, Impact and Quality and efficiency of the implementation. Internal evaluator only scores KIC portfolio strategic fit and compliance with the financial sustainability principles.

Each evaluation sub-criterion will be scored from 1 to 5 using the following scoring system.
**The quality threshold for selection is a total weighted score of 3.5. The top highest-scoring applications will be selected.**

| Score | | Description |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Poor | The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses |
| 2 | Fair | Application broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses |
| 3 | Good | Application addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present |
| 4 | Very good | Application addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | Excellent | Application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor. |

All applicants will be alerted in writing to the outcome of their proposal. Any requests for clarification must be submitted in writing no later than five (5) days following the notification of the outcome. Responses to clarification requests will also be provided in writing.

The recipients of EIT Funding must take all measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in the implementation of the action and, where applicable, in line with the gender equality plan. They must aim, to the extent possible, for a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including at supervisory and managerial level.

## 6.3 Appeal on Evaluation Results

Applicants can submit an appeal within 15 calendar days of receiving their result, if:

- The evaluation of their proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in this document.

For more details, please refer to EIT Food Redress guidance.

# 7. Administrative Items

## 7.1 Onboarding

As part of the onboarding process, selected individuals must:

- Sign and submit the Declaration of Honour.
- Sign and submit the Financial Information Form.
- Register on EIT Food grants management platform.

## 7.2 EIT Food Legal Framework & Legal Documents to be signed

Selected applicants will receive a second communication with instructions regarding the completion of the following documents, as well as agreeing to EIT Food´s conflict of interest policy:

To be signed between the participant and EIT Food:

- **Lump sum agreement**

Any other legal agreements to make this grant eligible.

## 7.3 Payment Schedule

The lump sum contribution will be disbursed in instalments and is conditional upon the delivery of the project deliverables. The first instalment comes as pre-financing and represents 50% of the total budget. Further instalments will be transferred upon completion of each deliverable.

Each deliverable is associated with proportional cost allocation and deduction rate. In cases where deliverables are not completed or only partially fulfilled, a deduction will be applied up to the amount associated with the incomplete deliverable.

To prove that the activity has been successfully implemented, the following compulsory deliverables must be submitted and approved.

| | **Value assigned to deliverables as percentage of total EIT Food contribution** |
|---|---|
| Deliverable 1<br>Progress report and feedback survey | 83% of the subgrant |
| Deliverable 2<br>Proof of coaching costs | 17% of the subgrant |

For more information, please see EIT Food Project Financing Policy.

**Please note:** the timing of funding is dependent on the dispersal of funds to EIT Food from the EIT.

## 7.4 Monitoring

The project will be monitored and may be audited. All Activities selected for funding undergo continuous monitoring by EIT Food to ensure effective progress and implementation in accordance with the Project Agreement.

EIT Food may request regular reporting of actual costs incurred with the subgrant, as well as regular reporting of KPIs and deliverables, together with the supporting documentation. The monitoring process may result in an amendment to the Activity workplan and/or budget.

In the case of under-performance, significant delay of implementation, misconduct, misalignment with the project specifications in the grant management system or any other reason jeopardizing the timely implementation of the Activity identified during the monitoring process, EIT Food reserves the right to discontinue or restructure the funding of the Activity at any point during the Activity duration.

A formal ex-post impact assessment within at least five years of the end of the activity and its outputs is required for each activity, including those implemented by third parties.

## 7.5 Support

If you have any questions about this call, please contact ian.collingwood@eitfood.eu.

Please visit our website for any updates to this call and information about upcoming events to support your application. You will also find our list of Frequently Asked Questions.

# ANNEX 1 – Eligibility

Please Note:

1. Failing any of the above call specific criteria will make your application ineligible. If an applicant is ineligible, the participant will be informed.

2. According to EU policies and measures, Russian and Belarus entities will not be authorised to participate in any new grant under the EU Research and Innovation programmes. This ban applies not only to their potential participation as beneficiaries, but to their potential participation in any kind of role: beneficiaries, linked third parties/affiliated entities, subcontractors, in-kind contributors, international partners/associated partners, and third parties receiving financial support. Find the full statement from the European Commission here.

3. Pursuant to Article 2 (2) of the Decision 2022/2506 of 15 December 2022 on measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary *where the Commission implements the Union budget in direct or indirect management pursuant to of Article 62(1) points (a) and (c), of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046,* ***no legal commitments shall be entered into with any public interest trust established on the basis of the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity maintained by such a public interest trust****.* This prohibition applies to financial support to third parties (sub-grants and prizes), hence the proposal of any entity or group of entities where a Participant is included in the list of public interest trusts shall be considered as not eligible.

4. Applicants will be deemed ineligible if:

a. bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, where its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, where it is in an arrangement with creditors, where its business Activities are suspended, or where it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under national laws or regulations;

b. it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the organisation is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;

c. it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the organisation is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the organisation belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful conduct which has an impact on its professional credibility where such conduct denotes a wrongful intent or gross negligence;

d. is found to be attempting to influence the decision-making process of the call during the process;

e. attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon its undue advantages in the call process;

f. it has been established by a final judgment that the organisation is guilty of fraud, corruption or money laundering.

# ANNEX 2 – Seedbed Venture Catalyst Implementing Participants

Only founders or projects currently enrolled in one the following programmes will be eligible for funding under this call.

- Carbon13
- Enviu
- Food Founders Studio
- Fresh Ventures Studio
- Ivoro Ventures
- Kost Studio
- Zinc

# ANNEX 3

## Estimated Project Start & End Dates for each Cutoff period

In your application form you will be asked to provide a "Project Start Date" and a "Project End Date".

The Start Date should be 5 weeks after the closing date for whichever cutoff period you apply in.

The End Date should be six months after the start date.

Deliverables are due 3 months after the Project Start Date.

Use the table below to help you work out what these dates will be for your project.

| Cutoff | Close date for the Cutoff period | Project Start Date (5 weeks after each Cutoff Close date) | Deliverables due (3 months after Start Date) | Project End date (6 months after Start Date) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1st Jul 2026 | 5th Aug 2026 | 5th Nov 2026 | 5th Feb 2027 |
| 2 | 12th Aug 2026 | 16th Sept 2026 | 16th Dec 2026 | 16th Mar 2026 |
| 3 | 23rd Sept 2026 | 28th Oct 2026 | 28th Jan 2027 | 28th Apr 2027 |
| 4 | 4th Nov 2026 | 9th Dec 2026 | 9th Mar 2027 | 9th Jun 2027 |
| 5 | 16th Dec 2026 | 20th Jan 2027 | 20th Apr 2027 | 20th Jul 2027 |
| 6 | 27th Jan 2027 | 3rd Mar 2027 | 3rd Jun 2027 | 3rd Sept 2027 |