

CIAA endorses “BESS” project on energy management in SMEs in the food and drink sector

www.bess-project.info

In June 2007, the EU co-funded project BESS – *Benchmarking and Energy Management Schemes in SMEs* – finalised an innovative e-learning scheme to implement energy efficiency measures in SMEs in the food and drink sector. The BESS tools have been developed by a European consortium of national energy agencies and consultancies and tested over 50 food & drink companies in 11 EU member states. CIAA actively supported the development of the BESS scheme and today endorsed its final deliverables as useful additional instruments to cut both energy use and costs.

Why energy-efficiency matters in the food and drink industry

Whereas the food and drink sector is overall characterised by a comparably low energy intensity, major differences exist among its sub-sectors and sharply rising energy prices over the last years have become a notable cost factor in several sectors.

The European food & drink industry therefore fully supports the promotion of energy efficiency as an important driver for industrial competitiveness. In addition, energy efficiency, together with a move towards low carbon energy sources, plays a key role in tackling climate change and reducing EU dependency on fossil fuels.

For this reason, EU food & drink companies undertake significant efforts and investment to improve energy efficiency, e.g. via the adoption of best practices, investment in new technologies, participation in national energy efficiency schemes, detailed energy audits.

CIAA actively supports BESS development and dissemination

For the same reason, CIAA actively supported the development of the BESS e-learning scheme, which aims to help SMEs in the food & drink sector to improve their energy performance by implementing best practice energy management. CIAA accompanied BESS from its early stages and provided continued support through its participation in the BESS Project Advisory Group, which consisted of members of the project consortium, the European Commission, the International Energy Agency and CIAA.

Now, that the BESS project has been successfully finalised, CIAA recommends the BESS management tools as useful additional instruments to support and complement existing strategies on energy-efficiency, in line with company and country-specific conditions. CIAA and its member federations will continue to support the dissemination of the BESS deliverables to SMEs across the EU.

Success factors for the implementation of the BESS tools:

CIAA particularly supports the BESS project's focus on SMEs, which represent 99% of food & drink companies in the EU. In adopting efficient energy and carbon management, SMEs often face a series of barriers, which can be grouped as follows:

- Management barriers (e.g. integration of energy and carbon issues at top level)
- Barriers to implementing and sharing best practices
- Lack of human resources and insufficient information on energy management
- Investment barriers (e.g. availability of investment funds, long pay back periods)

The BESS tools provide a useful instrument to support SMEs in overcoming some of the obstacles outlined above. The tools consist of an energy management specification, an implementation model, a handbook, a web-based e-learning scheme, a benchmarking system, and several supportive tools like templates for energy audits and checklists. The following success factors are crucial in exploiting the full potential of the BESS package:

Linking BESS to national programmes

In many EU countries, national support programmes for energy efficiency already exist (see e.g. UK Carbon Trust, the Austrian Klima:Aktiv Programme, and many others). The BESS management tools should be used to support and complement existing initiatives.

Communication with SMEs at the national level:

Particular attention has to be paid to identifying the most effective communication tools to reach SMEs, which often have no specialised staff for energy management issues. Industry sector federations, energy agencies, energy suppliers and consultants can play a positive role in reaching SMEs at the local level and the BESS promotion package can be supportive in these efforts.

Support schemes for energy efficiency measures:

Financial support schemes and the provision of energy-related expertise can provide important incentives for implementing energy efficiency measures, in particular in SMEs with often limited financial and human resources. Different actions may be supported e.g. the conduct of energy audits, consultancy, or training courses.

Investment support for SMEs

Long pay back periods for energy investments in a sector used to short investment cycles, investment uncertainty and the lack of available capital funds can constitute important investment barriers for SMEs. Investment support can be a crucial instrument to help SMEs to overcome existing economic barriers.

Sensible use of benchmarking:

Finally, benchmarking – if used in a sensible manner – can provide a stimulus for SMEs to implement efficiency measures and to monitor achieved energy savings. At the same time, benchmarking results should be interpreted with caution as the food & drink sector is a highly heterogeneous sector with large differences in production profiles, process technologies and local conditions. Existing correction factors – while useful and important – will not guarantee full comparability of different sites. Caution is particularly required when using benchmarking results (of whatever source) to draw conclusions for national or EU policy making.

For more information see also the BESS guidelines for policy making on the project website.

CIAA will continue to play an active role in the promotion of energy efficiency initiatives in the food & drink sector, including the BESS initiative, and will carry on working with all relevant stakeholders, including public authorities, to ensure that the implementation of best energy management practices will result in the continuous improvement of the competitiveness of SMEs and their environmental performance.

CIAA is the voice of the European food and drink industry – the largest industrial sector, major employer and exporter in the EU. CIAA's mission is to represent the food and drink industries' interests, at the level of European and international institutions, in order to contribute to the development of a legislative and economic framework addressing the competitiveness of industry, food quality and safety, consumer protection and respect for the environment. CIAA membership is made up of 24 national federations, including 2 observers, 32 European