

Newsletter: LCA-Care Second General Project Meeting – Advancing Sustainability for SMEs

On November 13–14, 2024, the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld hosted the second general project meeting of the **LCA-Care initiative**, an EU-funded project dedicated to equipping small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the agri-food sector with tools to reduce emissions, minimize waste, and achieve sustainability through life cycle assessment (LCA) and eco-labeling. With participants from Spain, Portugal, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Germany, the meeting gathered 27 attendees for two days of technical discussions, live demonstrations, and collaborative planning.

The meeting was coordinated by **Carlos Cabeleira** from ISEC (Portugal) and supported by International Project Managers **Jackeline Martínez** and **Navoda Senanayake** from IfaS. The event was a vital step in aligning project goals, refining technical deliverables, and advancing the development of the LCA tool that will help SMEs assess and improve their environmental performance.

Day 1: Collaboration and Technical Insights

The meeting began with a warm welcome by Jackeline Martines, who introduced participants and outlined the agenda. She also provided a logistical overview of the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld (ECB), known as Germany’s greenest campus. Jackeline’s introduction set the stage for productive discussions and inspired attendees with the campus’s sustainable operations.

Following this, **Carlos Cabeleira** addressed the group, emphasizing the project’s mission to create practical tools that enable SMEs to incorporate LCA principles into their operations. He outlined the challenges SMEs face in adopting sustainability measures and the importance of the collaborative, cross-border approach embodied by LCA-Care.

The morning’s technical sessions began with an overview from the University of Ruse, Bulgaria, presenting a comprehensive overview of Work Package 2 (WP2). It detailed the completed tasks, including stakeholder engagement and establishing a foundational roadmap for the LCA-Care tool. She also highlighted the steps needed to finalize WP2, ensuring alignment across the project’s partners as they move into subsequent work packages.

A key highlight of the meeting was a live demonstration by **Navoda Senanayake**, who introduced the prototype framework for the LCA tool. This Excel-based prototype provided a glimpse into the tool’s functionalities, including input fields for environmental data, preliminary calculations for impact assessment, and a modular structure adaptable to various sectors within the agri-food industry.

Navoda’s demo initiated an engaging discussion among participants, who offered valuable feedback to refine the tool’s features. Topics included enhancing the user interface, integrating additional data visualization options, and ensuring compatibility with EU regulatory standards. The session also clarified the technical workload for Work Package 3 (WP3), which focuses on developing and testing the final version of the LCA tool.

Campus Tour: Showcasing Innovation and Sustainability

Following the technical sessions, Jackeline led participants on a guided tour of the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld. The campus serves as a living example of how sustainable practices can be integrated into daily operations, aligning closely with the goals of the LCA-Care project.

Participants explored the campus’ state-of-the-art photovoltaic installations and other technologies, which supply a significant portion of its energy needs. Its broader renewable energy strategy includes energy-efficient building designs and optimized resource management. Jackeline

explained how these innovations contribute to the campus's status as one of the most sustainable educational institutions in Germany.

This hands-on experience underscored the practical applications of the principles discussed during the meeting. It also strengthened the participants' resolve to integrate these concepts into their work on the LCA tool, ensuring it provides actionable insights for SMEs striving to improve their sustainability.

The first day concluded with discussions on Work Packages 4, 5, and 6, focusing on specialized training for eco-innovation, the creation of educational materials, and scaling the LCA-Care approach to broader audiences.

Day 2: Practical Applications and Strategic Planning

The second day opened with a technical visit to **Govinda GmbH**, an SME partner based in Birkenfeld. Govinda GmbH, a producer in the agri-food sector, provided participants with an opportunity to observe firsthand how sustainability principles are applied in a real-world business context. For this session, the CEO of IfaS, Professor Peter Heck joined to welcome and greet the participants from the partner institutions.

During the visit, participants toured the company's facilities, learning about its strategies for energy efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable product development. Discussions with Govinda representatives offered valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities SMEs face in implementing these practices.

This visit reinforced the practical relevance of the LCA tool under development. Participants left with a deeper understanding of how the tool could support SMEs in identifying and addressing environmental inefficiencies, ultimately improving their performance and market competitiveness.



A Group Picture Taken at the Govinda Natur GmbH

The afternoon sessions returned to ECB, where the focus shifted to **Work Package 7 (WP7)**. This work package addresses communication, dissemination, and exploitation strategies to ensure the project's results reach a broad audience.

This session outlines a multifaceted approach to stakeholder engagement. The strategy includes targeted communication campaigns, digital platforms for disseminating findings, and the

development of case studies demonstrating the tool's application. These efforts aim to promote widespread adoption of the LCA tool and amplify its impact within the agri-food sector and beyond.

The meeting concluded with a review of **Work Package 1 (WP1)**, which focuses on project evaluation and quality assurance. Participants assessed the project's progress against established benchmarks and discussed strategies for addressing challenges proactively.

Carlos and Jackeline closed the meeting with expressions of gratitude to the participants for their active contributions. They emphasized the importance of building on the momentum generated during these discussions to achieve the project's ambitious goals.

Looking Ahead

The second general project meeting of LCA-Care demonstrated the importance of collaboration, innovation, and practical application in advancing sustainability for SMEs. From technical demonstrations to the campus tour and the visit to Govinda GmbH, participants left with a clear vision of the project's potential impact.

The insights gained during this meeting will guide the refinement of the LCA-Care tool, ensuring it meets the needs of SMEs striving to reduce their environmental impact and achieve eco-labeling.

As LCA-Care moves forward, its partners are committed to maintaining the collaborative spirit that has defined the project thus far. We look forward to the next consortium meeting, where we will continue to drive innovation and empower SMEs to lead the way in sustainability.



A Group Picture of All Partners Joined for the Project Meeting II of LCA-Care