**SwissDeCode nominated for EIT Award by EIT Food for Covid-19 detection test in food processing and packaging**

**Every year, the EIT puts its most promising and innovative startups in the spotlights through the EIT Awards. The awards not only celebrate ground-breaking entrepreneurial and societal achievements, but also aim to inspire the next generation of European innovators. EIT Food nominated the Swiss start-up SwissDeCode for their Covid-19 detection test for the food processing and packaging industry. SwissDeCode also qualifies for the EIT Public Award as every citizen is invited to cast a vote.**

It is the mission of EIT to encourage and enable entrepreneurs all over Europe to come up with innovative solutions for present days’ challenges. Therefore, the EIT organises yearly awards in five categories to showcase ground-breaking technologies and leading talents, innovators, start-ups and scale-ups from all over Europe. Winners receive a financial prize ranging from EUR 10,000 to EUR 50,000 and media exposure through EIT’s channels.

In total, there are 28 nominees for 5 categories: EIT Change, EIT Innovators, EIT Venture, EIT Women and the EIT Public Award. Out of all our strong talents, EIT Food nominated the Swiss start-up SwissDeCode for the EIT Venture Award for their dedicated business development. SwissDeCode developed a test to increase food safety as well as to tackle the threat of Covid-19 in food processing surfaces and packaging . Their potential victory would not only be a recognition for them but also for the effort EIT Food is putting into the innovation of the agrifood ecosystem.

**Increase trust in the supply chain**

“SwissDeCode helps farmers and food manufacturers to grow and produce food that is safe to eat”, explains Joana Gomes, Marketing and Communications Manager of SwissDeCode. “We provide them with rapid DNA detection solutions that help them - or any company along the food supply chain - to detect food contaminants.”

Companies or farmers that use the tests from SwissDeCode no longer need to send samples to laboratories. Instead, they receive the result on-site within 30 minutes to one hour. “This allows them to take immediate decisions which decreases risk of food contamination and on top of that it saves them money too.” Currently, there are about 100 food recalls per month in the entire European Union due to different quality issues. SwissDeCode contributes to lowering this number through rapid and early on-site detection through their tests.

SwissDeCode highly values transparency and wants to restore consumer’s trust in the origins of their food. To do this, they are developing a bar code and cloud system. “When consumers scan the barcode, they can see all sorts of tests, including allergen tests, that have been performed on the food”, explains Brij Sahi, CEO and co-founder of SwissDeCode. “Our test results are stored in a cloud and made available to any consumer or organisation, Sahi continues, “this method can be applied to test results along the entire food supply chain.”

**Covid-19 vs. Food Safety**

Covid-19 not only comes with the challenge of the transmission of the virus from human to human. The virus also survives on packaging and all kinds of other surfaces. SwissDeCode used their knowledge and insights to develop an innovative and rapid on-site environmental test to detect Covid-19 on surfaces. The start-up received a grant from the EIT Food Crisis Response initiative, and is preparing the roll out of BEAMitup, the name of the project, for next year.

“Thanks to rapid testing of surfaces, food manufacturing and food packaging companies will become much safer”, explains Sahi. “As companies will know immediately when and which food or packaging is contaminated, they can remove it from the food chain before any harm is caused.”

**A chocolate virus was the key**

Surprisingly, SwissDeCode derived their virus expertise from working with cocoa farms in Ivory Coast and Ghana. “Every year, a virus destroys 10% of the crops which leads to incredible amounts of deforestation as these fields cannot be used anymore”, explains Sahi. “70% of the world’s cocoa is produced in these countries and 14 million families are economically dependent on this industry. In other words, losing 10% of the fields to a virus not only puts a lot of pressure on the environment but also threats a large amount of families.”

SwissDeCode has studied the virus and worked with the world’s largest chocolate producers to create an on-site test that allows for rapid detection of the virus. This not only halts deforestation at a large scale, but also safeguards the cocoa production for many small-scale farmers in Ghana and Ivory Coast. It furthermore provided the start-up itself with the expertise to develop a test for Covid-19 for the food manufacturing and processing industry in Europe.

**The next steps**

“We have been collaborating with EIT Food for a while and it’s important for us to get recognition and reassurance for what we do from EIT Food through the nomination”, declares Sahi. “This opportunity gives us visibility but also access to investors.”

The next big goal of SwissDeCode is to launch their BEAMitup solution in Europe next year and scale up globally afterwards.

**Citizens** also have an important role to play in these awards. Your vote counts towards the **EIT Public award**, in which citizens get to elect the innovator and innovation they find most inspiring.

Cast your vote here until December 8 2020.

Cast your vote here.

More information about the EIT Awards

More information about SwissDeCode