

Introducing the **Central Coast Future Food Program**

In August, Central Coast Food Alliance (CCFA) surveyed small to medium-sized food and beverage manufacturers on the Central Coast, seeking to understand their attitudes, approaches, and their frustrations when it comes to Innovation.

We learnt that although local SMEs have several strengths which help them innovate, including an openness to new ideas and agile decision making, their innovation regularly falls short of expectations and, in fact every business that participated in the survey, recognised room to improve their approach to innovation.

Snapshot of insights from the ‘SME Innovation Needs Analysis’ survey -

Innovation is important to local SME leaders and drives business outcomes such as;

- improving product or service performance
- increasing revenue and competitive advantage
- delivering positive environmental or social impact

Common barriers to innovation for SMEs include;

- costs of developing or commercialising innovation
- no time to focus on innovation
- lack of external network to support innovation

“Innovation is very relevant in this business climate. If you are not innovating, you are going backwards.”

Businesses identify multiple innovation opportunities including;

- accessing new consumer groups, new sales channels or new markets
- sustainable packaging
- adoption of technologies to improve quality, process efficiency or customer service levels

Common frustrations for SME’s when innovating include;

- understanding whether they have capacity and capability to launch innovation
- tapping in Consumer or Technological trends
- successfully launching and measuring their innovation
- understanding real Consumer needs and pain points

“Consumer demands are changing and if you don’t do something you miss valuable learnings, and the world has moved on by the time you take the risk.”

86% of SMEs are open to sharing their business challenges and innovation opportunities with industry peers and working with others on innovation projects.

Only **57%** of businesses are satisfied with their ability to innovate effectively.

64% of SMEs believe “having a supportive peer network” would help them innovate more effectively.

“You can’t just sit back and wait for the money to roll in because competitors will catch-up”.

We learnt that Businesses want to strengthen connections with their peers, sharpen their innovation skills and take their innovation from good to great.

So, in October 2023, we're kicking off the **Central Coast Future Food Program**.

The Central Coast Future Food Program is designed to help Food and Beverage producers successfully launch innovation which sets them apart, makes them proud and helps them grow. With the support of the CCFA network and their local industry peers, business leaders will learn and apply best practice thinking and tools tailored for SMEs, to identify and accelerate tangible innovation opportunities for their business.

Who is the Program for?

Forward looking business leaders in small and medium sized Food and Beverage production businesses on the Central Coast, who are accountable for improving business performance (growth, productivity, cost reductions, etc.) but struggle to find time and the most effective ways to optimise their current approach to innovation.

What does the Program involve?

There are 2 key pillars of the Program. Businesses can participate in either or both.

1. Innovation Training - Capability-building for a cohort of up to 8 SMEs over 5 x ½ day in-person workshops designed to upskill businesses to innovate effectively at speed.
2. Innovation 'Bites' - Series of focused 1 - 2.5 hour in-person and on-line activities designed to develop participants' understanding of innovation concepts and tools, spark ideas and projects and enable regional ecosystem connections and collaboration.

All activities are **FREE** for Central Coast based SME Food or Beverage producers.

Want to enhance your approach to innovation?

Please contact Alex Blow, Manager, CCFA to register your interest in the Innovation Training or Innovation Bites activities both kicking off in October. Email - alex@centralcoastfoodalliance.com.au
OR 0418 665 226.

The Central Coast Future Food Program is just one way CCFA supports local Food and Beverage Manufacturers. You can learn more about our services and join CCFA via our [Website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).