MINT FOOD – INSPIRES EMILIE TO INNOVATIVE THINKING

Not easy to grasp and quite a challenge at first sight. But given some time, the participation in the MINT Food project has been a very valuable experience. Emilie Sellman at Oatly explains why this PIEp-supported initiative is a success.

“I really enjoy the mixture of biotechnology and food engineering we have at Oatly, says Emilie Sellman. To be able to work with enzymatic processes and food development at the same time hits the mark for me. I am definitely in the right line of business.”

Emilie Sellman is MSc in Engineering in Biotechnology from Lund University. For the last two years, she has been working at Oatly, the Landskrona-based pioneering company that was first to hit the market with its oat-based alternatives to milk. Sweden is still its largest market, but the company also expands abroad. As a relatively small company with about 40 people employed, Oatly was the right type of business to join MINT Food (MINT, Measurable Innovation in Team), when it started in the summer of 2009. Besides Emilie, also Angie Öste Triantafyllou and Carina Tollmar participated from Oatly.

“At first, I experienced the MINT Food project as too academic, but when I dug deeper into it and understood the main thread, it was quite easy to apply. Especially I would like to acknowledge its methodology thinking. Earlier at our company, we did not have a well-functioning system for choosing the right idea. It was more or less built upon market wishes and calculations. But now we consider other aspects, such as innovative height and degree of difficulty, when we rank and choose alternatives. We have also developed an innovative team at Oatly. That helps a lot when we try to spread the idea of MINT Food within our organisation”, Emilie explains.

It should be said though that the development process of finding, choosing and execute projects started already before Emilie joined MINT Food. But thanks to the project, they got very valuable ideas on how to design and start the process work.
According to Emilie, two keys to the success of the MINT Food project are the seriousness and confidentiality with which the participants have met the task, which allowed openness within the work group.

“The participants were very open and generously shared their ideas, thoughts and problems. In that way, we have learnt a lot from each other. And even though this part of MINT is over, we have plans to continue to collaborate and help each other, but in another form”, says Emilie.

Innovation is definitely one the buzzwords of our time, but still it can be difficult to interpret and apply. Emilie means that since the time she spent with MINT Food, she has started to learn more about innovation in general. For Oatly as a company a lot remains to be said about the influence of the project – it is a slow process to get a measure of the company’s innovation capability. It is also hard to know if or when you are innovative. But one concrete change that Emilie and her colleagues at the product development department have noted is that they prioritize better, and don’t spend so much time on irrelevant ideas. They can also motivate their choices in a much better way.

“I have changed my way of thinking towards less gut-feeling and more structure. It’s a complex thing though, there is no right and wrong, and no ready-made template. But for me it is prioritized – it is an important and exciting challenge both internally and towards our customers”, Emilie concludes.

FACTS – OATLY

Oatly AB is a food company which focuses on research and development, marketing and sales of oat-based non-dairy products. It is based in Landskrona, in the southernmost part of Sweden, and currently employs 40 people. The company is in itself the result of a genuine innovation – the oat milk was not an order for enlarging an existing range of products. As a research-intensive business, Oatly is running projects in close co-operation with Lund University, with the assistance of students and doctoral postgraduates. The Swedish market is currently responsible for around 50 % of the company’s total turnover (SEK 160 million in 2009).

FACTS – MINT FOOD

The original MINT project (MINT, Measurable Innovation in Team) was running 2008-2009. Its goal was to develop a framework for measuring innovation capability in teams. The project was driven by a common need among many product developing organizations: to increase innovation capability and bring about approaches for changes in work processes. MINT Food (2009-2010) was a continuation of MINT, with the aim to further develop the framework. In all nine food companies were involved. They tested the developed model in their own businesses by focusing on four to eight key figures in the different parts of the innovation process; identification, selection, realization and evaluation.

![Oatly Oat Drink](image)

Oatly Oat Drink contains only vegetable products, no milk or soya.

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PHOTO: OATLY