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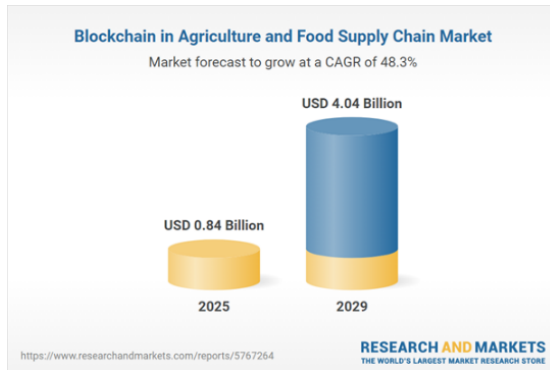
Press release

TRUSTyFOOD - Stakeholders-driven pathways for blockchain implementation in the agri-food sector: LESSONS LEARNED

After 42 months of research within the TRUSTyFOOD project, funded by the European Commission under the Horizon Europe research program (Grant Agreement ID: 101060534), the consortium (constituted by 13 International beneficiaries), and especially its coordinator, TECNOALIMENTI S.C.p.A., are drawing conclusions.

Marianna Faraldi, an active member of the project's Management Team, reports: “The past has been characterized by a lot of hype around this technology, which has been pushed at different levels as the panacea to solve all the problems related to the agrifood sector. Now that the technology is mature enough and the peak of interest has waned, only the good remains. We can learn from the mistakes of the past. It is now clear that BCT is not necessarily a solution that can be applied in every case and that end-to-end traceability can also be achieved through more economical and conventional IT methods. Those who approach Blockchain see this technology as an additional guarantee and a response to primary needs that are emerging ever more strongly in the sector: from the need for trust and accountability to the need to demonstrate sustainability and good practices (e.g., certifications, compliance to regulations) and, in some cases, to be remunerated for this. In the absence of immediate evidence of return on investment in economic terms, most use cases currently in production have shifted their focus to other types of value. Successful projects are those that articulate clear objectives, aligned with business benefits (e.g., operational efficiency), but also with aspects of public interest (e.g., consumer confidence, public health, social inclusion) and environmental benefits (sustainability).

To date, BCT has mainly attracted interest from medium-to-large organisations with a strong, well-organised corporate structure and greater scope for investment in new technologies, leaving the weaker link of the supply chain excluded. But where: (i) true transparency cannot exist unless it starts upstream, (iii) the ability to demonstrate sustainability and compliance with regulations is also an advantage for primary producers and small-to-medium-sized enterprises, it is important **NOT TO LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND** in future challenges.



The numbers are clear: globally, our competitor countries are moving, starting from farmers (coffee, spice, etc.). A truly surprising peak is expected in 4-5 years: the European Union cannot afford to miss the boat.

So what actions should be taken in the short term?

First of all, it is necessary to start from the key concept that over 97% of European farms and 99.1% of food companies are small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It is true that medium-to-large structures often dominate the market, but the vast majority of players in this sector cannot be excluded from the game. It is therefore essential to also focus on the agricultural world and small producers, supporting them in this WIDE TRANSITION towards digitalization with public funds that are properly used on a larger scale to:

- A. Lay the foundations by investing in: infrastructure, broadband, stable internet connections, digital literacy
- B. Ensure the right external support (EDIHs, farmer organizations, cooperatives, producer organizations). In this sense, involve these representatives in various decision-making and technical and regulatory development phases.
- C. Provide financial support to test the technology in its specific use case - start small and then progress in a modular way. Does it make sense in this case to test ONLY blockchain technology? No, it has been proven that blockchain is only ONE of the technologies. In fact, it must be tested with others (IoT, data collection, etc.).
- D. At the same time, work to: (i) harmonize regulations, so that, for example, there are no concerns regarding the GDPR, so that smart contracts are recognized as legally valid, so that the intended uses (e.g., for certification, auditing, demonstration of sustainability, etc.) recognize BCT as one of the “recommended” means. All this without increasing the burden on end users; (ii) ensure interoperability between the solutions adopted along the supply chain as well as common standards; (iii) raise awareness at all levels of the importance of traceability, transparency, and sustainability (throughout the supply chain to the consumer, so that the latter can exert strong pressure in this direction).

The challenge is not easy. Although it is one of the most important sectors in Europe, it is resistant to change, but policymakers can play an important role in making it competitive and resilient”.