

IFST Response to National Food Strategy Consultation October 2019

Institute of Food Science and Technology represents the UK's leading food science and technology professionals, supporting advancement of food science and technology for public benefit. **We positively support the creation of a National Food Strategy** and propose the scope should cover all UK, align with UN Sustainable Development Goals and address the entire integrated interdependent food system, not just agriculture.

Sustainable safe and nutritious food provision for the UK population is reliant on the essential supply of both foodstuffs and of other vital resources (energy, water, suitable soils, skilled labour), as well as access to new scientific and technological developments. To date the UK food system has been sufficiently resilient to successfully manage stress on the supply of safe food to the UK population. A National Food Strategy will need to consider and protect those factors critical to assuring continued resilience in the face of future predicted pressures such as climate change disruption causing severe weather patterns and trade disruption through socio-political change. Reinforcing ways of working, tolerances, economic buffers, and compensatory practices that support resilience, addressing unrealised weak links or vulnerabilities and determining the impact of shifts in manufacturing and diet patterns will all contribute to strengthening UK food system resilience. Even marginal gains can contribute to achieving significant improvements.

Given the far-reaching impacts of the food system, unintended consequences always follow a single factorial approach. What is needed is the consistent delivery against integrated multifactorial strategic goals. To enable this consistent delivery the industry needs **a framework to judge multiple impact factors across sustainability, safety, authenticity, legal compliance, consumer preference, positive nutrition, affordability, and ethical welfare** to ensure protection of the public and the supply chain. It is critical that all relevant food system stakeholders clearly understand and can measure the holistic impact of changes to food chain systems, to food products and their packaging to both avoid unintended consequences and to achieve the goal of providing access to truly sustainable nutrition. Evidence-based metrics to calculate impacts will retain consumer trust and protection. For example, scientifically-robust and relevant advice is needed to provide a balanced understanding of the impacts of packaging, both positive and negative, across the entire agri-food system. Packaging is essential to protect food product integrity and support longer shelf life, thus preventing food waste. Packaging materials choice and overall packaging design therefore needs to be balanced to deliver sustainable food safety and integrity.

Investment is needed to improve access to innovation particularly for primary processors post-farm gate and for the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises who make up 97% of total number of UK food businesses. Positive support for technology implementation is needed across the UK, mainly to move forward the cross-sector digitisation necessary to allow application of new information technologies, and the productivity initiatives required to progress sustainable intensification approaches for agri-food production, reuse of surplus and potential waste and overall more efficient use of resources.

Issues with accessing education and attracting and retaining capable talent in the food industry is impacting skills availability. Automation and application of a range of new digital and information technologies are concomitantly driving a need for new skills. **The positive promotion of the UK agri-food system as a sector valuable to the UK and a sector with rewarding career opportunities is urgently needed to reverse the decline in numbers and quality of skilled workforce.** Targeted investment to increase access to training provision across the agri-food sector is essential for business growth and to assure a capable, productive and resilient UK food system fit for the future.

Sustainable nutrition is needed to prevent diet-related disease and maximise the quality of life and health of the UK population from infancy, through childhood, into adulthood and old age. Poor understanding of food origins, processing, and nutrition makes public health messaging extremely challenging around diet, safe food preparation and other food related issues. It can also negatively impact acceptance of innovation. **IFST recommends increasing education on agri-food, food processing/preparation and diet across the personal, social, health and economic and citizenship curricula in both primary and secondary schools, establishing food science and technology as a core element across the science, technology, engineering and mathematics curricula and instigating increased access to funding for tertiary training and on-going technical professional development.** The integration of food education across the curriculum will update and re-educate the UK population to better understand the food we eat and the importance of a balanced diet. Improved access to technical skills training will help to address the growing UK agri-food system skills crisis.

A paradigm shift in behaviour across food system actors and stakeholders is needed to establish the level of collaboration and cooperation required to deliver an effective UK Food Strategy. Support for sustainable farming and food processing and the delivery of safe, sustainable food for the UK should be on everyone's agenda. **A forum to facilitate this new way of working would provide balance and consistency across policy, positions and communications.**

IFST looks forward to supporting this work to create a UK-wide National Food Strategy fit for the future.

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