Roundtable on Novel Food Regulations 2022 – Post-event summary

The Singapore Food Agency (SFA) organised the 3rd Roundtable on Novel Food Regulations on 25 October 2022, 2 – 5 pm, at the Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre. The Roundtable brought together diverse stakeholders to continue conversations that are important for the development of the novel food ecosystem.

2 Overall, there were 160 in-person attendees and 65 virtual attendees at the Roundtable, representing governmental agencies, the industry, the research community, and non-profit organisations.

Sharing session

3 The Roundtable started with presentations delivered by speakers from the Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ), Health Canada, Ministry of Health Israel, Good Food Institute (GFI), and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. The presentation topics and speakers are as follows:

Presentation topic	**Speaker**
Novel food & alternative Proteins: Some observations from down under	Mr Glen Neal, General Manager, Risk Management & Intelligence, FSANZ
Nutritional aspects of the novel food regulatory approval process in Canada	Dr Atiq Rehman, Senior Scientific Project Coordinator, Health Products and Food Branch, Health Canada
Regulatory framework and safety assessment of novel food in Israel	Dr Ziva Hamama, Head of Food Risk Management Department, Public Health Services, Ministry of Health Israel
Regulatory considerations of culture media in cultivated meat production	Dr Elliot Swartz, Lead Scientist, Cultivated Meat, GFI
Global perspectives: Diverse compliance requirements and essential regulatory elements to assure safety of novel food	Dr Masami Takeuchi, Food Safety Officer, FAO

4 Key points shared by the speakers were:

(a) Novel foods require a pre-market safety assessment as such foods do not have a history of safe use. Examples of novel foods include new food sources (e.g., cultivated meat), new production systems (e.g., precision fermentation), concentrates / extracts, nutritive foods, and in some jurisdictions, genetically modified foods. Strong scientific evidence must underpin pre-market safety assessments.

(b) The main aim of a novel food pre-market safety assessment is to protect human health. Nonetheless, other possible considerations for assessment can include the nutritional quality of the food and environmental impact.

(c) Novel food regulations, in which case-by-case safety assessments are carried out for each novel food product, are fit-for-purpose currently. However, such a regulatory approach is expected to be outpaced in the dynamic novel food ecosystem.

(d) It is important that stakeholders collectively work together toward a risk & science-based standard that incorporates Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), and Good Laboratory Practice (GLP), as well as key concepts such as substantial equivalence and risk analysis.

(e) An agile regulatory system, which includes ongoing discussions among stakeholders, alignment on safety assessment considerations among regulatory agencies, and early guidance for the industry, ensures the safety of novel food products for consumers while facilitating innovation.

(f) Industry-wide standards, as well as international guidelines developed by Codex Alimentarius, are useful for all stakeholders in the novel food ecosystem.

(g) International harmonisation of regulatory frameworks and standards development can contribute to safe and sustainable supply chains for novel foods. Nevertheless, completely harmonised frameworks among countries may not be feasible at this point as the contexts under which novel foods are used can vary significantly from country to country.

(h) Public acceptance is key to the development of the novel food industry as a whole. However, a major challenge faced by regulators and the industry is risk communication in an age rife with misinformation and strong biased opinions. Both regulators and the industry must therefore work together to ensure the safety of novel food products, and that such products are labelled accurately, in order to build consumer trust.

Panel discussion

5 Following the sharing session, Dr Tan Lee Kim (Director-General, Food Administration & Deputy CEO, SFA) moderated a panel discussion with speakers from the sharing session. The panel discussion focused on the setting of standards for novel foods.

6 Key points discussed by the panellists and attendees were:

(a) Standards pertaining to food safety are regarded as highly important by essentially all stakeholders in the novel food ecosystem.

(b) Partnerships between regulators and the industry are important for clear standard setting, which can increase consumer confidence in novel food products. Development of industry-wide standards that are accepted by regulators can also reduce uncertainty for both regulators and the industry.

(c) While there are concerns that setting of standards may stifle innovation in the nascent novel food industry, participants were of the view that a risk-commensurate approach, based on the specific risks associated with individual novel food categories (e.g., mycoprotein, cultivated meat, precision fermentation, etc.), can be taken.

(d) Some participants expressed the view that the industry should take the lead in standards setting, given that they are the most knowledgeable on their products.

(e) Some participants expressed the view that regulators should take the lead in standards setting, as regulators have the expertise in food safety while the industry should focus on innovation.

(f) Some participants expressed the view that both regulators and the industry should co-lead in standards setting through mutual learning and communication between both parties.

(g) Having a shared database where all stakeholders can retrieve information on novel food products can facilitate the development of the novel food ecosystem. However, there are likely to be concerns over the sharing of proprietary information on such a database. In this regard, it was suggested that companies work together to collectively decide on the classifications of information they wish to share on such a database.

(h) The harmonisation of a novel food safety framework among countries is on the horizon. However, there is much work to be done towards harmonisation and it may take several years for such a framework to be implemented.

7 The panel discussion closed with participants expressing the view that while standards setting for novel foods can be challenging, it is useful to have open discussions among all stakeholders.

Acknowledgement

8 SFA gratefully acknowledges Temasek Holdings' support in organising this Roundtable in conjunction with the Singapore International Agri-Food Week (SIAW) 2022 from 25 – 28 October 2022. SFA would also like thank all speakers, panellists, and participants for sharing their valuable insights and experiences, and looks forward to continual support from stakeholders for next year's Roundtable to be held during SIAW 2023, from 30 Oct – 3 Nov (exact date to be confirmed). SFA will continue to identify opportunities to drive discussions on ensuring the safety of novel foods while facilitating innovation to support Singapore's "**30 by 30**" goal.