

NTU, Singapore Food Agency, and A*STAR launch Future Ready Food Safety Hub (FRESH)

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Credit: NTU Singapore

Nanyang Technological University (NTU Singapore), in partnership with the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), today officially launched the Future Ready Food Safety Hub (FRESH) hosted at NTU.

Witnessed by Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, NTU President Professor Subra Suresh, A*STAR Chairman Ms Chan Lai Fung and SFA Chairman Mr Lim Chuan Poh, the FRESH collaboration agreement was signed by NTU Senior Vice President (Research) Professor Lam Khin Yong, A*STAR CEO Mr Frederick Chew, and SFA CEO Mr Lim Kok Thai at the opening of Food Science and Technology Global 2021 (FST Global 2021) conference.

The conference, held at the Nanyang Executive Centre Auditorium in NTU, aims to bring together food, science, and technology experts from local and overseas institutions to share their research and innovation, and nurture new partnership and collaboration.

FRESH is set up to drive food safety research for 'Food Safety Science & Innovation' under the Singapore Food Story (SFS) R&D Programme. It is also tasked with helping build local food safety science capabilities in support of Singapore's growing food innovation ecosystem.

NTU Senior Vice President (Research) Professor Lam Khin Yong said: "NTU is pleased to partner with SFA and A*STAR under the framework of Singapore Food Story on both urban farming and alternative proteins, as well as advisory role on various panels and committees on food matters. NTU has also established strong engagement with food industry which has led to a number of consumer products developed from our food tech innovations. Our researchers are increasingly engaged in broader national effort in food security. In addition, our dynamic education and research in food science and technology and expertise from various schools and colleges would also be of value for inter-agency collaborations. The ongoing vibrant collaborative culture among the leadership and researchers in the three institutions has laid a strong foundation for a successful tripartite partnership on FRESH."

NTU Professor William Chen, the organising chair of FST Global 2021 will serve as Host Principal Investigator for FRESH. Prof Chen is also Director of NTU's Food Science and Technology (FST) programme.

The executive committee of FRESH consists of Adjunct Associate Professor Joanne Chan from SFA, Professor Subodh Mhaisalkar from NTU Singapore, Adjunct Associate Professor Ralph Graichen from A*STAR, as well as other representatives from various Government agencies, Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) and relevant industries.

Adjunct Associate Professor Joanne Chan, Centre Director of the National Centre for Food Science (NCFS), at SFA, said: "FRESH provides an excellent opportunity for multi-disciplinary

collaborations between researchers from various research institutions such as SIFBI in A*STAR, NTU, NUS and other IHLs.

“SFA will continue to work closely with the food industry on new food developments, as well as facilitate the exchange of food safety knowledge, experience and expertise, to support our ‘30 by 30’ goal, which is to produce 30% of Singapore’s nutritional needs locally by 2030.”

Adjunct Associate Professor Ralph Graichen, Senior Director, Food & Consumer, Biomedical Research Council at A*STAR, and chair of the FRESH advisory committee, said: “By tapping on R&D to improve food safety and facilitate the introduction of novel foods to the market, Singapore is well on its way to becoming a leading agri-food and nutrition hub. We look forward to working together with NTU and SFA to drive safe product innovation, for improved health outcomes and to entrench Singapore in the high-value novel food industry.”

The key objectives of FRESH

- (i) To close the current gap in scientific capabilities for food safety risk assessment and validation, to support industry in new product development
- (ii) To strengthen Singapore’s food safety ecosystem, by providing a neutral platform to foster collaboration between regulators, public research performers and industry on food safety R&D
- (iii) To enable regulatory responsiveness through early exposure of regulatory scientists to novel methodology developed in the food industry, to address breaking food safety issues early, and hence accelerate product time-to-market

FRESH builds upon Singapore’s Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2020 (RIE2020) Plan, in which funding of up to S\$144 million was committed to the Singapore Food Story R&D Programme to drive innovation in the local food industry. The plan focuses on sustainable urban food production, future foods, advanced biotech-based protein production, as well as food safety science & innovation.

The glue that binds together expertise and teams

Talent development is key to Singapore’s sustainable food security. As a platform for collaboration across institutions and disciplines, FRESH will provide new food safety support and complement existing efforts under the Singapore Food Story.

FRESH will bridge multiple disciplines, which include food science, microbiology, chemistry, toxicology, engineering, and communication sciences and will work with government, academic and industry stakeholders to build a unique collaborative tripartite R&D platform.