

NTU, A*Star and SFA set up new outfit to research safety of novel food



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NTU Singapore

NTU President Professor Subra Suresh presenting Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu with a memento – a frame with an artwork depicting NTU's iconic building, The Hive, at the launch of the Fresh platform.

SINGAPORE — As novel food forms such as cell-cultured meat make their mark in Singapore, three agencies here have come together to establish a new outfit to drive research into food safety.

Called the Future Ready Food Safety Hub, or Fresh, it will build Singapore's capabilities in food safety science to support the entry of such novel food in the market.

Launched on Tuesday (April 27), it has been set up by Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore Food Agency (SFA) and Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*Star).

Experts across the three organisations will collaborate to strengthen Singapore's food safety ecosystem, which has seen an increase in interest in the [alternative protein industry](#) amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Last December, Singapore became the first country to approve the [sale of cell-cultured meat](#).



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Speaking at the launch of Fresh at NTU on Tuesday, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu pointed out that Singapore's food supply, which is mostly imported, is vulnerable to disruptions such as climate change and pandemics.

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As such, SFA, which regulates food safety here, is tapping innovation and technology to enhance Singapore's food security.

"But even as we make a big push to enhance food security via technology and research and development, it is imperative for us to ensure that our food is safe, including food derived from new food technologies...This is even more critical for future foods that do not have a history of consumption," said Ms Fu.

To this end, Fresh, which will set up its laboratory in NTU in the middle of this year, will work towards boosting safety-related research and development capabilities, said Ms Fu.

Industry players can also tap Fresh for research and development in preparation for regulatory assessments for novel food, she added.

Dr Benjamin Smith, the director of Fresh, said that unlike SFA which sets the rules and regulations for food safety, Fresh will look at coming up with new approaches to assessing novel foods.

"These are foods that have not been on the market before, or haven't necessarily been in our diets before," he said.

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"So in order to ensure our regulations and safety frameworks and approaches are adequate, we have to develop them in line with the products coming out of the market."

Fresh will also work with food safety agencies from other countries, such as the European Food Safety Agency, he added.

Some of Fresh's research will cover allergies that novel proteins can induce, and the safety of food sources which have not been consumed by humans before.

Dr Smith, who is also the director of A*Star's food safety programme, said that the team is also keen to come up with a new safety assessment for novel foods which focuses not only on the safety of the food, but its nutritional benefit.

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