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The shift towards pro-innovation food regulation – What’s happening and why does it matter?

Introduction

The Food Standards Agency (FSA), together with Food Standards Scotland (FSS), has launched the new ‘Innovation Research Programme’ (IRP), continuing the UK’s shift towards a pro-innovation regulatory approach for food technologies and products.

Rapid innovation has outpaced existing frameworks, and prior to 2025 it was becoming clear that this was an increasing problem for the UK’s food sector. In 2024 the FSA highlighted how the EU-inherited regulatory framework for food products was overly prescriptive, hindering the innovative development of novel food products and risking reduced consumer choice and competitiveness. However, a series of recent developments, of which the IRP is the latest, has signalled a shift towards a regulatory framework and approach that aims to enable innovation in the food sector without compromising safety standards.

The key 2025 developments

The IRP, announced on 23 September, is a ‘rapid one-year programme to enhance the UK food regulator’s capabilities and specialist expertise in regulating innovative food technologies’, particularly precision fermentation. This process uses bioengineered microorganisms to produce components like proteins and fats without traditional animal farming, offering benefits for food security and sustainability. The IRP seeks to ensure the UK has the regulatory capabilities and expertise to capitalise on such opportunities.

While the IRP is significant in its own right, it is only one of several major developments in 2025 signalling a shift towards a pro-innovation regulatory approach in the food sector. Key developments are outlined below.

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March 2025 – Funding and innovation initiatives

- **£1.4 million funding** announced by FSA to launch an **innovation hub** focused on regulating new technologies like precision fermentation.
- Launch of **sandbox programme** for cell-cultivated products (CCPs) – meat, dairy, seafood grown from animal cells – enabling collaboration between regulators and eight CCP businesses.

April 2025 – Major regulatory changes introduced

- Removal of the **10-year re-authorisation requirement** for certain products (including GMOs).
- Authorisation of all regulated products now possible via **ministerial decision**, streamlining processes.
- Changes effective **1 April 2025** under the Food and Feed Regulations 2025.

May 2025 – Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Regulations enacted

- Implements the 2023 Act, creating a simplified framework for **precision bred organisms** (PBOs).
- PBOs = plants/animals developed with biotechnology but only containing traits achievable through traditional breeding.
- Applies in **England only** from **13 November 2025**, currently limited to plants; animal decisions deferred.

June 2025 – Business support pilot

- New service to guide CCP businesses through UK market authorisation, improving application quality and market entry prospects.

The IRP, introduced in September, includes a similar business support service, with a focus on precision fermentation.

Comparing the UK's approach to that of other jurisdictions

These regulatory developments have been welcomed by the novel food industry and arguably position the UK as a potential global leader in balancing food safety and innovation, alongside countries like Singapore, renowned for its pro-innovation regulatory system. Some UK initiatives, such as CCP sandbox and business support services, mirror Singapore's successful approach of guiding businesses through authorisation.

While the UK moves away from the prescriptive system inherited from the EU, the EU has implemented little change, causing stakeholder frustration in the region over slow, costly, and complex regulations that stifle innovation. In June 2025, 24 industry bodies urged the European Commission and European Food Safety Authority for regulatory reform. Although a new life sciences strategy and consultation on a new European Biotech Act signal potential change on the horizon, tangible plans remain elusive.

What this all means for stakeholders

Naturally, the recent regulatory changes in the UK will interest investors and businesses in the novel food industry. However, the anticipated accelerated emergence of novel products has implications for stakeholders in the food sector as a whole, from the strengthening of supply chains to an increase in competition for producers utilising traditional methods of production. Businesses should keep abreast of the latest regulatory developments and proactively assess potential impacts.

To find out more, please click [here](#)

Contact us



Esme Saynor

Partner

T +44 114 279 4245

E esme.saynor@cms-cmno.com



Megan Loxley

Associate

T +44 114 279 4060

E megan.loxley@cms-cmno.com

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