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## 1. Event Summary

The Regional Think Tank on *Innovation-Ready Food Regulatory Systems in Asia* brought together regulators, scientists, academia, and industry leaders to shape a practical path forward for predictable access to market to functional ingredients and associated non-nutrient claims in the region. The meeting was designed to refine the scope of a multistakeholder collaborative initiative, prioritize ingredients and claims that would benefit from pilot assessment activities, and agree on a structured implementation pathway built around three pillars:

- **Consensus Regional Guidance:** Development of non-binding, Codex-consistent regional guidance to clarify key regulatory elements. This includes defining safety assessment requirements, establishing principles for claims substantiation, and identifying novelty triggers, including for ingredients with a history of traditional use when introduced in new contexts.
- **Collaborative Scientific Assessments:** Implementation of evaluations of selected ingredients using the consensus safety assessment and claim substantiation approach. This work will generate consensus scientific assessment documents in English for priority / pilot ingredients, paving the way for possible propagation of the assessments as a basis underpinning regulatory approvals in Asia.
- **Information Sharing Platform:** Establishment of a shared platform to support transparency and collaboration. The platform will provide access to guidance and assessment outputs, host data on evaluated ingredients and claims, and facilitate continuous knowledge exchange among stakeholders.

### 1.1 Day 1 – Scoping and Prioritization

Day 1 established a strong common understanding of both the challenges and opportunities facing the region. Discussions confirmed the scope of the initiative, focusing on functional ingredients added to foods as the primary delivery vehicle, with an emphasis on non-nutrient function claims rather than conventional nutrient content claims. Participants reviewed regulatory frameworks across Asian jurisdictions, identified key barriers to market access, and explored opportunities for greater convergence in scientific approaches.

Two working groups advanced a set of prioritization criteria for future pilot work, including regional relevance, linkage to Asian traditional knowledge systems, prior approval in at least one jurisdiction, economic potential, and the ability to build on existing scientific assessments. These discussions helped crystallize a pragmatic direction: to initially focus on ingredients and claims that are not controversial amongst food regulators or consumers and that are amenable to shared scientific assessment, enabling early and tangible progress.

## 1.2 Day 2 – From Scoping to Operational Design

Day 2 marked a transition from discussion to implementation. Consensus was reached on a three-pillar workplan that will guide the initiative moving forward.

Under **Pillar 1 (Enhanced Regulatory Guidance)**, participants agreed to develop two consensus guidance documents: one addressing the safety assessment of novel functional ingredients, and the other focusing on the substantiation of non-nutrient claims. These documents will draw on Asian and international best practices, the ASEAN/Southeast Asia experience on claims, and lessons learned from Thailand’s Food Innovation Regulation Network (FIRN).

Under **Pillar 2 (Pilot Collaborative Assessments)**, the group agreed to initiate pilot work on **GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid)** and on **goji berry-derived ingredients**, particularly extracts. GABA was selected as a strong candidate given its prior regulatory experience in Japan and its relevance for testing both safety and claims substantiation pathways. Goji berry and related extracts were prioritized based on their economic potential, their strong linkage to traditional knowledge systems, and the opportunity to leverage scientific and regulatory experience from China. These pilots will serve as practical test cases to advance convergent or sequential assessment approaches.

Participants also agreed that **Pillar 3 (Knowledge Sharing and Transparency)** should be developed once a sufficient critical mass of outputs is generated through the first two pillars. This phased approach reflects a deliberate focus on producing robust, evidence-based content before scaling dissemination efforts.

## 2. Governance and Institutional Anchoring

A major outcome of the meeting was the convergence toward scaling the Thai Food Innovation Regulation Network (FIRN) model into a broader regional and global network: the **Global Food Innovation Regulation Network (G-FIRN)**.

The proposed network is envisioned as a neutral, science-anchored platform that will:

- Support the development of guidance and methodologies.
- Enable safety, efficacy, and market access assessments.
- Promote transparency and dissemination of scientific evidence.
- Convene stakeholders across sectors.
- Strengthen training and capacity building.

Importantly, the initiative will remain anchored in Asia’s priorities. As a first order of business, G-FIRN is expected to support market access opportunities for ingredients linked to Asian heritage and traditional knowledge systems, while ensuring that all work remains grounded in robust science and evidence-based policymaking.

## 3. Participating Organizations

The Think Tank brought together a diverse group of institutions across regulatory, academic, and scientific communities, including:

- **BPOM Indonesia** (Indonesia Food and Drug Authority).
- **China National Center for Food Safety Risk Assessment (CFSA)**.
- **Food Innovation Regulation Network (FIRN)**, Thailand.
- **Food Science and Technology Association of Thailand (FoSTAT)**
- **Global Food Regulatory Science Society (GFoRSS)**.
- **Hong Kong Baptist University**.

- **The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.**
- **Indonesian Association of Food Technologists.**
- **Industry representatives and private sector stakeholders.**
- **International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFOST).**
- **Philippine Association of Food Technologists (PAFT Inc.).**
- **International Life Sciences Institute Southeast Asia Region (ILSI).**
- **Singapore Institute of Food Science and Technology (SIFST).**
- **Sun Yat-sen University - Institute of Advanced Studies (Hong Kong).**

#### **4. Next Steps and Milestones**

Participants agreed to document the outcomes of the meeting in a proceedings paper, including terms of reference for the proposed governance structure. A follow-up coordination call will be convened within the next two to three weeks to advance early operational deliverables.

Over the next six months, the initiative aims to deliver:

- Draft consensus guidance on safety assessment and claims substantiation.
- Initial outputs from pilot assessments, starting with GABA.

Progress will be reviewed and further engagement mobilized through upcoming regional and global platforms, including:

- **Vitafoods Asia (Bangkok, September 2026),**
- **Food Ingredients Asia,** and
- **The IUFOST World Food Congress (Hong Kong, October 2026).**

#### **5. Conclusion**

The Think Tank established a clear and pragmatic foundation for advancing innovation-ready food regulatory systems in Asia. Beyond identifying challenges, it defined a structured pathway toward convergence—combining guidance development, pilot implementation, and the establishment of a science-based regional network.