

A fresh plate:

How the Regulatory Innovation Office could stir up the food and drink sector

16 December 2024

On 8 October 2024, the UK Government unveiled a new regulatory body, the Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO), aimed at easing the journey for businesses looking to launch innovative products into the market.

This new office is set to collaborate with regulators from various sectors, including the food and drink industry, to pinpoint and dismantle the obstacles that block innovation for emerging technologies. Its role extends to advising the government on writing policies that aim to reduce these barriers, facilitating the introduction of novel products to consumers.

Impact on food and drink sector innovation

The RIO has identified engineering biology (the use of synthetic biology and biotechnology to create new products and services derived from organic sources) as a key area of focus, in a move that spells promising developments for the food and drink industry's innovation efforts, which is currently marred by lengthy delays and complex layers of regulation.

According to Peter Kyle, the Science and Technology Secretary, this initiative will expedite approval processes, ensure regulatory clarity, and minimise delays:

Peter Kyle, Science and Technology Secretary

“By speeding up approvals, providing regulatory certainty and reducing delays, we’re curbing the burden of red tape so businesses and our public services can innovate and grow, which means more job, a stronger economy, and a better quality of life for people across the UK.”

Support for cell-cultivated product innovators

This announcement was quickly followed by news that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) had secured a £1.6 million Engineering Biology Sandbox Fund dedicated to cell-cultivated product (CPP) development. Although no CPPs have yet been approved for human consumption in the UK, (although they have been for pet food), the potential market is vast.

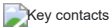
The FSA plans to use this fund to assemble a team tasked with collecting scientific data on CPPs and their associated technologies. This effort aims to enable the FSA to offer recommendations on product safety and to provide pre-application support to pioneering businesses operating in the CPP market.

The FSA has announced its intention to allocate a portion of the fund to assist companies in the CPP sector with pre-application processes, although specific details of this support are still not yet available.

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