

Green Paper submission – Food System Integrity Team AgResearch.

Our focus: the **Food Systems Integrity** team applies cutting-edge microbiology to complex (and often urgent) food safety risks and challenges across the whole value chain –from farm, to factory, to fork. These challenges are bottom-line consumer, industry, exporter and regulatory concerns. The team’s work plays a critical role in ensuring the integrity, safety and stability of New Zealand’s food exports and those we consume locally. There are a number of points that as a team working in a CRI think are of value to share during the consideration of the future direction of science and the CRIs.

- **Funding** - We support SSIF – core or discretionary funding is key to enabling the development of future thought leaders and the fundamental knowledge which goes on to support industry needs as they take up the innovation. It allows CRIs to support the development of early career scientists through PhD studentships and post-doctoral positions and offers a career pathway where our next generation of scientists can learn technical, strategic, industry commercialisation and leadership skills in key areas of importance for NZ. We have actually done very well in this regard of late, but it needs to continue. Over the last four years the Food System Integrity team has supported 6 PhD students one of which is now a post-doctoral researcher within the team, 4 Post-Doctoral Researchers, two of which have now taken up scientist roles within the team maintaining and building on key capability and providing a pathway for succession planning. We could not do this without access to SSIF, especially as a lot of key areas are covered by last man standing due to pending retirement. CRIs in collaboration with universities can also offer research areas with direct application to industry, working in a commercial setting. The other thing we think we shouldn’t forget is that there are individuals and teams embedded within CRIs that provide science support to essential regulatory functions in areas such as food safety, animal welfare and biosecurity e.g. MPI recognised laboratory programs, Methods Manuals etc. Such groups may not always carry as high a level of academic prestige but nevertheless require ongoing funding support to continue in their role.

We support the base grant – having funding dedicated to support the organisation separate from that of science offers a better understanding and management of real science costs rather than spreading the cost across all of science. The removal of overheads and/or FTE allocation would be a fairer way to manage science costs as different research areas attract different organisational costs which are otherwise subsidised by other projects. Further, this would also allow CRIs to have a more equitable costing structure to that of universities which often win projects based only on cost. It also drives non collaborative projects as the FTE costs of CRIs are much higher so the best teams for the project are disadvantaged by increased costs.

- **Research Priorities** - We also support mission led research areas similar to that of the NZFSSRC and Infectious Disease platform. This will reduce duplication and fragmentation of research efforts and enable multidisciplinary teams to be developed to tackle key issues. The risk is that other research areas will be under invested. With respect to this, SSIF has an important part to play in establishing new innovative areas of research for future needs as well as contributing to international recognition.

We would like to see clear short, medium and long term goals and signals to enable us to focus on key areas for NZ R&D. Further, we would like to see a mechanism for those “Gold Star” MBIE projects to seek further funding support as nothing exists at the moment.

- **Infrastructure** - We also support the idea of sharing costs and resources across the CRIs reducing duplication in operational areas such as purchasing, HR, Legal etc. An overarching framework for strategic and governance would also cut down on costs at senior leadership and result in better collaborative decisions, work practices and research goals enabling better collaboration.