

Strengthening Food Science Research, Innovation and Development in Africa's Tertiary Institutions Through Regional Partnerships Among Food Professional Associations

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Abstract

African countries are mostly consumers of food product research, innovation, and development from the advanced countries of the globe. This situation requires urgent amelioration. A handful of tertiary institutions in Africa hosts impactful local, international, collaborative, inter and intra-disciplinary research in Food Science and Technology. However, more often than not, infrastructural and socio-economic challenges tend to compromise research objectives and outcomes of food research and innovation in Africa despite the recognized strengths and opportunities which ought to be exploited to stimulate regional breakthrough for competitive global food markets. The Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) presents both a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen Food Science Research, Innovation and Development in Africa. Part of the solutions towards addressing the challenge of achieving optimal and impactful food science research, innovation and development and the achievement of AfCFTA objectives would be the establishment of regional partnerships under the auspices of food professional associations. This could be driven through well thought out engagement of tertiary institutions across the Nigerian Institute of Food Science and Technology (NIFST) and the South African Association for Food Science and Technology (SAAFoST) as both associations remain the most influential bodies for the advancement of Food Science & Technology in Africa.

There is an unmet need for NIFST and SAAFoST to collaborate so as to coordinate and strengthen food science research, innovation, and development in Africa. Such relationship could trigger accelerated solutions to the challenges encountered by stakeholders in their quest for relevance in the competitive local and global food markets. Through sharing of limited expertise and facilities between both professional associations, research quality, output and impact could be enhanced and a pool of active food science experts with long standing relationships formed beyond the annual or biennial NIFST and SAAFoST conferences, respectively. This paper aims to stimulate discussion around the appropriate modalities, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the achievement of a strategic alliance between NIFST and SAAFoST with the goal of strengthening food science research, innovation and development among its' member tertiary institutions.

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Professor Abu holds a PhD in Food Science from the University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. He joined the services of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Nigeria 29 years ago. Prof. Abu is the current President of the Nigerian Institute of Food Science and Technology. He is married with children.