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Comments on FAO Consultation: “Guidance on strengthening national science-policy interfaces for agrifood systems – Draft report”

Dear Office of the Chief Scientist of FAO,

The Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the consultation, “Guidance on strengthening national science-policy interfaces for agrifood systems – Draft report.” As a global organization of approximately 11,000 science of food professionals, we believe science is critical for establishing evidence-based policies to ensure a global food system that is sustainable, safe, nutritious, and accessible to all. We are pleased to see this draft report that provides aspirational, structural, and procedural guidance for the development of science-policy interfaces (SPI) and addresses several of the concerns raised in our previous comments on barriers and opportunities for scientists to contribute to informing policy for agrifood systems. We would like to provide the following feedback and perspectives based on guiding question 2, provided in the consultation.

“Are the sections/elements identified in the draft guidance the key ones to strengthen SPIs at the national level? If not, which other elements should be considered? Are there any other issues that have not been sufficiently covered in the draft guidance? Are any sections/topics under- or over-represented in relation to their importance?”

The draft guidance highlights many opportunity areas to strengthen SPIs at the national level and has appropriately drawn attention to the need to integrate knowledge from both scientific research as well as practical knowledge from local/Indigenous Peoples’, small scale producers, and consumers. We agree that connecting empirical science and applied science is critical for the development of effective policies that strengthen agrifood systems.

Based on our previous comments on barriers and opportunities for scientists and other knowledge holders to contribute to informing policy for agrifood systems, we were pleased to note that the draft guidance addresses some of the barriers identified, such as a need for training on how scientists may engage with policymaking as well as the importance of engaging

in conflict, particularly related to interpretation of science, in a constructive and transparent manner. We also emphasized several additional barriers and opportunities, many of which are included in Annex 2 of the draft guidance (“Building capacity for evidence-informed policy in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe”, from the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)). For example, Annex 2 and our previous comments point out that there is often misalignment of priorities between the policy environment and other sectors, such as academia, resulting in little professional recognition and limited remuneration or reward for academic scientists to engage in policymaking or evaluate the usefulness of their scientific activities for policymaking. We agree with Annex 2, that to address this barrier and increase motivation and awareness of science for policy, mechanisms need to be incorporated at the organizational/institutional level that incentivize policy engagement for scientists. However, the draft guidance itself does not address this or several of the other barriers mentioned and does not provide insight on how the learnings of the JRC may inform the future guidance for SPIs. We would encourage the draft report to elaborate on how the work of the JRC and OECD may help inform further iterations of this draft guidance as it seems a robust evaluation of many operational and process barriers.

IFT applauds the work of the FAO Chief Scientist Office in the development of this important draft guidance to guide the development and operationalization of SPIs. We believe quality science and the inclusion of all forms of knowledge is critical to establishing evidence-based policies to transform the food system to ensure food and nutrition security for all. Science of food professionals play a critical role in generating scientific knowledge for policy development and welcome further dialogue on overcoming barriers to better integrate science and policy. Please contact Anna Rosales, Senior Director Government Affairs and Nutrition (arosales@ift.org) if IFT may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,
Anna Rosales, RD
Senior Director Nutrition and Government Affairs
Institute of Food Technologists