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Date: December 15, 2020

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris:

Re: Strengthening the Food and Agricultural Systems

The Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) strongly believes that our food and agriculture systems are a cornerstone to the four priorities (economic recovery, COVID-19, racial equity, and climate change) of your Administration. Therefore, we are keenly interested in working with you and your Administration to strengthen the food and agricultural systems. IFT is a global organization of approximately 13,000 individual members, in 95 countries, who are committed to advancing the science of food. Since 1939, IFT has engaged experts in food science, technology, and related professions from academia, government, and industry to solve the world's greatest food challenges. IFT provides scientific, technical, and career development resources for advancing the science of food and its application across the global food and agricultural systems. We believe that science is essential to ensuring that our global food system is sustainable, safe, nutritious, and accessible to all.

The agriculture and food (AgriFood) sector is the third-largest contributor of direct U.S. GDP, after healthcare and housing, accounting for \$5.08 trillion of combined GDP and 22.8 million jobs in 2018. Further, the Food sector (processing, manufacturing, distribution, retail, food service, and delivery of food and beverage products) within AgriFood contributed \$2.7 trillion of combined GDP and accounted for 20.7 million jobs in 2018. Yet, for more than 20 years, Federal funding, largely through USDA, for food and agricultural sciences economics, education, and extension has been flat, while there has been a rapid increase in AgriFood research by our competitors (e.g., China and Brazil). Along the spectrum of the food supply chain, AgriFood research has increasingly focused upstream (i.e., agriculture) and downstream (i.e., consumption), with very little emphasis on the middle segment (e.g., formulation, processing and packaging, and retail).¹ According to a recent National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine report, the Federal share of research funding for food science, including food processing, preservation, and other food-related technologies, declined from 10% to 4% of the total funding for nutrition research between 1985–2009.² If investments in these areas do not increase, we risk losing a significant portion of our GDP, our global competitiveness, and the next generation of scientists and talent pipeline in this sector. We believe that significant investments in AgriFood with an urgent focus in Food research (food safety and quality, processing, manufacturing, distribution, retail, food service, and delivery of food and beverage products) will help address critical national and global challenges surrounding food safety, nutrition, public health, and food security.¹

COVID-19, mounting disparities and inequities, and climate change impact public health, economy, and health and security of the nation. We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated many challenges, including food supply chain disruption, food insecurity, disparity, and inequality. We see that susceptibility to, and severity of COVID-19 is exemplified in individuals with an underlying health condition(s) and chronic disease(s), particularly among those in lower socio-economic strata and/or from

¹ Mohamedshah, F., Havlik, S., & Velissariou, M. (2020). *Food research: Call to action on funding and priorities* [White paper]. Institute of Food Technologists. <https://www.ift.org/-/media/policy-advocacy/ift-whitepaper-012720final.pdf?la=en&hash=325D75E4611DD73335C9ED2DD3C8A7143D589F78>

² National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine. (2019). *Science breakthroughs 2030: A strategy for food and agricultural research*. <http://nas-sites.org/dels/studies/agricultural-science-breakthroughs/>


minority racial and ethnic groups.³ The economic downturn and job loss due to COVID-19 have certainly escalated food insecurity, further straining vulnerable populations. For the first time, many middle-class families are experiencing elements of food insecurity and enrolling in supplemental nutrition programs.⁴ Further, climate change is expected to threaten food and agriculture production, including food safety and nutritional quality, food security, food prices, and distribution, particularly to the most vulnerable⁵, intensifying the mounting challenges that the food system already faces. Food safety is a primary consumer priority and expectation. With the global food system rapidly evolving while embracing new digital technologies and distribution channels, industry and government partnership is critical to ensuring that expectation is met every day.

The association between food, nutrition, and diet-related chronic diseases and their mounting healthcare costs, evolving disparities in diets, varying consumer demands, food safety challenges, inequalities, increasing susceptibility to unforeseen threats to the food system, including COVID-19 and impacts of climate change have heightened the need for resilient and agile food systems. Our food systems must be able to provide safe, nutritious, affordable, accessible, palatable, and culturally/socially acceptable food supply to maintain health or where needed improve health outcomes.

We believe that food science and technology play a critical role in addressing these challenges. Additionally, transdisciplinary sciences and application of advanced technologies (e.g., Artificial Intelligence and blockchain) are needed to transform the food systems so that they are more resilient, agile, and can meet the increasing food and nutrition demands of the growing population, globally. We urge the Administration to consider the importance of inclusion of research funding for food and agriculture, with a focus on Food, in the research agendas of agencies such as NSF, DoD, and DHHS, to complement the top-notch research conducted and funded under USDA'S REE — ARS, ERS, NASS, and NIFA. Further, public-private partnerships are critical to address the monumental challenges and advance and transform our food systems. We urge the Administration to develop additional programs similar to the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research to advance and strengthen public-private partnerships. We are confident that the administration will engage all critical stakeholders, including farmers, scientific societies, academia, food and ingredient manufacturers, consumers, and others to address these challenges.

The health of the population is linked to economic health and security of the country. We trust that the Biden-Harris Administration will pursue appointing scientists, and food scientists and technologists in particular, to appropriate stakeholder and policymaker positions where their expertise would help advance the Administration's priorities. IFT and food scientists and technologists stand ready to assist the Administration on many aspects of the food system—including food safety and quality, traceability, resilience and security, nutrition, food processing, packaging, and food loss and waste—to successfully address these challenges. Please contact John Ruff, Chief Science and Technology Officer (jruff@ift.org; 312-782-8424) or Farida Mohamedshah, Director, Nutrition Science, Food Laws and Regulations, (fmohamedshah@ift.org; 202-330-4986), if IFT may provide further assistance.

Sincerely,



Christie Tarantino-Dean, FASAE, CAE
IFT, Chief Executive Officer

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, April 22). *COVID-19 in Racial and ethnic minority groups*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

⁴ TuftsNow. (2020, April 30). *Food insecurity in the age of COVID-19*. <https://now.tufts.edu/articles/food-insecurity-age-covid-19>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019, June 18). *Climate and health: Food security*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [Climate Change and Public Health - Health Effects - Food Security | CDC](#)