



# IUFOST

## Iufost's Framework On Food Classification Systems

*Towards Evidence-Based, Inclusive and Science-Driven Food Classification Systems informing Policy Agendas*

### 1. Background and Rationale

The discourse surrounding “ultra-processed foods (UPFs)” has gained significant attention in public health and policy circles. However, this narrative often oversimplifies the science, portraying processing itself as inherently detrimental and disregarding the critical roles that food processing plays in food safety, nutrition, sustainability, and accessibility.

Such reductionist frameworks risk misclassifying safe, nutritious foods, discouraging beneficial technologies, and confusing consumers.

IUFoST, as the global scientific body representing food science and technology, proposes a constructive alternative: a multi-attribute, evidence-based approach to food classification that recognizes processing as an enabler — not a detractor — of healthy and sustainable food systems.

### 2. Proposed Framework

#### 2.1 Pillar 1 – Advancing Evidence-Based and Inclusive Food Classification Systems

##### **Objective:**

To develop, validate, and promote scientific, multi-attribute approaches to food classification that integrate nutritional formulation, processing, and other relevant attributes (e.g., safety, sustainability, affordability, and palatability).

##### **Actions:**

- Continue methodological development of IUFOST's Formulation and Processing Classification (IF&PC) model, building on the 2024 Nature Science of Food publication (Ahrne et al., 2024).
- Pilot and demonstrate quantitative applications of the model through case studies showing how multi-attribute scoring systems can more accurately reflect a food's health impact and quality.
- Promote scientific consensus through expert consultations, joint symposia, and regional workshops involving both the nutrition and food science communities.

**Goal:**

To demonstrate, with evidence, that the notion of “Ultra-Processed Food” should not be relied upon as a valid scientific or policy classification, while acknowledging its widespread use and addressing it through education and reframing rather than confrontation.

## **2.2 Pillar 2 – Global Advocacy and Policy Engagement**

**Objective:**

To ensure that all international deliberations and policy discussions concerning food classification and processing occur within the legitimate, science-based platform of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, where trade, health, and agricultural perspectives converge.

**Actions:**

- Engage with Codex leadership and relevant committees (CCNFSDU, CCFL, and CAC) to encourage the structured discussion of food classification under existing frameworks such as nutrient profiling and front-of-pack labelling.
- Liaise with FAO and WHO leadership to advocate that deliberations on processing and classification be channeled through Codex — ensuring neutrality, scientific rigor, and inclusivity of all stakeholder perspectives.
- Leverage meetings of regional Codex bodies (CCASIA, CCNE, CCLAC, etc.) to raise awareness of the implications of oversimplified classifications for trade, regulatory coherence, and innovation.
- Mobilize IUFoST's scientific network to provide expert input into Codex workstreams, ensuring that future deliberations are informed by robust, peer-reviewed evidence.

## **2.3 Pillar 3 – Strategic Communication and Public Engagement**

**Objective:**

To reposition food processing in the public discourse as a science-driven ally of food safety, nutrition, and sustainability — highlighting tangible societal benefits and countering misconceptions.

**Actions:**

- Develop and disseminate clear communication materials (infographics, briefing notes, short videos) illustrating how processing interventions improve safety, stability, and nutrition.
- Highlight real-life examples demonstrating positive impacts of processing:
  - Food additives preventing spoilage and ensuring safety (e.g., inhibition of *Listeria monocytogenes*);
  - Fortified foods addressing nutrient deficiencies in vulnerable populations;
  - Processing innovations supporting circularity and climate-resilient food systems;
  - Pasteurization and freezing for microbial safety and shelf life;

- Fortified and reformulated foods as vehicles for nutrient delivery;
- Use of food additives as safety and stability enablers;
- Reduction of food loss and waste through modern processing.
- Showcase collaborative work with UNIDO to illustrate how processing supports industrial transformation and inclusive economic growth, especially in low- and middle-income countries.
- Strengthen collaboration with the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) to foster a shared scientific foundation between nutrition and food science communities.
- Re-enforce a **unified IUFoST narrative**: that responsible food processing is a critical intervention for safe, nutritious, and sustainable food systems.
- Engage the media and scientific community to share success stories and build public trust in science-based food technologies.

### 3. Implementation and Coordination

#### Lead Coordination:

IUFoST Platform on Food Processing

#### Partners:

UN agencies, IUNS and International Science Council bodies, adhering bodies, representing national food science institutes and academies, IUFoST Associates, and other IUFoST global partners such as Association of African Universities (AAU), African Academy of Sciences (AAU) International Dairy Federation (IDF) and all those who commit to evidence-based, inclusive and science-driven food processing solutions.

#### Expected Outcomes:

- Recognition of a methodologically robust multifactorial model e.g., Formulation and Processing Classification model as a reference framework for evidence-based food classification, upon which policy decisions can be made.
- Reinforced Codex leadership on classification discussions.
- Improved public understanding of the role of processing in advancing food safety, nutrition, and sustainability.

#### *In Summary:*

*Through this three-pillar strategy, IUFoST confirms its leadership as the global scientific voice for responsible food processing. The goal is to advance science-based classification, inform fair and inclusive global policy and foster a balanced, informed understanding of how food processing supports healthier, safer and more resilient food systems worldwide.*