



06 March 2026

To: **Dr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**

To: **Mr. René Orellana Halkyer, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the FAO
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC)**

Subject: **Seeking your support to maintain the scientific integrity and multilateral coherence
in the discourse on “Ultra Processed Foods” and related labelling proposals**

Your Excellencies,

On behalf of the International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFOST) and the Latin American Association of Food Science and Technology (ALACCTA), we write to express our concern about the evolving discourse on foods described as “ultra-processed” (UPF) and the growing support for national labelling proposals based solely on processing.

1. Shared commitment to food security and scientific integrity

IUFOST and ALACCTA fully share FAO’s mission to promote food security and nutritional well-being for populations around the world. We believe that any food- classification or labelling system must be anchored in sound scientific evidence, uphold regulatory integrity, and avoid measures that could threaten food security or marginalise food technologies. We trust that these principles are also central to FAO’s mandate.

2. A troubling precedent: the Chilean Senate event (13 January 2026)

It is with considerable concern and astonishment that we note that, on 13 January 2026, an FAO official publicly supported a draft bill before the Chilean Senate’s Health Commission proposing that foods containing more than five industrial ingredients be labelled as “ultra-processed.” Such an intervention effectively signalled endorsement of the NOVA classification—a framework that remains **scientifically contested** and lacks a globally accepted definition. Taking a public position on a contested concept at this stage risks influencing national policy in a manner that we respectfully consider as inconsistent with FAO’s neutral, science-based role.

3. Premature reliance on the NOVA classification in FAO communications

Our concerns are further reinforced by sections of the FAO/IFAD/UNICEF/WFP/WHO report “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025” (SOFI 2025) that adopt the NOVA classification to frame “ultra-processed foods” as cheaper yet less healthy alternatives. For example, the report states that nutrient-dense foods have the highest prices per kilocalorie, whereas “ultra-processed foods ... tend to have lower prices per kilocalorie ... [and] are increasingly displacing more nutrient-dense alternatives despite



growing evidence of their adverse health impacts”. It further asserts that “ultra-processed foods” are often high in saturated fats, trans fats, sugar and salt, depleted of micronutrients and fibre, yet cheaper than other categories. Presenting such assertions as established fact—without acknowledging the ongoing scientific debate, the absence of a globally agreed definition, or the distinction between formulation and processing—could be seen as an implicit endorsement of NOVA by FAO. While we do not dispute that poorly formulated products (high in sugar, salt, saturated and trans fats) pose genuine health risks, it is **the formulation choices** that drive these concerns, **not necessarily the processing itself**. Yet the SOFI report relies on a classification system where processing is the sole parameter highlighted in the classification designation, which we view as premature and potentially exclusionary.

4. Need for inclusive science and multi-parameter approaches

We respectfully highlight that the NOVA system was developed with **limited engagement from the broader food-science community**. Many food scientists and technologists have raised concerns that NOVA **conflates processing with formulation**, leading to systematic misclassification of foods fortified with essential nutrients or designed to address specific dietary needs. IUFoST, in collaboration with the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS), has developed a multi-parameter methodology through our taskforce on Food Processing for Nutrition, Diet and Health that integrates nutritional composition, formulation and processing (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41538-025-00395-x>). We fully support clear consumer information, but we believe **classification systems for public policy** must reflect **multiple measurable attributes**, not processing alone.

5. Risks to food security, nutrition equity, and innovation

Processing plays a crucial role in improving nutritional value, safety, and shelf life as well as environmental impact and affordability—particularly relevant in low- and middle-income regions. Simplistic labelling regimes based on processing level risk stigmatizing shelf-stable, fortified, or nutritionally enhanced and environmentally favoured like plant-based foods that are vital to addressing micronutrient deficiencies, malnutrition and the environmental footprints. Such policies could undermine the availability and acceptance of safe, nutrient-dense and environmentally friendly foods, thereby compromising progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and potentially hindering innovation aimed at improving public health.

6. The need for careful, consultative policy development

Given these ramifications, we seek from FAO and WHO to engage the food science community in **broad consultations**—which not only include nutrition scientists, but also food scientists, technologists, industry representatives, and consumer groups. We also hope that our leading international organizations reconsider the endorsement or promotion of **processing-centric classification** or labelling systems. Such classification is considered as a contested concept. Premature endorsements **could therefore unintentionally shape national regulations and create inconsistencies with Codex Alimentarius standards**.



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7. Proposed way forward

In light of the above, we respectfully suggest that FAO considers processing as one of several relevant factors and encourage multi-parameter classification approaches that incorporate nutrient composition, formulation, and function.

We very much welcome possible engagement between FAO, IUFoST, ALACCTA, IUNS, and other scientific bodies to ensure balanced expertise across nutrition, food technology, and regulatory science is considered before the development, adoption and dissemination of formal positions that may have impacts on public policy.

We stand ready to collaborate with FAO as it champions policies that enhance diet quality while safeguarding food security, innovation, and equitable nutrition access.

We remain at your disposal for further discussions and would welcome a technical exchange with FAO leadership to explore how best to ensure that food-classification initiatives are scientifically rigorous, inclusive, and consistent with FAO's mission to improve global nutrition and food security.

Please accept, Your Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely,

  **IUFoST**

Prof. Samuel Godefroy

President, International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST)





Prof. Rommy Zúñiga

President, Latin American Association of Food Science and Technology (ALACCTA)

IUFoST is an elected member of the International Science Council (ISC)