
UK-IRELAND FOOD BUSINESS INNOVATION SUMMIT

Workshop Questions and Summary Responses

This paper sets out the questions posed to the Summit delegates in the workshop sessions. The questions were designed to explore the three themes of Skills, Innovation and Shortening the Food Chain addressed by the Summit presentations. The delegates were divided into small groups and given the opportunity to discuss at least one of the questions. The summary findings from each of those discussions are documented with the question they respond to and provide one of the key inputs into the final event report '[Innovation in the Ireland and UK Food Sector: Ambitions for Action](#)'.

WORKSHOP 1: SKILLS

1.1. How can the UK-Ireland food sector collaborate to attract new talent and equip its workforce with the skills the sector needs?

a) What are the key challenges?

- Profile/perception of the food industry (from a young age)
- Food science graduates not being properly equipped with commercial skills.
- Business people don't see tangible/lucrative career path
- Food courses inflexible and not changing with industry

b) What are the key opportunities?

- Collaboration between university and industry re placement and professional development
- Adding food to career guidance in schools
- Vacancies more broadly known

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Create an umbrella organisation piloted by 2 universities (UK & Ireland).
- Perform GAP analysis on skills
- Diary date for an event

1.2. Entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs are flourishing in some sectors of our businesses. How can we learn from them and spread the benefits?

a) What are the key challenges?

- Visibility of who entrepreneurs are
- Get idea generators and tech capabilities together
- Do we have a culture of learning from mistakes?
- Time short to gain access to all required "techniques"

b) What are the key opportunities?

- Entrepreneur support network (central hub operation administration, teaching others, info networks)

- Culture of ideation and support to end product (from top down)
- Value from ideas on the shelf in big companies (back catalogue) – wrong timing
- VC and business angel links

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Pep up the sector profile in schools and universities (part government role), e.g. university students given opportunity for developing back-catalogue ideas.

1.3. How can UK-Ireland food sector lead the world in innovation through meeting consumer needs profitably / commercially?

a) What are the key challenges?

- Trust: sharing commercial information may impact on competitiveness
- Skill set: lack of co-ordination between industry and educational bodies
- Investment required
- Duplication between Ireland and UK
- Culture – reactive – shaped by events rather than industry driving innovation
- Mixed messages from industry (to research bodies and educational bodies)

b) What are the key opportunities?

- Huge market available
- Identify common interests where competitiveness will not be an issue
- Opportunity for large companies to mentor smaller companies, share learning and experience.
- Macro trends e.g. food for health/the elderly/sport/infants
- Streamlining regulations, skill sets, qualifications, labelling between Ireland and UK
- Clarify the issues surrounding IP to allow a higher rate of commercialisation of IP

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Create a senior industry team representative of the whole supply chain. Determine areas of prioritisation.
- Create examples of success through incentivisation that allow trust to be built.
- Create an innovation network to:
 - Determine priority areas
 - Create networks for these areas
 - Involve industry, researchers, retail, regulatory bodies, etc;
- The innovation network should:
 - Be all in one place – could be a virtual place
 - Be funded by all stakeholders
 - Link or streamline current resources to avoid duplication

1.4. Good ideas often come from small businesses and small business often become world leaders. How can we grow small businesses faster?

a) What are the key challenges?

- Getting access to skills base with regard to innovation
- Access to finance
- Access to markets: difficulty in new markets; trading terms of supermarket multiples; larger companies have very stringent criteria for establishment of suppliers

b) What are the key opportunities?

- Linking to innovation capacity in universities/research institutes (exchanges of staff, using MSc students etc)

- Linking with larger companies for mentorship and to be established as suppliers
- Getting an understanding of opportunities for support that exist

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Create a hub to bring together SMEs with universities, research institutes, larger companies and state support agencies for access to mentorship, intellectual capital, human capital, markets etc.

1.5. How can food businesses and education partners work together to transform the mid-career workforce so they can compete globally for new opportunities and new markets?

a) What are the key challenges?

Group 1:

- Flexibility of training opportunities to meet demands of a mid-level career
- Lack of academic/industry cross-communication
- Access to information on training/entrepreneurship opportunities

Group 2:

- Time for SMEs to train staff
- Return on investment/opportunity cost
- Relevance - availability

Group 3:

- The needs of SME the greatest but challenge of time
- Lack of awareness of supports and opportunities available
- While some topics are generic, a lot of challenges can be company specific, e.g. farmhouse cheese vs non-speciality foods.
- No coherent national understanding of [how] CPD works

b) What are the key opportunities?

Group 1:

- E-learning opportunities
- Industry supporting industry (large to SME), making use of Ireland/UK
- Using EU model – like Marie Curie etc. in a Ireland/UK model to support industry and academic

Group 2:

- Create environments to share experiences and education [to] provide such environment
- Emphasis on people and discussion – online will not work
- Share experiences where different partners/companies have strengths, e.g. retailing

Group 3:

- Possible role for sharing online resources but questions for suitability of sharing
- Lots of programmes available from e.g. Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia for support
- Clearer needs for training: regulation, labelling, social media, technology, shelf life, business planning and market research.

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- One-stop shop for Ireland/UK set up as a task force: how to get funding; how to train; how to engage
- Get some companies to agree to a programme to share experiences, create knowledge sharing to facilitate learning and training
- Clear package of information for companies on supports and resources available for them, e.g. at set-up stage.

WORKSHOP 2: INNOVATION

2.1. How can innovation drive forward the UK/Irish food sectors profitability and create new markets, new jobs and better safer food?

a) What are the key challenges?

Group 1:

- Scaling from SME to large company
- Encourage/reward innovation
- Academic career progression in not aligned with accelerating innovation

Group 2:

- Funding & public sector (EI) support from R&D
- Hybrid graduates wanted – experience in business and academic qualification.
- Culture in public sector provides no incentive for innovation

b) What are the key opportunities?

Group 1:

- Global expansion

Group 2:

- Between Ireland and UK – could we create the Harvard of Food Science for emerging markets?
- Closer collaboration between industry and academia

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Link university funding to industry collaboration
- Internships
- Focus more on SMEs – that's where innovation comes from

2.2. How can food companies and public research organisations develop collaborations and meaningful partnerships to drive innovation?

a) What are the key challenges?

Group 1:

- Need for improved dialogue between industry and academia to: (a) showcase academic research relevant to industry e.g. support of NPD vs. LCP (low cost production), pre-competitive vs near market; and (b) allow industry to articulate its needs
- Need for improved flexibility by government and academia of time frames and process faced by industry, in particular SME industry, when faced with the “formalities” and time frames to deal with public funding and resources applications/needs
- Perceived clash between government classification of the responsibility for the food value chain and how it is actually structured.

Group 2:

- Gap between research institutions and industry – communications – need to speak the same language
- How to manage this interface
- Visibility of food industry challenges to researchers
- Low success rate of innovation (new products to market)
- Scale of innovation required by industry vs research programmes

b) What are the key opportunities?

Group 1:

- Shift to a more “partnership” based relationship between academia and industry to share returns as well as risk and to emphasise the importance of

trust in maintenance and confidentiality and protection of IP, which have been identified as potential barriers for collaboration.

- Industry should devote resource to identify opportunities and quantify their needs, through blue sky research, to allow those needs to be communicated to academia
- Trade associations should be one route for interaction between industry and government

Group 2:

- Create hub/interface between institutions and industry
- Cluster companies/technology centres: to work with researchers
- Integrating consumer info e.g. from Bord Bia etc
- Role of public bodies in communicating and building consumer trust
- Networking

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

Group 1:

- Possible funding of active interface between academia and industry to catalyse two-way knowledge exchange in order to address the issues noted above.

Group 2:

- Repeat this event: (UK-Ireland Chamber of Commerce) ownership of event and process important
- Create hub/interface to link between industry and institutions. Explore:
 - Who can do this, e.g. trade associations/professional bodies/enterprise boards etc.
 - What is available and how to access it (funding knowledge)
 - Bilateral arrangements for funding and partnerships

2.3. What focal point could enable efforts to promote food innovation across UK-Ireland economy?

a) What are the key challenges?

- Funding – agreement across public and industry
- Capability of SMEs to engage fully
- Absence of obvious cross-jurisdictional host

b) What are the key opportunities?

- Hub: Network of expertise that would also showcase expertise and attract new graduates
- Pilot plants – need for more and improved visibility of existing ones [e.g. Teagasc Moorepark]
- Joint Ireland/UK graduate development programme to meet industry needs.

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Establish Ireland/UK panel of experts – mix of industry, public research bodies and government – to map and prioritise industry innovation needs.

2.4. How can we harness innovation towards sustainable growth?

a) What are the key challenges?

- Graduate training – correct skills, attract kids early age, top down/industry guidance
- Align research with industry needs
- Finance/investment for innovation and commercialisation
- Harmonisation of research programmes/industry needs globally

b) What are the key opportunities?

- Development of food fellowship programmes
- Industry research partnerships

- Venture capital

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Skills portal for food – industry led, hosted by Chamber

2.5. What global market opportunities are open to the UK-Ireland food sector that would benefit from collaboration now and in the future?

a) What are the key challenges?

Group 1:

- Identifying USP for UK and Ireland agrifood offering
- Disconnect around academic and business led research

Group 2:

- Britain & Ireland have difficulty getting new products to markets through protectionism
- Getting SMEs from both countries to third markets

b) What are the key opportunities?

Group 1:

- Creating platforms around health and wellbeing, safety, traceability and sustainability
- Creating branding around platforms (above)
- Linking manufacturing strength in Ireland with the retail strength in the UK and marketing that globally

Group 2:

- Where there are difficulties: collaborate and use resources to penetrate these markets e.g. lobby and trade trips
- Brand SME products as a collective e.g. British/Irish cheese board and to organise trade missions

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

Group 1:

- Mapping exercise: Teagasc and IFR to identify the strengths around the platforms and to map these out.

Group 2:

- Bringing together willing and suitable SME companies and model on existing ideas, e.g. Irish Dairy Board

WORKSHOP 3: FOOD CHAIN

- 3.1. How can we improve food security and sustainability by working within a shortened food supply chain?**
- a) What are the key challenges?**
- Are shorter supply chains more efficient?
 - Utilise by-products and waste products for new uses – more information on opportunities this presents
 - Mind-set and requirements of supermarket chains
- b) What are the key opportunities?**
- Funding opportunities (transnational projects UK & Ireland)
 - Waste database to link companies for innovations and research
 - Personalised buying habits (flexible – packaging)
- c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?**
- Transnational funding opportunities and knowledge exchange such as market and technical research
- 3.2. How can we use local sourcing and consumer preferences to drive innovation?**
- a) What are the key challenges?**
- Group 1:
- Local cannot supply everything
 - Lack of understanding of what is local
 - Consumer used to all year round supply
- Group 2:
- Ability to develop new product: what materials, where can they be sourced and what does the consumer want?
 - Reduce costs
 - Mindset of companies towards innovation
 - What is local? UK/Ireland vs county/village etc
- b) What are the key opportunities?**
- Group 1:
- Increased consumer education
 - Packaging/technologies innovation to allow longer season/travel further
 - Using local knowledge/ideas to use entire animal – local recipes
- Group 2:
- Local branding
 - Building scale through networking (national/international)
 - Linking UK-Ireland funding models
- c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?**
- Group 1:
- Define what's local for UK/Ireland and develop an overarching brand built on shared quality standards.
- Group 2:
- Link consumer understanding, technology and companies to bring knowledge and expectations together.
- 3.3. What are the commercial risks of and rewards for shortening the food chain – how can we make it work commercially?**

a) What are the key challenges?

Group 1:

- Food chain shortening – a question of trust by consumer on quality
- Volume of waste produced – large scale enterprise has greater capacity to process or add value to waste
- Large enterprise – has already shortened process[ing] and supply chain (e.g. Burgers: kill to burger restaurant in 10 days)
- Climate change (biofuel industry demand for wheat –removes from food chain)

Group 2:

- Reduce links in process chain (e.g. fish pie: went from 10 days to 11 hours, consumer preference went from 7% to 77%):
 - Consolidation of chain
 - New techniques
- Better in-line process testing for quality – technological development needed
- Forecasting by retailers to suppliers to reduce waste
- No overall responsibility for all links of supply chain (50% of fruit from Brazil lost)
- Price (uncertainty of price at primary produce level)

b) What are the key opportunities?

Group 1:

- Economies of scale to reduce waste through processing or value add.
- Greater research institutes-industry interaction to produce technologies to reduce waste
- Timing of political discussions Ireland-UK is good – can deliver options

Group 2:

- QR technology – traceability from farm to fork including supply chain
- Reducing level of reworked products (minimising water transport costs; tallow oil → biofuel)
- Shorter number of process steps will increase efficiency and decrease time and waste
- Transfer of research into business

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

Group 1:

- Mergers and (vs.) acquisitions
- Integrated policy between Ireland, NI & UK for research, tax incentives and for business interactions
- Capitalise on EU funding opportunity for Ireland-UK interaction in research

Group 2:

- Apply technology and develop new technologies
- Consolidate links in food chain
- Greater initiative by research institutes to make technology transfer for business solutions

3.4. How can we bring together excellent research centres and innovative food producers across UK-Ireland to pioneer new ways of utilising waste in food production?

a) What are the key challenges?

- Sharing research info between companies and getting companies to collaborate as they seek competitive advantage
- Lack of sufficient support to SMEs
- Research centres not being responsive enough, fast enough, to deliver solutions to industry

b) What are the key opportunities?

- Industry and academia personnel interchange

- Provide support for SMEs to undertake research within their companies
- Great opportunities to develop business opportunities for product in alternative markets (e.g. blood waste)

c) What are the next steps to foster collaboration and make progress?

- Increased support for SMEs: financial, networking, facilitation