Policy briefing

BEZOS CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE PROTEIN

European Biosolutions Coalition

BIA UK BioIndustry Association

A cross-European way forward for novel foods regulation: High-level conclusions of UK-EU roundtable, July 2026

Background

The future of novel foods stands at an inflection point in Europe. The UK's flagship regulatory sandbox for Cell Cultivated Products (CCPs) is coming to an end in early 2027, and in the EU, the future of regulation for novel foods is being debated under the Biotech Acts I and II, which in its current proposal excludes regulatory sandboxes for novel foods.

Meanwhile, UK-EU reset negotiations on new food trading rules are underway and likely to conclude this year, which could result in the UK aligning with current and future EU regulation. This could have significant implications for the path to market for novel foods across both jurisdictions.

Without immediate intervention, food security and future food innovation in Europe are at risk. With this in mind, the BioIndustry Association (BIA), Bezos Centre for Sustainable Proteins, and European Biosolutions Coalition (EBC) convened a UK-EU roundtable on securing a cross-European way forward for novel foods in July 2026. The roundtable brought together EU and UK innovators, national associations, and policymakers to share learnings from the UK's Innovation Research and CCP regulatory sandbox programme, and charter a way forward for food innovation and security across Europe.

Key findings and conclusions: A cross-European approach to novel foods

Building on the discussion and participant's reflections, we identified a set of policy recommendations to advance a more pro-innovation and aligned novel foods regulatory framework across Europe.

Participants emphasised the unique role of regulatory sandboxes, and that education is needed for both policymakers and consumers to understand their purpose and effectiveness. The UK and Netherlands provide strong, replicable models for Europe that need to be taken forward. Across the discussion, three core recommendations emerged where coordinated action can deliver meaningful progress:

- Following the finalisation of the renewed UK-EU SPS Agreement negotiations, the EU and EFSA should formally consider the UK CCP sandbox learnings and outcomes as evidence in their approach to novel foods regulation and the shape of regulatory sandboxes.

- Sandboxes for novel foods should actively be encouraged at EU and Member State level to create certainty for innovators, regulators and consumers, and for continued learning.

- Dialogue between innovators and farming communities is essential to address opposition and to foster understanding of opportunities for farmers.

Europe already has all the building blocks to become a leader in novel foods. Continued engagement at European Parliament, Commission and Council (Member States) level is crucial. The Biotech Act remains central not only to the commercialisation of novel foods, but to ensure European food security and geopolitical competitiveness. The Act is particularly important given the exclusion of sandboxes for novel foods from Biotech Act I, which sends a negative signal to industry, consumers, and global partners, and risks losing out on European innovation.

Education is needed for both policymakers and consumers to better understand regulatory sandboxes: regulatory sandboxes are not loopholes but tools that add regulatory oversight. They can provide predictability in regulation that is crucial to innovators, and enable open and early engagement with consumers as well as farmers. As such, they play an important role in reducing fear-driven backlash, perceived consumer resistance, and real political resistance to novel foods.

Participant insights: the sandbox model

What drove UK Government investment into the CCP sandbox

UK Government investment into the CCP sandbox was driven by the fact that the UK had a relatively large number of small, innovative alternative protein (cultivated meat, dairy, etc.) companies, alongside enabling companies (such as Extracellular and Roslin), and media companies (e.g. Multus). Together, this created a strong small community and industry ecosystem. Government recognized this industry presence. In parallel, there was a general government push towards pro-innovation regulation, and regulators viewed cultivated products as one of the most novel future foods to explore.

The role of tastings in reaching consumers

Tastings are a key way to reach consumers. Tastings were not a specific aim of the UK CCP sandbox, but nevertheless were an important part of the work that allowed some early interactions with consumers. Tasting of novel foods are currently allowed in Great Britain, but strictly for R&D purposes only. While not a direct way to reach consumers, tastings can be used to understand consumer preferences in a controlled R&D context, allowing consumers to consume cultivated products before they reach market authorisation. In the Netherlands, thanks to the efforts by companies such as Mosa Meat and Meatable, several people were reached through tastings, including consumers, investors, chefs, and politicians.

Contrasting the UK and Netherlands approaches

In the Netherlands, success has been governed by the Dutch tasking framework, allowing consumers to test non-approved novel foods, setting it structurally apart from the UK-style sandbox (a structured exchange with regulators). The framework is based on national competence and is formally approved by Parliament, initially for cultivated meat and recently broadened to precision and biomass fermentation products. In essence, it is designed to ensure tastings are conducted under strictly controlled, safe conditions for consumers while confirming that the activity does not constitute a 'placing on the market' under the EU's General Food Law. In the UK, the formal sandbox model is used. There are

many transferable learnings from the CCP sandbox for other novel foods. In other countries, rules around sandboxes, and tastings, are unclear, not harmonized, and remain a grey area.

Positives and negatives of sandbox participation

The UK CCP sandbox delivered a well thought out and predictable process that companies could apply for. Open sharing of information by companies is central to the sandbox model and its success. Potential concerns include the risk of exposing proprietary data and intellectual property without adequate safeguards or clear alignment on mutual objectives. However, the benefits of learning apply not only to regulators but also to companies.

Among other benefits, sandboxes operate as a trust based system: participation is sincere and valuable, especially for small companies preparing dossiers. Companies in UK CCP have been very willing and open, lending to its overall success.

Overall, the net benefit of the sandbox model is positive, and the companies involved are often frontrunners in the field. A healthy industry ecosystem of competitors supports individual company success. The UK and the Netherlands are seen as role models for Europe in novel foods. Their positive experiences should therefore be explored and replicated.

Consumer perspective on novel foods and CCPs

Open dialogue with consumers is essential to success of commercialisation of novel foods. Consumer studies (e.g. Euroconsumers 2025, incl. on barriers to meat reduction) show that they are supportive of cultivated products as part of a range of options for alternative/novel foods. They are not the only solution but are viewed as healthier and more sustainable. 85% of European consumers want more independent food capabilities in the EU.

Consumers are more positive towards cultivated products than politicians often assume. ~50% would try cultivated meat if authorised following a positive safety assessment by EFSA. (Euroconsumers, 2025). Taste, texture, and affordability are major concerns, and cost-of-living pressures remain important.

Labelling is also important for consumer information, but a balanced approach is needed as overly strict labelling risks creating an uneven playing field. However, it is noteworthy that labelling in itself only goes so far, for example, there is no food labelling in restaurants. Consumers also dislike terminology that sounds 'synthetic'.

Sandboxes are not fast tracks through regulation, a loophole or an exemption, but tools for working with regulators, industry, academia, and consumers. In fact, they are an added layer of regulatory supervision. This is not always understood by politicians.

It is a lack of policymaker knowledge and political will, not consumer opposition, that is driving resistance to novel foods commercialisation and particular CCPs.

Resistance

Lobbying against cell-cultivated meat and precision-fermented foods exists within agrifood sectors. Opposition from traditional agricultural stakeholders is largely shaped by uncertainty over the economic and structural implications of a shifting food landscape. Consumers generally trust farmers, who hold cultural and food-system importance. Their voice therefore matters. Many farmers can be innovation-driven but could be allies in Brussels and national capitals if a collaborative approach is taken.

In the Netherlands, farmers are more engaged through initiatives like "Respect Farms." Mosa Meat for example invited farmer groups to share a burger and discuss concerns. In Italy, the political narrative is strongly negative (including a ban on "artificial meat"). At the same time, plant-based markets and food biotech research are growing. Farmers in Italy are interested and experimenting, despite poor public narratives. Similar openness in the Netherlands is why a Government-supported open scale-up facility, Cultivate at Scale, was created for everyone's use.

Policy and regulatory issues to commercialisation of novel foods

Sandboxes for novel foods are currently excluded within Biotech Act I. This exclusion can still be fixed before the Biotech Act is finalized. There are legitimate concerns that the exclusion creates legal inconsistencies. Compromise amendments are underway in European Parliament. Progress is positive, but equally depends on Member States represented in Council.

Sandboxes, while positive, take time in terms of legislation, implementation and execution. Commercialisation, meanwhile, can still progress via the existing approval pathway, supported by voluntary and project-based approaches. In addition, "mini-sandboxes" and guidance efforts already exist across the EU.

Member State level regulators often lack knowledge to successfully leverage national competence under EU law to enable novel foods sandboxes or tastings with a view to commercialisation (a patchy picture from one Member State to the other).

About the BIA

The BioIndustry Association (BIA) is the voice of the innovative life sciences and biotech industry, enabling and connecting the UK ecosystem so that businesses can start, grow and deliver world-changing innovation. With over 600 members spanning human health and non-health biotech, including start-ups, scale-ups and established global companies, our membership encompasses the full UK ecosystem, including non-commercial research institutions and service providers. BIA is a member of the International Council for Biotechnology Associations (ICBA), Europabio and the European Biosolutions Coalition.

About the Bezos Centre for Sustainable Protein

The Bezos Centre for Sustainable Protein drives the global shift toward future foods. We unite academia and industry to develop nutritious, affordable, and scalable protein solutions that strengthen global food system resilience, reduce environmental impact, and advance the circular economy. Through translation and commercialisation, we address global challenges in health, sustainability, and food security, transforming food systems into models that are sustainable, healthy, and equitable.

About the EBC

The European Biosolutions Coalition (EBC) consists of leading industry organizations representing a significant share of Europe's biosolutions companies. Biosolutions are nature's own tools, and they offer a powerful pathway to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable, resilient, and competitive future. Our mission is to elevate biosolutions on the European agenda, ensuring the sector plays a central role in driving the green transition and strengthening Europe's resilience. We advocate better conditions and opportunities to unlock innovation, accelerate the shift toward a climate-neutral economy, and enhance Europe's global competitiveness in a rapidly changing world. The Coalition is supported by the Novo Nordisk Foundation and Danish Industry.

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