

FIA Dialogues 2020 readies Asia's food industry for the post-COVID environment

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Garnering 3,000 participants over the last three days, attendees heard from industry experts across a range of webinar sessions and panel discussions, covering key topics such as the role of new technology in bolstering global food security, the changes needed to reduce wastage in food production and the increased focus on healthier diets and immunity.

Mr Maurizio Brusadelli, FIA President and Mondeľz International's Executive Vice President & President Asia-Pacific, Middle East & Africa, said the virtual conference's themes – Health & Nutrition, New Innovations, and Sustainability – reflect the key trends transforming the F&B industry today, and highlighted the importance of FIA's role in furthering industry conversations around them.

"While these trends emerged prior to the pandemic, it is crucial for F&B companies to pay greater attention to how they have evolved alongside consumers' behaviour in the wake of the outbreak. The robust insights shared at the FIA Dialogues were helpful and can serve to better inform strategies moving forward as businesses move on to the new normal," said Mr Brusadelli.

The Dialogues kicked off on 27 July with discussions centred on [Reformulation: Healthier Food for Asia Post-Pandemic](#) and [Wellness & Immunity: Strengthening the Immune System](#).

Participating leaders from Cargill, Mondelēz International, Barilla, Kerry Food Ingredients and McKinsey & Company highlighted the continued importance of reformulation in the F&B industry, especially at a time when consumers are paying more attention to their overall health and wellness amidst the pandemic; but also acknowledged the need to balance taste and nutrition to cater to consumer demands, and to take on a holistic approach – as opposed to focusing only on a single ingredient or nutrient – when reformulating.

Leaders from Unilever, Imogene Labs, DSM Nutritional Products, Nutrition Hub and Lux Research also shared how this increased focus on health and wellness has translated to consumers opting to stock up on products that provide a boost to their immunity and being more open to accepting health and functional claims on packaging. At the same time, consumers are also showing a greater preference for reliable and trustworthy brands, particularly as they continue to face economic uncertainty and limited budgets.

On the second day of the Dialogues, representatives across Corteva Agriscience, Cargill, Novozymes, DuPont Nutrition & Biosciences, Bits x Bites and the University of Queensland came together to discuss the role of [CRISPR genome editing in building global food security](#) – a topic that has driven key discussions amongst governments and businesses in the past months. To successfully bring such new technologies to market and tap on their potential, the leaders highlighted the importance of building consumer trust and driving sound regulatory policies.

Speaking at the next session of the day, which was centered on [Proteins Challenge: Accelerating Innovation in Agri-Tech](#), leaders from Fonterra, Nestlé, Avant Meats, Tasmanian Agricultural Company, Turtletree Labs and AgFunder Asia reaffirmed the importance of new innovations such as plant-based solutions as a complementary source of protein to meet the world's growing demand. They also highlighted the need to ensure food safety across protein supply chains and to provide consumers with greater quality assurance and transparency.

The last day of the Dialogues saw the spotlight shift to [food loss and food waste](#), and [plastics and packaging](#). Participating leaders in both sessions highlighted the need for continued multi-stakeholder collaborations and a strong focus on consumer education in efforts to shift the dial on the management of food loss and waste, and in reducing plastic pollution.

Notably, leaders from DBS Bank, Lazada, Sealed Air, Intello Labs, Hazel Technologies and AlphaBeta, who participated in the former session, emphasized the need to adopt a localised approach to food production to ensure wastage is minimised across the entire supply chain. Speakers from Suntory, Danone, Amcor Flexibles Asia Pacific, PepsiCo, Circulate Capital and SecondMuse similarly reiterated in the latter session the importance of developing tailored solutions alongside partners such as NGOs and government bodies to address the plastic crisis in each market.

Mr Matt Kovac, FIA Executive Director, reinforced the industry association's commitment to driving meaningful conversations around emerging trends and to supporting businesses in navigating the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Refer to the [FIA Dialogues](#) website for further information on the speakers at each session