

# New lab to create healthier foods, sustainable biochemicals

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It will smell, look and even taste like regular satay, but it will not be chicken or beef on a stick.

Instead, it will be a dish based 100 per cent on plant-protein.

The vegetarian satay is one of the products that could emerge from the new WIL@NUS Corporate Laboratory, which aims to drive innovation in food technology and sustainable biochemicals.

The \$110 million research facility, which is jointly set up by Wilmar International, National University of Singapore (NUS) and the National Research Foundation, was launched yesterday by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, who is also chairman of the foundation.

Wilmar is the world's largest manufacturer of oleo-chemicals, used in the production of everyday consumer items like industrial cleaners, lubricants and fragrance.

The 2,000 sq m joint research lab will comprise of two key clusters.

The first will look to address major public health issues through the development of healthier foods, like the plant-based satay.

The other cluster will look at designing cost-effective and sustainable methods of producing chemical compounds using natural sources.

Currently, plant-based feedstock is used for the production of high-value oleo-chemicals.

Scientists at the lab will look to produce biochemicals from natural sources with the use of microbes and enzymes.

Researchers at the WIL@NUS Corporate Laboratory will also look at ways to formulate healthier cooking oils that could reduce cholesterol levels and in turn lower the risk of chronic diseases.

They will also develop food products such as ready-to-eat meals and beverages that could help to manage diabetes and obesity.

Wilmar chairman and chief executive officer Kuok Khoon Hong said that his Singapore-based company

was thrilled to be embarking on the collaboration with NUS.

He added that the food industry was experiencing a paradigm shift.

He said: "From the elderly to millennials, people are demanding healthier and more nutritious food. To stay ahead of the curve, we embrace open innovation."

Mr Heng said in his speech at the launch ceremony: "This partnership between NUS and Wilmar is testimony to the increasing public-private R&D collaborations between universities and industry in our innovation ecosystem, which allows our universities to work closely with industry to develop commercially applicable solutions for problems faced by the industry."

Mr Heng added that he looked forward to food products from the lab that could enhance people's health and well-being, as well as to greener and more sustainable production of biochemical compounds for the industry.

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Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat (right) with Professor Ho Teck Hua, senior deputy president and provost of National University of Singapore, at the launch of WIL@NUS Corporate Laboratory. ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA