Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

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S. Korea Unveils Master Plan to Integrate Advanced Technologies into the Food Sector

Sejong, 20 July 2026 — The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA) announced its first master plan for fostering the food-tech industry on 6 July.

Importantly, the announcement marks the launch of the first statutory master plan under the Food Tech Industry Promotion Act, the world's first standalone law dedicated to fostering the food-tech industry, which entered into force last year.

- Food-tech, a merger of food and technology, refers to a new industry involving the application of cutting-edge technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), biotechnology, etc.) across the entire value chain covering all business processes, including production, manufacturing, distribution, and delivery, in relation to food products. Examples of food-tech include cooking robots, food-serving robots, food delivery robots, plant-based meat alternatives, etc.

Moving beyond a government-led support model, the plan focuses on building regionally specialised innovation clusters through collaboration among industry, academia, and research institutions, while fostering a self-sustaining, private-sector-led innovation ecosystem. To support these efforts, the Ministry has established four strategic pillars under the L.E.A.P. framework.

- "L.E.A.P." strategy: (1) Local—building region-led industry ecosystems; (2) Empowerment—developing key personnel and stimulating investment; (3) Advancement—expanding the global reach of Korea's food-tech; and (4) Pioneer/Platform—securing future-leading technologies and advancing regulatory innovation.

(1) Local: build a region-led industrial base for food-tech

The Ministry will establish agri-food innovation clusters centred on regional anchor companies in connection with the Mega Special Economic Zone, as well as the five mega-regions and the three special self-governing provinces, with the latter two serving as growth engines for balanced national development. The Ministry will also run practical cooperation arrangements among local governments, regional universities, research institutes, and businesses, and promote the nationwide adoption and expansion of successful cooperation models. In Pohang, for example, ten companies—including robotics anchor firm Neuromeka—have already committed investments around the Food Tech Research Support Centre scheduled for completion by the end of 2026. Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH) and the Korea Institute of Robotics and Convergence are jointly researching technologies to address on-site challenges.

The number of Food Tech Research Support Centres will increase from the current seven to ten by 2030. In addition, the Ministry will establish a framework for connecting agricultural producers with food-tech companies through long-term supply contracts, creating stable supply chains for high-value agricultural products from such regions as Iksan (soybeans), Naju (pear pomace), and Chuncheon (eco-friendly produce). This model will promote the growth of both agriculture and the food-tech industry.

(2) Empowerment: Foster talent and promote investment through private-sector ecosystems

As part of efforts to cultivate industry-ready professionals, the Ministry from 2026 has expanded the industry-linked postgraduate programmes in food technology from the current master's diploma to the doctoral degree and increased the number of partner universities to ten. The programme—operated through partnerships between the government, universities, and companies—has already demonstrated tangible results, with participating companies seeing their sales rise some 1.8 times on average after their employees completed this training. Also, the Ministry will increase its support for food-tech startups throughout their entire business lifecycle through the K-Food Startup Support Centre, while expanding training in technology commercialisation for research teams at universities, research institutes, and companies to support the commercialisation of research outcomes.

The government will expand support for aspiring and early-stage entrepreneurs and help growth-stage companies scale up through the Future Innovation Growth Fund (KRW 30 billion in 2026) and the Secondary Fund (KRW 35 billion). As a result, cumulative government policy funds will increase from KRW 51 billion in 2024 to KRW 81 billion in 2026 and reach KRW 100 billion by 2027, reinforcing a private-sector-led investment ecosystem.

(3) Advancement: Expand Korean food-tech globally and upgrade manufacturing

The global popularity of Korean food and cuisine has created an opportunity to move beyond conventional food exports. Value-added “export package” models that combine technology, cooking robots, recipes, and food products—for example, robotic pizza and bibimbap chefs paired with Korean recipes—will be developed, and the Ministry will provide comprehensive support for their expansion into overseas markets. The Ministry will also expand experiential promotional events abroad such as tastings of robot-prepared foods while establishing dedicated Food Tech pavilions at domestic and international trade fairs.

Meanwhile, the Ministry is working with the Ministry of SMEs and Startups to greatly expand the smart factory programme across the food manufacturing sector, increasing the cumulative number of participating facilities from 30 in 2024 to 187 by 2026. Building on the K-Food Smart Manufacturing Alliance launched in June, the Ministry will also advance AI transformation initiatives in areas including traditional alcoholic beverages and traditional foods.

(4) Pioneer/Platform: Lead in future technologies and proactively remove regulatory barriers

The Ministry will tailor R&D support to each stage of business growth, from the idea stage through investment-linked funding to scale-up financing. The Ministry will also expand investments in industrial demand-driven R&D that enables smaller companies to participate more easily, accelerating commercialization of food-tech. By 2027, an official industrial classification system for the food-tech sector will be established, alongside industry surveys, while an industry database will be put in place to help position Korea as a leader in setting global standards.

Regulatory barriers are the greatest challenge facing businesses. In response, the Ministry will launch the Regulatory Improvement Application System, creating a single window for all regulatory requests. Regulatory sandbox best practices have already been delivered for upcycling food by-products—including citrus and pear pomace and brewer's spent grains—into plastic substitute materials and advanced materials. The Ministry will also improve the institutional framework through revisions to the Waste Control Act and other measures in cooperation with the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment (MCEE).

Minister Song Miryung stated: "We are entering an era of profound global transformation in which technology, recipes, content, culture, and consumer experiences converge on a single platform and spread across the world. Food-tech is the driving force behind this transformation and a future growth strategy that will maximize the value of K-Food through convergence with advanced technologies and further enhance the K-Brand."

Minister Song added: "The true competitiveness of food-tech depends on how quickly innovative technologies move from the laboratory to real-world application. We will spare no effort in providing proactive, comprehensive support—including a one-stop regulatory improvement system and innovation funds—to ensure that Korean food-tech companies are not held back by regulations and can lead global markets."

To ensure effective implementation of the master plan, the Ministry will designate two or three dedicated implementing agencies and launch a public-private consultative body to promote ongoing dialogue between the government and industry.