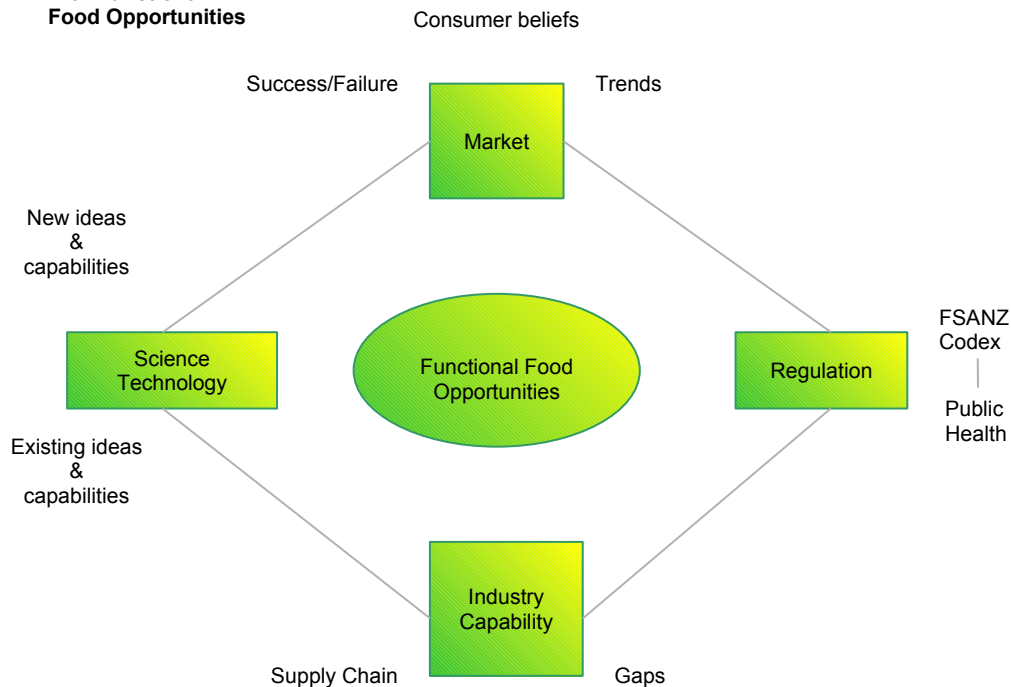


The National Centre of Excellence in Functional Foods, Australia

The Australian National Centre of Excellence in Functional Foods (NCEFF) was established in July 2003 to support the Australian food industry in the development of a functional foods market by integrating knowledge from a range of sources (Fig 1).

Fig1 Factors associated with Functional Food Opportunities



The Centre itself is based on intersectoral collaboration, a joint venture between the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Organisation (CSIRO) - Division of Health Sciences and Nutrition, the Department of Primary Industries, Victoria, Food Science Australia and the Australian Research Council Key Centre of Smart Foods at the University of Wollongong. The task of the Centre is to provide leadership for the Australian food industry in the area of Functional Foods by drawing upon the combined capability of the partner organisation (e.g., expertise in food technology, nutrition and consumer science [basic science through to human trials], public health, food regulation, marketing and innovation management).

The Centre has two main streams of operation, a generic stream funded by the National Food Industry Strategy and the four partner organisations (Food Science Australia, the ARC Key Centre for Smart Foods, CSIRO- Health Sciences and Nutrition, and the Department of Primary Industries, Victoria), and a separate industry-funded stream. The generic stream funds independent pre-competitive research and activities, while the industry-specific stream works closer to the market on projects sponsored by industry. This enables the generation of new knowledge available to all and a framework for building concepts for a functional foods market generally.

Projects are organised under clusters of substantiation research and development (nutrition perspective), regulation, and market intelligence/innovation management.

Thus, research undertaken is considered in the light of the types of nutrition communications that might lead from the research, as well as the likely market for any emerging products. In keeping with the direction Australian legislation is taking on health claims, a whole of diet approach lies at the centre of the research strategy. The first stage of the strategic (generic) research program focuses on the impact of types and amounts of macronutrients and of anti-oxidants on energy balance, energy expenditure and oxidative capacity. This set of studies, currently underway, will produce knowledge that is relevant to new food formulations that support optimal metabolic responses under various conditions, including physical activity. In marketing terms this would relate to foods for healthy aging, weight control, healthy lifestyle and child and adolescent health. Projects in the regulatory and market intelligence clusters relates to the strategic research program, identifying business opportunities, keeping up with developments in the regulatory environment, and facilitating communication between stakeholders on nutrition related issues.

As the Centre develops new linkages will be formed with other research providers and organisations as part of the consolidation of effort. The functional foods platform is aimed toward improved nutrition and carries with a view to a healthy lifestyle. The achievement of this aim, however, has many dimensions, but starting with food, it is possible to see how these dimensions can be systematically and productively linked.