FDF seeks clarification on skills provision for sectors

The Food and Drink Federation (FDF) is asking the government for more clarity on how it will ensure national training and much-needed reassurance amid the Covid-19 crisis in the food and beverage sectors.

Welcoming the publication of the Skills for Jobs White Paper, Mark Corbett, education and skills policy manager, the FDF, said he would like to know how the development of local skills plans will address the gaps in provision that are a real problem for both sectors of the industry.

"It is encouraging that the government has acknowledged the need to address the fall in apprenticeships," Corbett said. "The additional support for SMEs, and a matching service, will help with the take-up of the levy transfer, but it doesn't address the root cause of businesses not being able to use their levy due to inflexibilities in the system.

"While we support the announcement that from April 2021 eligible adults can access a (level 3) qualification for free, it is disappointing that there are currently no options in food and drink manufacturing. Food and drink businesses have been recruiting throughout the pandemic and continue to offer excellent career opportunities to people who want to retrain.

"We seek urgent clarity on how the government will ensure that this offer adapts to our sector's current and future priorities."

When it comes to technical education, getting employer collaboration right is absolutely crucial, added Corbett.

The FDF wants government to bring consistency to employer involvement in qualification design. It is asking that employers sit at the heart of the system to ensure each qualification is fit for purpose and develops the relevant skills and

competencies for the future of the industry they serve.

With the ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the vast sums of money the Government is spending on job retention and creation, the FDF said it is clear that additional investment is still needed in the sector, in order to see returns through a prosperous future economy.

Researchers develop two devices to detect adulteration in long-grain rice

Scientists have found two ways to expose adulteration in rice when cheap long-grained rice is mixed with basmati to increase profits.

A team of researchers from India and the UK developed one test via a hand-held device and a second, lab-based, led by Christopher Elliott, a professor at the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen's University Belfast in Northern Ireland.

Elliott believes basmati fraud to be "substantial and on a global scale".

The two different techniques has one based on near infrared (NIR) spectroscopy and can be deployed in a hand-held device, the other uses a lab-based instrument and works on principles of gas chromatography mass spectroscopy (GC-MS).

According to Elliott, the NIR can perform testing where rice is produced and traded. The accuracy of the method is around 90%. The GC-MS method is laboratory-based and will give close to a 100% level of accuracy. According to Ratnasekhar CH, a scientist from the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, the GC-MS method involves keeping the rice sample in a glass vial and pass on the volatile compounds of rice to the GC-MS using solid-phase microextraction fibre.

The scientists, who used nearly 1,400 rice samples to test and validate the devices, said the ideal way to conduct a test is to do a quick NIR test first and if this shows the rice to be suspect in terms of authenticity, follow-up using GC-MS.

Both types of testing methods are based on producing food fingerprints. The NIR generates a fingerprint of the rice in terms of how it absorbs light energy and produces a spectral pattern. Using multi-variant models, they can then differentiate high-quality basmati rice from adulterated rice.

The GC-MS test produces a fingerprint of the volatile organic compounds that produce marker compounds to identify the special aroma of basmati rice and adulterants.

EverGrain introduces plant-based barley

EverGrain, a sustainable ingredient company, has introduced barley to deliver highly nutritious, protein and fibre barley-based ingredients.

EverGrain utilises saved grain from brewing and through its proprietary processes, transforms barley into ingredients that can be used in a variety of food and beverage products.

According to Frederik Lievens, group products director, Puratos, the company is working with EverGrain to develop the ingredient technology that will allow bakeries to make "great tasting, nutritious and sustainable breads". EverGrain is commercialising its first generation of products, EverPro and EverVita. EverPro a fully soluble protein isolate, is currently being formulated in plant-based protein products, including beverages, protein bars and snacks.EverVita, barley fibres and proteins with minimal starch, are being used to boost the health benefits of baked goods, pasta and snacks.