EEC Newsletter

EASTERN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR OFFICE (EECO)

Food for the Future

From the Kitchen of the World to the Food of the Future

Thailand has fed the world for generations. In 2024 it was the world's eighth-largest exporter of agricultural and food products, shipping over US$50 billion — around 17% of Thailand's total exports. Thailand ranks first in the world in cassava and among the leaders in canned food, rice, fruit and, increasingly, pet food. The "Kitchen of the World" is not a slogan; it is a measurable position built over decades. Yet the frontier of the food industry has moved. Value is shifting from how much a country can grow and process to how much science, health and innovation it can put on the plate — and that is a different contest.

The question this raises is uncomfortable but clarifying: a country can feed much of the world and still capture only a thin slice of the value created on the dining table. The most profitable parts of modern food — functional ingredients, bioactive compounds, health-targeted nutrition — are precisely where Thailand is still behind today. This issue sets out why that gap, far from being a weakness, is the clearest investment opportunity in the EEC's food sector, and why the moment to act on it has arrived.

What "Food for the Future" Means

"Food for the Future" is the industry's shorthand for science-led food that does more than satisfy hunger — food designed to keep people healthier, tread more lightly on the planet, and fit modern lives. It is the fastest-growing and highest-value tier of the food economy, and it falls into four broad categories.

Functional food and beverages

the largest segment — everyday products fortified for immunity, gut, heart and cognitive health.

Alternative proteins

the fastest-growing segment — plant-based, insect, microbial (fermentation-derived) and cultivated protein, of which plant-based and fermentation are the most investable today.

Functional ingredients and additives

the highest-margin tier — the flavours, enzymes, sweeteners and bioactive compounds that sit, largely unseen, at the science- and patent-intensive core of the industry.

Personalised and healthy-ageing nutrition

medical, clinical and senior nutrition tailored to demographic change, and to an ageing Asia in particular.

A Market Pulling Toward Health and Value

Behind these categories is ***a*** structural shift in what the world eats, driven by ageing populations, rising incomes, and a move from treating illness to preventing it. The functional-food market is already worth several hundred billion dollars a year and, on broader measures, is on course to roughly double toward the one-trillion-dollar mark within a decade. Alternative proteins alone are projected to reach about US$36 billion by 2030. The centre of gravity is Asia-Pacific — the largest and fastest-growing market for these products, and the demand pool that sits directly alongside Thailand.

Thailand's Strength — and the White Space

Thailand brings a rare foundation to this opportunity: a complete food ecosystem that runs from farm to export terminal. Some 2,500 food and agricultural processors operate across the value chain; the country is the world's largest exporter of cassava, the second-largest of canned food, and the second-largest of pet food. Its own future-food exports reached THB 144 billion in 2023, almost 90% of which is functional food, placing Thailand 12th in the world and on a path toward a national target of THB 500 billion by 2027.

But strength in volume is not the same as strength in value. The high-margin tiers — functional ingredients, bioactive extracts, and nutraceuticals (food-derived products with medical benefit) — are still largely imported. Simply put, the most profitable areas of the food industry are exactly the ones where Thailand is currently less mature. That is the white space: categories that are high in value yet less developed in local capability, where the first companies to move in will set the standard. The opportunity is not to grow more food, but to keep more of its value at home.

Why the EEC Is Built to Close the Gap

The EEC exists to turn exactly this kind of gap into an investment case. The corridor concentrates Thailand's agri-food strengths — four agricultural clusters spanning fruit, aquaculture, bio-energy crops and herbs — alongside the deep-sea port at Laem Chabang, and a modern road and rail network. At its centre, the Eastern Economic Corridor of Innovation (EECi) provides pilot plants and a biorefinery where research can sit directly beside production, shortening the path from laboratory to commercial line.

The economics are deliberately generous. Qualifying projects can receive corporate income-tax exemption up to fifteen years, duty-free import of machinery and research inputs, and EEC One Stop Service (EEC-OSS) for permits and visas. To close the talent gap, EECO's Human Resource Development model shares workforce-training costs with investors on a 50:50 basis and adds a 250% tax deduction on those expenses, working hand in hand with Thai universities. On standards, Thailand's frameworks align with international benchmarks such as Codex (the global food-safety reference) and GMP (good manufacturing practice), and work is underway with regulators to widen the scope for evidence-based health claims — a practical step toward letting innovators market what they create.

Global Leaders Are Already Building Here

The case is not theoretical. In June 2026, the EECO convened government, industry, academia and innovators for a sectoral deep dive on the food industry, part of a wider effort to position the EEC as the base for Thailand's next food economy. Among the companies already invested in the corridor are some of the world's most recognisable food and ingredient names.

Nestlé — a long-standing investor in Thailand with food and beverage manufacturing facilities across the country. In the EEC, beyond its food production, Nestlé has expanded investments in pet food and animal nutrition, building on Thailand's standing as the world's second-largest pet-food exporter and on a philosophy of pairing commercial growth with better nutrition and regenerative agriculture.

Evonik — the German specialty-chemicals group, present in Thailand for more than 35 years, produces food-grade precipitated silica at Map Ta Phut in Rayong and views the country as a natural base for the biotechnology that underpins sustainable ingredients and alternative proteins.

Lotus Bakeries — the Belgian maker of Biscoff has chosen Chonburi in the EEC for a major greenfield plant, its third Biscoff factory worldwide and its first in Asia, citing Thailand's established food industry, raw materials and central regional location.

Thai Union — the homegrown global seafood leader, ranked first in the food-products industry on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices for 2024, embodies the value-capture journey itself, turning what was once by-product into high-margin fish oil, calcium and collagen.

Around these anchors sits a maturing ecosystem of public research bodies, industry associations and food-tech innovators — the connective tissue that turns individual investments into a self-reinforcing cluster.

Seizing the Opportunity

Four forces are converging at once: demand reshaped by health and ageing; among the most generous incentive packages in Asia; an integrated supply chain from raw material to advanced processing; and an innovation ecosystem built to de-risk scale-up. Each on its own would be notable; together they mark an inflection point. The opportunity before Thailand is not simply to feed more people, but to feed them better — and, in doing so, to move from supplying the world's volume to capturing more of its value. That shift, in line with Thailand's Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economy, is what the EEC is built to enable.