

Utrecht: leading innovation in food and nutrition

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history the Netherlands has pulled more than its weight in the global economy. With superb infrastructure and a tradition of trade and working together, the country today serves as a primary gateway to the EU and beyond.

Among the country's notable strengths are a stable, internationally-orientated business climate, extensive and robust physical and digital infrastructure and a well-trained, multilingual workforce. Dutch companies are represented throughout the food and nutrition industry, with a particular emphasis on food safety and the relationship between nutrition and health.

The World Economics Forum ranked the Netherlands fourth in its Global Competitiveness Report 2016-2017 and the Utrecht region is second in the latest European Commission's Regional Competitiveness Index.

According to the Global Innovation Index 2016, the Netherlands also ranks highly for its regulatory environment, infrastructure and creativity and has a top 10 ranking in many other innovation scoreboards.

In short

-  The Netherlands is the world's second largest exporter of food and agricultural products.

-  12 of the world's top 40 food and beverage businesses have major production sites or R&D facilities in the Netherlands, including [Danone](#), [Kraft Heinz](#), [Unilever](#) and [Pepsico](#).

-  The agri-food sector has been earmarked one of the Dutch government's nine top economic investment industries.

-  Food security is a priority theme in Dutch development cooperation policy.

Utrecht is at the core of the Netherlands' food and nutrition industry and is particularly strong in the relationship between human nutrition and health.

The region aims to become a world leader in the field of specialized personal nutrition.

Much research also focuses on improving food safety and security by assessing the allergenic, microbiological and toxicological safety of complex products.

Another key area is the recovery of bi-products from food and the discovery of new protein sources – both are crucial areas of research in the fight against global food and resource shortages. Preventing and fighting existing and emerging animal-transmitted diseases is also a main focus.

The province of Utrecht is smart, central and offers an excellent quality of life.

-  **Smart**: Utrecht is known for its world-class universities and research institutes and boasts the most highly educated workforce in the Netherlands.

-  **Central**: Conveniently located in the heart of the Netherlands, Utrecht has excellent road and rail links and offers easy access to Schiphol airport and the rest of the world.

-  **Excellent quality of life**: The region offers a combination of vibrant cities and villages with a wide range of recreational facilities. Utrecht city itself is developing the concept of Healthy Urban Living using smart technology to boost livability.

And what is more, the European Commission has ranked Utrecht the most competitive region on the European mainland since 2010.

II. EXCELLENT ECOSYSTEM

A. Skills

[Utrecht University](#) was founded in 1636 and is now the country's largest and most prominent research university with a strong focus on food, nutrition and health.

The [Food Valley](#) region is home to a large population of highly-educated international personnel specializing in food R&D.

Many of the region's innovative food and nutrition companies are found in or close to [Utrecht Science Park](#), where 1,700 researchers, 250 professors, 1,300 PhD students and over 2,000 BSc and MSc students collaborate in top level research.

B. Facilities

[Utrecht Science Park](#) houses a unique collection of academic, medical, business and regulatory players, especially in the area of health, food and nutrition. Examples include:

- [Utrecht University](#);
- [University Medical Centre \(UMC\) Utrecht](#);
- [Nutricia Research](#);
- [Dutch government's National Institute of Public Health and the Environment](#).

[Utrecht Science Park](#) campus is part of both [Immuno Valley](#) and [Food Valley](#) cluster organisations which connect hundreds of food, nutrition and health companies in the wider region. There are also various public and private initiatives housing incubator facilities for innovative companies.

C. Support

The food and nutrition sector is supported by a variety of joint initiatives involving educational institutions, local government and companies. There are also several province-wide initiatives to help fledgling entrepreneurs.

- ■ [Utrecht Life Sciences \(ULS\)](#) is a network organisation to facilitate strategic partnerships to drive innovation in human and veterinary health. It promotes collaborations and the sharing of research facilities in a wide range of areas, including medical trial design.
- ■ [UtrechtInc](#) is an incubator and support organisation for innovative entrepreneurs and has supported over 150 startups since 2009, some through private pre-seed funding.
- ■ The [Invest Utrecht](#) organisation offers free-of-charge practical assistance and information services to foreign life science, health, food and nutrition companies venturing into the Utrecht region.
- ■ [Food Valley](#) is a regional network that interconnects more than 140 companies and knowledge organisations in the areas of food and agriculture while
- ■ [Immuno Valley](#) is a regional network of some 30 companies and knowledge institutes related to human and veterinary infectious disease.

D. Financial support

National/European subsidies and financing initiatives

There are a number of investment programmes within the Netherlands and the EU to support and finance companies focusing on food and nutrition.

- [Bio-economy Horizon 2020](#) is an EU scheme to stimulate innovation in the fields of food security, the bio-economy, sustainable agriculture and marine biotechnology.
- Another European programme is [Eureka](#), an EU-wide innovation programme to support firms engaged in market-driven R&D.
- Closer to home, the Dutch government offers [various bank guarantees](#) to enable companies to have easier access to finance for innovation.

There are also various regional financing initiatives.

- [Economic Board Utrecht](#) has launched a regional co-financing initiative to support R&D projects in key areas such as food and nutrition. To qualify, a company must be established within the province and contribute at least 30% of project costs.
- [Utrecht City has also set up LEF](#), a special fund to stimulate economic and employment growth with subsidies for the creation of new jobs and apprenticeships.
- And of course, the [Rabobank Group](#), a leader in food and agriculture financing and sustainability-orientated banking has its global headquarters in Utrecht.

E. Inspiring companies and partners for collaboration

The presence of so much expertise has led to the development of several joint initiatives involving the region's universities and the private sector.

For example:

- ■ [Nutricia Research](#), the international R&D department behind [Danone Early Life Nutrition](#) and [Danone Advanced Medical Nutrition](#) has recently opened four new facilities: a [Nutrition Clinical Research Unit \(NCRU\)](#) to conduct clinical nutrition studies in healthy volunteers, a [Design Kitchen](#), an [Early Life Nutrition Quality & Food Safety Reference Laboratory](#), and a [Packaging Lab](#).
- ■ A collaborative project involving Utrecht and Wageningen Universities and [Nutricia Research](#) is known as [NutriBrain](#). It aims to learn how nutrition could support brain development shortly after birth and later in life. [NutriBrain](#) recently received a €5 million regional government grant dedicated to supporting public-private research in the Utrecht region.
- ■ [Future Food Utrecht](#) is another multidisciplinary research collaboration dedicated to sustainable production of healthy and safe food products for future generations. It encompasses everything from life science research and agricultural innovation to psychology and behavioural research.
- ■ The [Utrecht Center for Food Allergy](#) is a multi-partner research laboratory in the area of food allergies.
- ■ Among the big private sector players in the region is [Royal FrieslandCampina](#), the Dutch dairy cooperative which has grown into a global player, making and exporting dairy products such as dairy-based beverages, infant nutrition, cheese and desserts all over the world. The company is headquartered in Amersfoort, just 15 minutes from [Utrecht Science Park](#).

III. EDUCATION, TALENT AND KNOWLEDGE

Some 46% of the working population in Utrecht has a degree and the region is host to several important universities and research institutes.

- [Utrecht University](#) is home to the only [School of Veterinary Medicine in the Netherlands](#). [UMC Utrecht](#) and the University's faculty of Veterinary Medicine have named '[One Health](#)' a key research theme, recognizing the intimate link between human and animal health, exemplified by food-borne infectious agents and emerging antibiotics resistance.
- Nearby [Wageningen University](#), rated number one agricultural university in the world, focuses much of its research on food and food production.
- [Utrecht Science Park](#), which is the biggest science park in the Netherlands, houses two institutes from the [Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research](#) - [TNO Food and Nutrition](#) and [TNO Innovation for Life](#), both of which are involved in cutting edge research.
- [The National Institute of Public Health and the Environment \(RIVM\)](#) is the Dutch regulatory agency for public health and has an extensive programme of in-house research. It is based in Bilthoven, between Utrecht and Amersfoort, with excellent public transport links to both.
- Another key academic facility is the [Westerdijk Fungal Biodiversity Institute](#) which is home to a world-renowned collection of living fungi, yeasts and bacteria, and is part of the [Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences](#).

In all, the Utrecht region is the ideal location for cutting edge companies involved in food and nutrition. The region contains hundreds of knowledge-intensive organisations working across the sector, offers strong networks, excellent facilities and an expert workforce.

IV. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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