



Call for Proposals for the Research and Innovation Platform

1st May 2026

1. Introduction

The Ireland-Malawi Agri-Food Systems Programme (“IMAGRI” or “Programme”) is a four-year programme (November 2025 to October 2029) supported by the Embassy of Ireland. The Programme is working closely with several key government agencies and departments, including the National Planning Commission, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Industrialisation, Business, Trade & Tourism, among others.

IMAGRI seeks to strengthen Malawi’s food safety regulatory system and enterprise competitiveness by enhancing institutional capacity and promoting inclusive enterprise growth within a sustainable food system.

The specific objectives of the Programme include:

1. To strengthen Malawi’s institutional framework to support harmonised food safety regulations
2. To enhance private sector competitiveness by supporting the adoption of food safety practices in food businesses
3. To improve governance, strengthened multi-sectoral coordination and capability of the food system to address specific weaknesses and gaps

The Programme is divided into three work packages: (1) Food Safety Systems, (2) Enterprise Development for Food Safety and (3) Food Systems Transformation Support.

2. The Research and Innovation Platform

As part of the third work package but also contributing to the first and second work packages, the Programme seeks to pilot food systems research and innovation initiatives aimed at identifying and addressing key food systems constraints and bottlenecks while promoting inclusivity, supply chain resilience, sustainability, adoption, and policy implementation. The Research and Innovation (R&I) Platform will fund applied, solution-oriented projects that test, adapt, or scale practical innovations addressing critical constraints in Malawi’s food system, with a strong emphasis on usability, scalability, and stakeholder engagement. There are no restrictions on the value chains. The call is open to all sectors contributing to food systems transformation.

It is anticipated that if the pilot research and innovation grants are implemented to test practical solutions (e.g addressing bottlenecks and gaps in the food system), Malawi will be better positioned to achieve sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems outcomes that advance the goals set out in Malawi’s food systems transformation pathway.

A total of EUR40,000 is available for award. The maximum amount allocated for each thematic area is provided in Table 1, with 10% allowable overhead costs. One award will be considered per thematic area. Applicants will submit a maximum of one application. Grants will be awarded on a

competitive challenge fund basis through applied research projects, with an emphasis on participation of users (producers/producer groups, processors, cooperatives, other industry or public sector stakeholders) and demonstration of innovative solutions. The R&I platform intends to complement existing research funding or innovation initiatives, therefore evidence of alignment with other funders' priorities would be welcome. The proposed project duration is expected to be between 12 and 18 months.

Proposals should clearly indicate the thematic area being applied for and also identify the food system bottleneck being addressed, the relevant users or decision-makers needed for adoption, and the pathway through which the proposed solution could be taken up beyond the life of the grant.

3. Proposed Thematic Areas

The research and innovation platform will seek to address the following themes or focus areas, aligned with the IMAGRI's objectives and national priorities, including the Malawi 2063, National Research Agenda, and the national food systems pathways report:

Table 1: Thematic areas, challenges addressed and funding focus

No	Priority area	Key challenges to address	Funding focus
1.	Food Safety Systems (maximum EUR10,000)	Fragmented food safety regulatory system, limited investment in food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary measures related infrastructure and skills, and an overall low awareness of food safety and its impact on public health.	Support for technologies, systems and data to support legal/policy harmonisation and risk-based inspections.
2.	Infrastructure (maximum EUR17,000)	There exist significant infrastructure gaps (e.g., laboratory equipment for aflatoxin/heavy metal testing, water quality monitoring). Furthermore, direct funding for day-to-day laboratory operations and consumables is limited.	Development of collaborative solutions for infrastructure and information/data deficits/gaps with respect to crop, soil and animal health, hygiene management in water, ingredient and food storage, food preparation, processing and associated compliance and diagnostic testing.
3.	Innovation and Technology (maximum EUR13,000)	Limited adoption of digital tools, data systems, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in food systems.	Projects that demonstrate practical application of proof-of-concept research and innovation based on existing research capabilities, technology and expertise platforms to addressing food system challenges, including leveraging of digital tools, databases, AI, and machine learning for food safety.

4. Inclusivity and Diversity

4.1 Targeted Support:

- 4.1.1 Reserved funding for institutions in rural areas or those led by underrepresented groups, including women, youth, underprivileged, and informal sector.

- 4.1.2 Inclusive programme design, outreach, including solutions that are accessible to marginalised groups and address informal sector realities.

4.2 Capacity Building:

Mandatory inclusion of early-career researchers and mentorship plans.

5. Application Guidelines

5.1 Proposal Checklist

- 5.1.1 Project Proposal (15 pages maximum), including title, problem statement, methodology, stakeholder and user engagement, pathway to uptake and scaling, risk assessment, and mitigation strategies. The proposal should be in word format, 1.5-line spacing, and Calibri 12 font size.
- 5.1.2 Budget Template: Itemised costs aligned with activities, including equipment, fieldwork, and dissemination. A detailed budget should be submitted in excel as a separate attachment.
- 5.1.3 CVs: Covering qualifications and prior publications for the Principal Investigators (PIs) and co-PIs.
- 5.1.4 Support Letters: From host institutions and collaborators, and industry.
- 5.1.5 Ethics Approval: For studies involving human/animal subjects (if applicable).

5.2 Application Criteria

- 5.2.1 PIs: Must hold a permanent position at a Malawian institution and demonstrate expertise in food systems and related fields.
- 5.2.2 Institutional Support: Letters confirming infrastructure access and commitment to project timelines.
- 5.2.3 Gender Inclusion: Teams must comprise $\geq 30\%$ women, with priority given to women-led projects.

5.3 Eligibility Requirements

- 5.3.1 The call is open to all sectors within the Malawi food systems.
- 5.3.2 Institutions: Universities and research organisations registered in Malawi, and individuals affiliated to Malawian registered institutions.
- 5.3.3 Collaborations: Encouraged with industry partners or regional institutions (e.g. per existing bilateral frameworks).

6. Contract Terms and Conditions

6.1 Payment Schedule:

- 6.1.1 50% upfront, upon signing of contract
- 6.1.2 35% after mid-term review, subject to dissemination of pilot results
- 6.1.3 15% upon final deliverables.

6.2 Intellectual Property Rights:

Joint ownership between institution and any proposed commercial co-funder (if deemed permissible), with commercialisation plans required. All ownership arrangements will be formalised through contractual agreements specifying roles, rights, and responsibilities, including provisions for use, licensing, and benefit-sharing.

6.3 Compliance:

Adherence to Malawi's food safety regulations and open-access publishing mandates.

6.4 Collaboration Guidelines:

- 6.4.1 Cross-Sector Partnerships: Preference for projects involving SMEs or policymakers.

6.4.2 International Networks: Allowance for attendance at conferences or host workshops.

7. Expected Outputs and Deliverables

- 7.1 Final technical report /Demonstration/pilot results
- 7.2 Policy brief or business case or Short learning note outlining lessons, constraints, adoption potential, and recommendations for scaling or policy uptake
- 7.3 Dissemination event or stakeholder engagement

8. Evaluation Guidelines

The proposals will be reviewed by an independent panel of experts, drawn from stakeholder institutions and key industry stakeholders. Proposals must score at least 70% overall and at least 40% in each criterion to be considered for funding. In addition to technical quality, proposals will be assessed on the extent to which they demonstrate a credible route to adoption, use, or institutional embedding within Malawi's food system.

Submissions will be assessed based on the criteria outlined below:

Table 2: Evaluation Guidelines

No	Criterion	Weight	Description
1.	Scientific Merit	30%	Innovativeness, methodological quality, practical relevance, and alignment with national priorities
2.	Impact Potential	25%	Scalability, policy and institutional relevance, user adoption potential, and strength of the pathway to uptake beyond the grant period
3.	Feasibility	20%	Realistic timelines, resource availability, and risk management
4.	Team Expertise	15%	Track record of PI and collaborators
5.	Diversity & Inclusion	10%	Gender balance and support for underrepresented groups

9. Call Timeline and Milestones

The following is a proposed timeline for the call.

9.1 Call Launch:

1 May 2026

9.2 Information Session:

A virtual information session open to all interested stakeholders will be held on 8 May 2026 on the Zoom Platform. Below is the advance registration link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/5JkckuXzSjCOJchTYh9TxQ>. After registering, the participant will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

9.3 Full Proposals Due:

12 June 2026

9.4 Peer Review:

30 June 2026

9.5 Award Decision:

17 July 2026 followed by contracting and administration processes

9.6 Disbursements:

18 September 2026

9.7 Project Start:

30 September 2026

9.8 Progress Review:

Quarterly progress reviews after 30 September 2026

10. Inquiries and Submission

10.1 For inquiries and questions, please contact imagri.inquiries@mwapata.mw

10.2 Submissions should be made to imagri.submissions@mwapata.mw

11. Conclusion

This call invites innovative, collaborative, and impact-driven proposals that can deliver practical solutions to Malawi's food system challenges. IMAGRI particularly encourages applications that demonstrate strong stakeholder engagement, scalability, and inclusivity.