Colleagues,

Alumni and students,

Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening! I am delighted to join in this joyous occasion, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the NUS Food Science and Technology Programme, affectionately known to us all as FST. It is particularly special to me; I have witnessed FST all through its journey, from conception, inception, to its fledgling years, coming of age, and now, maturation into a fine, steady and impressive Programme.

Twenty years ago, before the turn of the new millennium, the NUS Faculty of Science made a bold, innovative and strategic move; that is, to introduce Singapore’s first bachelor’s degree in Food Science and
Technology. I was then Vice Dean of the Faculty, overseeing undergraduate education. FST’s establishment was an act of foresight and gumption, as applied and multidisciplinary programmes were still rather rare and novel then.

Twenty years on, NUS FST has made remarkable progress in education and research. The annual intake of undergraduates has doubled, from around 30 in 1999 to over 60 students now. In 2013, the bachelor’s and honours degrees with primary major in FST gained accreditation by the International Union of Food Science and Technology; our degree programmes remain as the only certified degrees in Singapore. Food Science is also now being offered to NUS students as a Second Major.

FST graduates consistently enjoy one of the highest employment rates among the university courses. FST alumni are contributing their expertise in both the public and private sectors. FST graduates are a critical talent input to Singapore’s vibrant food manufacturing industry, a growing industry that enjoys a strong international reputation in safety
and quality. I’m pleased to note that a good number of alumni are progressing well in their careers.

FST’s postgraduate student numbers have also increased, in tandem with the growth in research capabilities and sophistication. FST has close to 80 postgraduate students, and they have won many international awards, such as the prestigious biennial International Union of Food Science and Technology Young Scientist Awards.

On the research front, FST’s high-quality research outcomes have gained international recognition. A number of research outcomes have been well received by the general public. Have you tried probiotic beer, durian wine or purple bread? They were developed or tested out by FST faculty and students in their labs. In addition, FST alumni, postgraduate students and staff members are running a number of promising start-ups such as Kosmode, Probicient and Alchemy Foodtech, which have gone on to raise significant funding from industry investors.
In recent years, food science & technology and human nutrition have become a key national priority, as Singapore seeks to achieve food safety, security, and advance economic opportunities in research and manufacturing.

Singapore is today, known as a food paradise; what is probably less known is that Singapore is also home to a thriving food manufacturing sector (and a solid FST degree programme!) The Singapore food manufacturing industry generates more than $10 billion of output annually. This is in spite of our small land mass and limited traditional agricultural output. Many MNC food companies have chosen to base their Asia-Pacific headquarters and research centres here. They are collaborating with NUS in experimenting with new ingredients and in innovating new products, from plant based proteins to sugar alternatives and more, to meet health needs and evolving consumer preferences.

In March this year, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Chairman of Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2020, (or RIE2020), announced
that S$144 million from the RIE2020 plan will be allocated for R&D work in sustainable urban food production, future food, as well as food safety science and innovation. The aim is to meet the newly announced target of producing 30 per cent of the nation’s nutritional needs by 2030.

It is thus a golden opportunity for trailblazing work and NUS-FST must rise to the occasion.

To support, enable and propel FST in its next stage of growth and pursuit of excellence, I am very pleased to announce that the University has approved the FST Programme’s elevation to become an academic Department, that is, the Department of Food Science and Technology in the Faculty of Science.

FST Department will be Singapore’s first Department of Food Science and Technology in the university sector. I am confident that the new department shall take pride, ownership and direction of its ambition to become one of the world’s leading FST Departments. It will play a pivotal
role in convening expertise across the different Faculties of NUS and fostering significant research collaborations to help Singapore to achieve food resilience and security, as well as to advance Singapore’s food industry.

On this high note, I would like to once again, convey my heartiest congratulations to FST on your 20th Anniversary! Thank you and have a pleasant evening!