Foreword

Zhang-Yue Zhou and I grew up a world apart in completely different cultures but we share many common experiences encountered in our early lives. We both lived and worked in farming communities and developed a strong connection with agriculture and food production. In professional life this has led to a continuing interest in agricultural research and development and trade that focuses on sustainable domestic and world markets. I first met Zhou earlier this year at a National Forum to establish food safety research, development and extension priorities across the entire food chain in Australia and we quickly established a rapport and a realisation that we share a common passion for food quality, safety and security as well as rural development and agribusiness.

I have spent over 40 years in senior management roles within the Australian food industry working in areas of agricultural production, food manufacturing, sales, marketing and research and have had a long involvement with company boards, committees and associations all dedicated to the advancement of a sustainable food industry for Australia. Now, as Chairman of Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL), my objective is to build collaborative networks between businesses, research institutions and governments to create the critical mass for future growth of the Australian food industry. The goal is to help businesses develop a continuous innovation cycle, produce higher value-added products, increase margins and also increase the number of exporting Australian firms and their foreign market share. For FIAL to achieve its objectives, particularly increasing Australia’s food export capability, we must have two critical inputs – detailed and accurate knowledge of our target markets and deep consumer insights to guide our innovation and product offerings. This book is a valuable source giving both knowledge and insights into what will be our most significant future market of China and I commend it to all those with an involvement in the food industry.

Zhou and his co-authors have a unique understanding of Australia’s capabilities in food production that is perfectly balanced with a deep understanding of China’s current food consumption, and they have great insights into future trends and demands. It is this understanding of the changes in Chinese demographics and the analysis of future trends that
make this book so valuable to the food industry and the direction innovation must take.

For most of our modern history, Australia has been a major producer of a wide range of agricultural and manufactured food products where exports far outweigh domestic consumption. It is in the Australian mind set to look to markets overseas. Our focus was once on Britain and Europe but has been shifting to Asia since the 1950s. The most significant and dynamic opportunity for Australia is the rapid growth and development of China since the 1990s and the opportunities this creates for Australian food producers who can deliver consistently high quality and safe products. China is growing so rapidly and the dynamic of the different demands across China is so confusing and the opportunities so large that it is difficult for a casual observer to interpret and comprehend. This book provides clarity that cannot be obtained merely by examining the statistics and data currently available from multiple Chinese government and international sources. It is not sufficient for Australian food producers and manufacturers to continue to export what we have always produced, particularly on the commodity markets. We must understand the specific consumer needs within the different segments in the Chinese marketplace and innovate in what we produce and how we supply our products to satisfy real consumer needs. Australia does not have the capacity to be a dominant food supplier to China. Zhou and I agree, therefore, that Australia's contribution to China's future food needs must focus on higher margin, value-added food products that exploit our well-earned reputation as a producer of consistent high quality foods with an exemplary reputation for food safety. Australia’s strength is its ability to innovate new offerings of value-added foods for the emerging middle class and wealthy consumers of China.

This book provides extremely valuable information and insights into the changing food consumption in China. It predicts future consumption patterns and illuminates the dynamic difference between rural and urban Chinese and between different socio-economic groups. The analysis of future agricultural outputs and the assessment of future Chinese import needs is a valuable planning tool and guide for potential participants in the food industry of Australia and elsewhere.

Peter R. Schutz
BSc (Hons), B App Sc, FAIFST, FAICD
Chairman, Food Innovation Australia Ltd
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