

**START**  
CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE  
AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS

# **STRATEGY PAPER**

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2025-2027

# PREFACE

The Center for Sustainable Agrifood Systems - START - is a unique platform for collaboration between Danish universities for strategic research related to the green transition of agrifood systems.

Since its launch in March 2022, START has established 10 cross-disciplinary research hubs, where more than 250 faculty from Danish universities engage in cross-disciplinary activities. START has developed a broader community with our annual meetings, and has engaged in policy dialogues with position papers and visits to Brussels.

The first years have given us a platform for further development, and in the coming years, our ambition is to:

- Strengthen the community by launching a portfolio of signature tools and activities aimed at START faculty,
- Collaborating closer with national and international stakeholders to become an even more significant network,
- Continuously align across all Danish universities to maintain and further develop our common commitment to an accelerated green transition of the agrifood-system.

Coming up, we are expanding our annual meeting 2025 to an international forum for dialogue concerning key challenges for a greener future with the Green Minds Gather Conference, generously supported by the Novo Nordisk Foundation.

Going forward, we want to turn our commitment to integrative, inclusive, and interdisciplinary research – or, in short, Triple-I-research - into specific tools, courses, and activities that will actively build community and stimulate collaboration on research that will contribute to and accelerate the green transition of the agrifood-system.

START is governed by the leadership (deans, directors and alike) of the eight universities. However, START impact is created by the involved faculty, who take the time to meet and work across disciplines on integrative, inclusive and interdisciplinary topics and challenges. As a consequence, the START strategy will focus on giving involved faculty in the research hubs even better opportunities for achieving that in the coming years.

START will only be successful if partners, institutions, policy makers and foundations nationally and internationally appreciate the objective and strategy of START as highly relevant, outstanding and differentiated from the many other centers and single initiatives. We will further the development of START with close dialogue to national and international key stakeholders.

The second strategy of START has been prepared by the START Steering Committee, and it is based on widespread feedback and experience from the START community, including perspectives on future possibilities. The Steering Committee would like to extend its warm thanks for all the contributions to the strategy.

We hope that the strategy will be fruitful for the further development of START, and that it continues to provide the backdrop for integrative, inclusive and interdisciplinary collaboration among Danish research excellence within the green transition of Agrifood Systems. In the end of this strategy period, in 2027, we want START to have more strategic presence among faculty and national and international key stake holders as a core network enabling collaboration and green impact, to have given START faculty concrete Triple-I skills, and to be an exemplary for collaboration between all Danish universities.

We all wish the best for START, and we hope the network receives extensive scientific recognition and creates impact we couldn't achieve separately.

On behalf of the Steering Committee,

Jens Ejbye Schmidt  
Chair of the START Steering Committee



# ABOUT START – AN ACADEMIC POWERHOUSE

## Introduction

START is a unique collaboration between the united Danish Universities with the overarching purpose to deliver future research solutions to unlock the green transition of Agrifood Systems.

START is on a mission to identify and develop systemic transition of the agrifood system in order to meet the 2050 sustainable development goals to secure healthy food and biomass sufficiency within the planetary boundaries.

With strong focus on an integrated and inclusive approach based on interdisciplinarity, START aims to gear and provide optimal conditions for extended academic collaborations that support researchers to work together to develop and unfold tools and strategies for future solutions. When we collaborate across disciplines all the way from natural, technical, health and digital sciences to social sciences, humanities and arts, and when we share knowledge, expertise, and ideas, we create more impact even faster.

Impact can only be realized with a strong link to the industries and policy-areas that face the demand for change. By nurturing networks both with industry, policy makers and the broader international academia, START creates a network for problem realization and definition, which directs the translation of research into practice.

START strives to pursue any opportunity for its members to become an attractive lead partner in international research consortia. With the unity of all universities in Denmark, the START network enters the European arena as an academic powerhouse in the top-three European knowledge institutions in the green domain, with a substantial participation record in EU Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programmes. A recognised and acknowledged position in the European research arena opens new opportunities for START members to take leading roles in consortia with propositions for funding and societal impact. Denmark is an exploratory country. The agrifood system is cultured by tradition, innovative by character, and has a compassion for sustainability at its heart. Denmark aims to showcase how a collaborative and problem oriented approach creates an environment for effective translation of research ideas both into research projects, policy areas and society at large.

# GOALS

The goals of START can be summarised in a brief overview:

**Develop and identify tools and pathways for systemic transition of the agrifood system**

**Be an attractive entry point for agrifood faculty and international research consortia**

**Showcase and exploit Danish leadership in agrifood research**

The goals will be achieved by supporting researchers' bottom-up initiatives to establish collaboration on challenges in the agrifood transition in an integrative, inclusive and interdisciplinary approach with proposals to relevant calls.

START already established a strong collaborative partnership with all Danish research institutions. Looking forward START continues to work on partnerships with politicians, industry, society, and funding organizations in Denmark and internationally.

START strives to facilitate cooperation on the use of research facilities and living labs, in recruiting talented human resources from outside Denmark, and to promote START as a thought leading network from science to policy.

## Triple I-Approach – the heart of START

A successful green transition of agriculture and food systems in general is paramount to addressing the various worldwide green challenge to secure nutritious food and other biomass for the biobased society through resource sufficiency within the planetary boundaries.

This transformation can solely be achieved by disruptive changes in our society and economy with evidence based on best co-creative science. The unique assets of the START community favor a setting for co-creating in which researchers can generate realistic future solutions, together. Such a setting requires:

- an Integrative approach to technical innovation and societal transformation for the various interlinked green challenges related to climate, environment, biodiversity, food, health and wellbeing, society, biobased economy, etc.
- an Inclusive approach, with all stakeholders and actors in science, society and businesses by means of novel methodologies such as living labs and citizen sciences.
- an Interdisciplinary approach by further enhancing the cooperation of scientific researchers from a wide diversity of disciplines from natural, technical and digital sciences to social sciences, humanities and arts.

While Triple-I has been a conceptual backbone of START since its inception, in the coming years we will work together to operationalize the concept into a portfolio of tools, learning opportunities and activities that are offered to START faculty and beyond.

The research hubs are bottom-up cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional groups of faculty centered around a green agrifood challenge and have been approved by the Steering Committee. Each hub is led by a hub coordinator and supported administratively by START staff. The hubs are the organizational structure for pursuing the defined goals and continuous dialogue and openness between the Steering Committee and the hub coordinators is key to future development.

# ROAD TO IMPLEMENTATION

Following the overall discussion of START's mission and goal, below we summarize and highlight central elements of strategy execution and the related success indicators. With this, START is ready to take the next steps towards unlocking the green transition of agrifood systems.

## Objective, goals, plans, indicators and impacts

<b>Objective</b>			
START accelerates scientific impact on the green transition of the agrifood system targeting strategic research in an integrative, inclusive, and interdisciplinary approach			
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Plans</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<p><b>Goal 1</b> Identify and develop pathways for systemic transition of the agrifood system towards the SDG objectives in terms of climate, environment, biodiversity, food, health and wellbeing, energy, land use, inclusive society, and resource sufficiency.</p>	<p><b>Plan 1</b> Develop an academic platform in the form of a portfolio of goal relevant START hubs enabled to do research with an integrative, inclusive, and interdisciplinary approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of hubs.</li> <li>• Hub activity and commitment (activities, proposals, projects, publications).</li> <li>• Triple-I skill building activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Triple-I researchers equipped to be interdisciplinary thought leaders for the green transition.</p>
<p><b>Goal 2</b> Be an attractive entry point for international research consortia to contribute to high-impact transition programmes and public-private partnerships.</p>	<p><b>Plan 2</b> Map and attract key faculty to START, build national and international community and stimulate funding-activities and be a voice in a science-to-policy dialogue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of START faculty.</li> <li>• Number of international network activities.</li> <li>• Number of policy dialogues and inputs.</li> </ul>	<p>START faculty involved in more international research consortia Triple-I research agendas.</p>
<p><b>Goal 3</b> Showcase and exploit Danish academic leadership cultured by tradition and compassion, with allied expertise.</p>	<p><b>Plan 3</b> Showcase START as a Danish collaborative initiative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of presentations of the START network.</li> <li>• Activities with other key stakeholders (industry scientists, policy-makers).</li> </ul>	<p>Awareness of START brand.</p>

# VALUE PROPOSITION – INTERNAL INCENTIVES AND EXTERNAL UNIQUE SELLING POINTS

## Current Incentives

The obvious benefits and incentives for researchers to engage in START are:

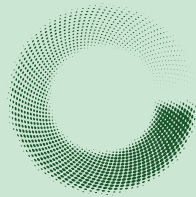
1. A network: A chance to get into contact with researchers you do not know yet across universities and disciplines interested in working with green transition
2. A chance to work integratively, inclusively and interdisciplinarily based on concrete tools and activities
3. An opportunity to develop innovative ideas for proposals in one of the START hubs and cooperate on funding opportunities
4. Administrative assistance for START hubs

## Future value propositions

The potential incentives for the academics within START are based on the unique selling points for the external partners of START.

	Unique selling points – external	Incentives – the START research community
<b>Brand</b>	The academic association START is one of the top three European powerhouses in the domain of research within the green transition.	A recognized and acknowledged position in the European research arena opens new opportunities for leading roles in consortia with propositions for funding, societal impact and professional support.
<b>Concept</b>	START provides a triple-I approach (integrative, inclusive, interdisciplinarity) that is essential for the green transition.	This triple-I approach leads to new scientific challenges and methodologies, resulting in high-ranked papers and it is attractive for large and comprehensive proposals.
<b>Promotion</b>	START promotes Denmark as an explorative country that is agrifood cultured by tradition, innovative by character and has compassion for sustainability at heart, providing a unique living lab of European research and innovation.	Denmark provides a sound basis for the further development of infrastructure and practices at excellent and internationally qualified living-lab scale and holds an increased potential for sharing and gaining access to research collaboration, data, analyses, and models.





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