Draft Operational Plan for the Global Kimchi Ambassador Program to Build a Sustainable Global Kimchi Ecosystem

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I. Background and Rationale for Promoting Ambassador Season 2 (2026–2028)

1. Background: domestic and international structural issues, and Changes in the Global Environment

[Domestic]

ㅇ Due to the increase in single-person households (36.1%), Korea's entry into a super-aged society (from 2025 onward), and the westernization of dietary habits, kimchi consumption* has continued to decline. In particular, the growing number of people who give up making kimjang (so-called "Kimpo-jok," or kimjang-abandoning households) has raised concerns about the weakening of kimjang culture.

* Kimchi consumption (g): (2013) 98.7 → (2018) 90.3 → (2023) 88.7 (Average annual decrease of 1.06%, a total decline of 10.1% over 10 years)

ㅇ The domestic kimchi industry is valued at approximately KRW 6.4 trillion*, and while both commercial kimchi production and exports continue to grow, imports are also increasing, resulting in a persistent trade deficit**.

* Size of the kimchi industry (KRW trillion): (2019) 5.0 → (2020) 6.1 → (2021) 6.0 → (2022) 6.5 → (2023) 6.4

** Trade balance (USD million): (2020) △8 → (2021) 19 → (2022) △29 → (2023) △8 → (2024) △26 → (2025) △34

◈ In Korea today, kimchi faces a dual challenge: a weakening consumption base and structural imbalances within the industry. As a result, the need for comprehensive responses at both cultural and industrial levels is increasing.

[International]

ㅇ Amid growing global interest in Hallyu, fermented foods, and sustainability, K-Food exports have reached an all-time high*. Kimchi, as a vegan, fermented, and immunity-enhancing food, aligns closely with global food culture trends.

* As of November 2025, K-Food exports reached USD 12.34 billion
(Up 5.4% compared to January–November 2024, marking five consecutive years of exports exceeding USD 10 billion)

** Revision of U.S. Dietary Guidelines (Jan. 7, 2026): Recommends the consumption of fermented foods such as kimchi to support gut microbiome balance.

ㅇ Kimchi, a representative Korean food and health food combining traditional fermentation

techniques with plant-based ingredients, is now exported to 102 countries and is establishing itself through new forms of consumption.

- Through locally tailored product development and marketing that leverages Hallyu, awareness of kimchi has increased, leading to export growth particularly in Western markets such as North America and Europe.

* Kimchi trade status (2024 → 2025): Countries: 95 → 102, Export value: USD 163.5 million → USD 164.4 million (up 0.5%), Export volume: 47,052 tons → 47,729 tons (up 1.4%)

** Share of export value by country (2014 → 2024, %): (United States) 5.9 → 29.3 (Netherlands) 1.6 → 5.9 (United Kingdom) 2.1 → 4.5

ㅇ Despite the expansion of the kimchi market driven by export growth, insufficient understanding of fermentation principles and kimchi's identity has led to an increasing number of cases where kimchi is perceived merely as "spicy pickled vegetables" or confused with other fermented foods. At the same time, distorted or altered* versions of kimchi are being produced and distributed**.

* According to a 2023 analysis by the World Institute of Kimchi, information on kimchi's origin, history, and health benefits on platforms such as U.S. Wikipedia, Citizendium, the Encyclopaedia Britannica (UK), and Baidu Baike (China) was found to be partially inaccurate, insufficient, biased, or distorted.

** Examples include unauthorized preemption of kimchi trademarks by overseas companies (14 suspected cases identified by the Korean Intellectual Property Office in 2022), ongoing controversies over Chinese pao cai being claimed as the origin of kimchi (since 2020), and disputes over labeling kimjang cabbage as "Chinese cabbage" (2022–2025).

◈ As the global kimchi market expands and kimchi culture spreads, there is an increasing need for strategic responses that can systematically convey and manage kimchi's authenticity and Korea's identity as its country of origin.

2. Need to Expand and Strengthen the Ambassador Strategy

ㅇ (Domestic) To mitigate the sharp decline in kimchi consumption, tailored consumption-promotion strategies are needed for women and people in their 20s and 30s, who have experienced the largest decreases in intake.

* By gender (2010 → 2023, g): (Men) 128.5 → 108.7 (down 15.4%) (Women) 90.6 → 68.7 (down 24.2%)

** By age group (2010 → 2023, g): (20s–30s) 110.6 → 63.2 (down 42.9%) (40s–50s) 135.1 → 104.8 (down 22.4%)

- In addition, as the country of origin of kimchi, Korea needs to secure and promote the diversity of kimchi (in terms of varieties, ingredients, and preparation methods).

ㅇ (International) Through government- and private-sector-led efforts to raise awareness of kimchi, a basic foundation has been established in strategic regions such as North America and Europe*. Going forward, there is an urgent need to transition to a new model of kimchi public diplomacy that builds locally sustainable "people" and "systems."

* Examples include the designation of Kimchi Day (in 12 U.S. states, Argentina, and the Kingston borough of London) and

corresponding export growth.

- There is a need to cultivate specialized professionals who can serve not merely as promotional ambassadors, but as active practitioners capable of delivering education on kimchi, connecting with mainstream local networks, and promoting customized consumption methods through the analysis and integration of local ingredient quality characteristics.

◈ A shift is required from a conventional "kimchi promotion" approach to a stage where structures are built that allow the continuous accumulation of kimchi consumption and its industrial and cultural value.
◈ The World Institute of Kimchi serves as a core institution that coordinates and leads the balance and expansion of the global kimchi industry and cultural ecosystem, fulfilling its role as a "Global Kimchi Balancer."

II. Detailed Operational Plan (Draft)

◈ Through the Global Kimchi Ambassador Program, kimchi will be established as a food culture element that is continuously consumed, taught, and distributed within domestic and local food cultures, education systems, and communities worldwide, thereby structurally expanding the sustainability of kimchi's globalization.

1. Overview and Selection Plan

1. Program Overview

ㅇ Purpose: To establish kimchi as a global food culture through ambassadors and to build a sustainable ecosystem
ㅇ Nature of the Program: A convergent human resource development initiative linking public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and the food industry
ㅇ Operating Organization: World Institute of Kimchi
ㅇ Core Values: ▲ Structural diffusion ▲ Sustainable consumption ▲ Dissemination of scientific and cultural value

2. Operational Structure and Method

ㅇ Operating Unit: Science–Culture Convergence Team, Industrial Platform Research Division, World Institute of Kimchi
Responsible for ambassador selection and management, activity support, performance monitoring, and feedback
ㅇ Operational System: A centralized, integrated management system in which the World Institute

of Kimchi oversees the entire cycle of planning → selection → education → activities → performance management → feedback

Designed as a comprehensive operational model that enables diverse ambassador activities to be systematically linked with the Institute's research, projects, and policies

- Platform Operation: Use of "Naver BAND" as a communication and collaboration platform

To facilitate ongoing communication among ambassadors, share activities, and strengthen collaboration

3. Selection Plan (Draft)

- Eligibility: Domestic and international practitioners in fields related to kimchi, Korean cuisine, fermentation, food culture, media, distribution, and research who can contribute to promoting kimchi consumption and its global dissemination
- Scale: 33 ambassadors (11 international, 22 domestic), symbolizing November 22, "Kimchi Day"
  - Domestic: Open to all Korean citizens (no age limit)
  - International: Foreign nationals, overseas Koreans, overseas Koreans with foreign nationality, marriage migrants, etc.
- Term of Appointment: April 2026 – March 2028 (2 years / reappointment possible for those with outstanding performance)
- Selection Criteria: Balanced composition by country and field of expertise (with a focus on kimchi export- and consumption-expansion countries and strategic regions; role-based selection to minimize overlap and maximize outcomes)
- Ambassador Selection Criteria

✓ Understanding of kimchi and Korean food culture and relevant activity experience

✓ Domestic and international influence and outreach (media, networks, etc.)

✓ Ability to accurately convey the scientific and cultural value of kimchi

✓ Representativeness and sense of responsibility as a national ambassador for kimchi

- Benefits of Selection:

Issuance of an official certificate of appointment under the President of the World Institute of Kimchi, and opportunities to participate in education programs and related events