

## EIT Food Fight Podcast - Episode 4 - Can we really influence consumers.mp3

**Matt Eastland** [00:00:06] Welcome, everybody. This is The Food Fight.

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:00:09] EIT Food's live podcast recording at Seeds and Chips Food Innovation Summit in Milan.

**Matt Eastland** [00:00:14] My name is Matt Eastland.

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:00:16] And I'm Lukxmi Balathasan.

**Matt Eastland** [00:00:18] And we both work for EIT Food, who are an organization who's building an innovative community to improve food together.

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:00:28] So we've just had a panel discussion looking at food and healthy consumer choices from the industry perspective, and the question we were discussing was, should producers be responsible for making healthy food? And I think the answer to that was yes. Producers are definitely doing their part to make healthy food available to consumers. And the question that we are going to be discussing in this panel is if healthy food is available, can we actually influence consumers to make a healthy choice? So first on our panel is Danielle Nierenberg, she is a world renowned researcher, speaker and she is the founder and president of Food Tank, it's a not for profit organization focussed on building a global community for healthy and nourished citizens.

**Matt Eastland** [00:01:12] And second up we have Ignace De Nollin, who is the M.D. of Smart with Food, which is a spinoff of the Belgian retailer Colruyt. He's also developing a platform which allows consumers to make healthier choices when purchasing food.

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:01:27] And our final panellist for today is Bela Gil. She's a chef, a nutritionist and a food activist. Bella hosts a cooking show in Brazil and has also published four bestselling cookbooks. Welcome, everybody, to The Food Fight.

**Matt Eastland** [00:01:39] Great. So in the previous panel, we heard about the great work the producers were doing in producing healthy food. But given that the food related diseases are continuing to rise, there does seem to be like a dislocation between the availability of healthy food and the choices that consumers make. So, Danielle, I wonder if we could start with you. What do you think are the factors which are actually stopping people from making healthier choices? Is it choice? Is it price? Is it convenience? Is it education?

**Danielle Nierenberg (Food Tank)** [00:02:11] Well, thank you and thanks for putting this all together. I think this is a great forum to discuss these issues. I mean, I think, you know, I'd probably disagree with some of the things said on the last panel, I don't think there's a plethora of healthy food out there. There's a lot of, still focus on commodity crops like corn, rice, wheat and soy and not enough of nutrient dense crops. So I think there needs to be, you know, if producers and governments can make those changes and switch to healthier crops, that would do a lot to benefit consumers. I would also say that we need to talk about affordability. You know, accessibility is great. Availability is great. But if people can't afford these healthier products and that's a real issue, especially for underserved communities or people who just don't have those kinds of products available to them. So there needs to be a combo of accessibility and affordability.

**Matt Eastland** [00:03:04] And Bella. I saw you nodding there. Do you agree?

**Bela Gil (Chef, nutritionist and food activist)** [00:03:06] I totally agree. I agree 100 percent, because I think we should create opportunity to people to buy healthy food. An opportunity means the financial access to food as well, and not only the physical access to the food. So I come from Brazil. And Brazil is a country where we are seeing a rise on junk food eating habits like people are switching from like real food, our staples like rice and beans and vegetables to the more convenient food, which is like junk food because they're everywhere and they're cheap. So I totally agree with that. We need the public policies to help introduce real food in food deserts, for example, where like in Brazil, we have a lot. So the disparity between healthy eating and non healthy eating is huge in Brazil now. And that's really because of the accessibility. And there was someone said, I think from Germany that one of the two drivers that make consumers do a choice when they are choosing what to eat. It's like nutrition and sustainability. And I was thinking, oh, my God, that's the dream coming true. Like in Brazil, the first thing people think about when they're buying food is price. They go for food because it's cheap and then it's taste. You know, sustainability and nutrition, it's the last thing they think about it. So, yeah, I totally agree with that.

**Matt Eastland** [00:04:38] And Ignace, from your perspective, like the retailer view, what do you think?

**Ignace De Nollin (Smart with Food)** [00:04:43] No, I think I fully agree with the price element. So the prices are really a driver. It's not only in Brazil but the same in little Belgium. But there are different ways as well to support, I think, and to create more transparency. I think that's also the reason why our company or scale up or spin off has been created. We had a dream or we had the vision of as a retailer, we have a lot of access with our consumers. And how can we help them to create more transparency? First of all, you can create new products. That's true. But there are a lot of products for the moment already in the retailer. And people do not understand what is there. Which product is really suiting my specific profile? So we are creating an AI algorithm really to understand all of the products so that you can try to match each of the products with the individual, and I think that this is the first thing creating this transparency. I had a discussion with a doctor sometime ago and he told me if my patients are following the diets that I'm subscribing, for example, you need to eat more vitamins, B12 or something like this. He said 50 percent come out of my office and they forget what I said, but the other 50 percent is coming into the store and they don't find this information on the package. They don't find the information on the products. Should I eat bananas or should I eat apples? So but all this information is available. It's fragmented. It's out there. So I think from a retail perspective, the solutions that we are driving is helping creating this transparency to do the consumer.

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:06:10] Thank you very much. It's really an interesting point. I also sort of agree. I feel like cost is such a big part in living in London. There's definitely, we see the inequality and like actually an increase in obesity. And there's areas of London where there's actually social economic depravities, I think cost is a really big factor. So I'm going to kind of talk to Bella a little bit about your role as an influencer. So, you know, we live in this new age of social media. So from your experiences as an influencer, what role do you think you play as an influencer and what role do you think that social media has to play with actually promoting healthier choices in influencing consumers to make better decisions?

**Bela Gil (Chef, nutritionist and food activist)** [00:06:45] Well, that's also a tough question, because we now live in an era where we have like food bloggers and like fitness bloggers that sometimes mix up messages and make consumers even more confused. So, well, I have a very privileged position where I have a TV show and also the social media and all that. And I use that to provide information so people can, information that inspires transformation, because I believe that all information and in education, it's not enough. And so that's why I became also an activist, because I believe that we really need public policies to help to really give access to healthy food. But speaking as like a chef and as a nutritionist, as an individual person, that can really influence people's behaviour. I've noticed that it really doesn't work, only preaching. Why do you believe it's good because you really have to make an impact. I always say that there are two ways that people really change with regards to food, which are when they become parents and when they get sick, that's when they seek out transformation. But I mean, we don't have to become sick to change or we can already have a healthy diet in order to prevent becoming sick. And what I focus now as an influencer is to work with children, because I believe that food education for children is the best way for us to create a healthy community. Because I also say that there is a phrase, a sentence that I like to say, that adults that cut out sugar, they are like doing good, you know, like they are super healthy, like, that's good for you. But when I say that, like, I mean, my kids, I avoid giving sugar to them. People go like, oh, my God, poor them. Why? Why don't you let them eat like, you know? And that's why we have to change our way of thinking about healthy food. Like healthy food should be for everyone, even kids. You know, kids eating broccoli, it's a good thing. So I use my means of communication that I have to really show people that having a better diet, it's good for everyone, not only for our physical health, but also for the environment, but also for the small producers that really put the food on our table. So it's a huge issue to really summarize. But yeah. That's what I try to do.

**Matt Eastland** [00:09:27] Okay. Thank you. And you know, so that's the influencer perspective. I'd be interested from the other panellists, you know, who do you think has the most influence as a you know, as a person, a stakeholder over the healthy food choices we make? Danielle?

**Danielle Nierenberg (Food Tank)** [00:09:41] I mean, I think it's a lot of different factors. I think the influencer community has grown so much over the last few years with, you know, the continuing rise of social media. I want to touch on a point that Bella said earlier that there's a lot of misinformation out there. And because she's a nutritionist and a chef and a mother, I think she comes from an area of expertise that many influencers do not. And I think there's a lot of onus on consumers to sort of sift through who's an expert, who's a real expert, and who's just sort of using this as a vehicle to promote themselves or their brand or whatever. So I think, you know, consumers need to know more about nutrition in the first place so that they can follow the real experts. And I think that goes back to your other point about education in schools. We've lost all over the world, education about cooking and nutrition, and that really needs to come back. So who influences I mean, governments could have a big influence on whether kids are educated about food or not. So I think that's one sort of part of the equation. And then I think, you know, as adults, as eaters ourselves, there is a big onus on us to really make sure that we're teaching our kids, you know, what good nutrition is that it's not just for our own personal health, but for the health of the planet. So I loved all of the points that Bella made, because we really need to be, you know, not just teaching kids about, oh, you know, eat this because it's good for you, but you need to eat it because it's good for everyone.

**Matt Eastland** [00:11:07] Thanks Danielle, I totally agree. And Ignace, I'd be interested in your perspective from a retailer. You know what is it that retailers can do in this space?

**Ignace De Nollin (Smart with Food)** [00:11:15] I think for me, the retailer has a smaller and neutral role in providing advice to consumers. I think there are a lot of expertise from from dietitians, from doctors, from experts. And everybody can go to his right experts to have an advice of how should I live? And my diets will be different from your diet. And at a certain moment, my diet will be even different from what I'm eating right now. So I think as a retailer, what you should offer is and what I'm calling is this like food as a service. I think every consumer has the right to follow his own diet and should follow his own diet. But they don't find this transparency, again while going shopping. So I think there is a lot of opportunity of helping the consumer. I want to follow a certain diet, so help me in doing that, provide me the right tools in terms of products, but also recipes. Imagine something that you're developing right now. Imagine that you're having an application. You take a photo of any recipe which is existing in the world and it's translating to the right SKU's in the retailer that is matching my profile. Imagine I want to take care of my sugar. I'm lactose intolerant, but I want to eat that pasta bolegnese because I like it. So give me the right products in a frictionless, easy way. So I think that's the roll of a retailer. Another element that retailers could do is based on, for example, the buying history. They have a lot of data and in my personal feeling, they don't give enough data back to the consumer. So there is tons of data. So something that we are doing within a proof of concept is we are analyzing all of the data and we are giving this back to the consumer that is following certain diets. So I want to follow the food pyramid diet. So by giving all this data back and I'm saying to the consumer, you as a family, because it as a family, you bought X percent of vegetables of where you want to be. You bought X amount of red meat where you want to be. And we have seen that if you give this data back in this aggregated easy way, understandable way, their changing behaviour. So it's not the role of the retailer to change, but it's the role of the retailer for me, to facilitate.

**Matt Eastland** [00:13:13] And what role does cost play in this? Because both your panellists have both mentioned affordability. I mean, as a retailer, what else can you do from a cost perspective to make sure that consumers are choosing healthier foods?

**Ignace De Nollin (Smart with Food)** [00:13:26] I think like I said in the beginning, as well cost is a main driver and is an important one. But sometimes the perception is there. If you want to eat healthy, it's more expensive. And from the opposite perception of the retailer, if you want to provide more healthy food at the acceptable price, my margin is lower. But I don't really know if this is true. So there are certain cases that it's true. But I think there is a lot of possibilities of offering a good price of doing that. So my mother company or the Colruyt group in which we started up our Smart With Food company, they have a program which they call 1 to 3 euros, meaning for certain groups they can make meals, they propose meals, healthy meals for one, two or three euros. So it is possible of doing that, but I think the right effort should be there.

**Lukxmi Balathanan** [00:14:15] So a big influence on a lot of people's lives right now is social media. And everybody loves taking a really lovely photo on Instagram of what they eat. So do you think all the clean eating trends and all of that on social media is having an influence? I mean, can we leverage social media to influence behaviour?

**Bela Gil (Chef, nutrionist and food activist)** [00:14:32] I think so. I think and also that's something good but also bad in a way of we are stantardising a little bit. The way we eat because of social media, too, like we want a plate, you know, the same way and we want

to like spread the chia seeds and like this way. And like you see people are around the world all eating kind of the same foods because of that. So what I do in opposition of that is cultivating the indigenous and native foods from Brazil, also changing the perception of like what healthy food is for people and trying to make people understand that eating healthy can be also cheap, you know, because as an influencer what I tried to do it's changing demand because I believe that the food industry, one of the drivers that can make them change and really provide more healthy food is changing or increasing the demand from consumers to these kinds of foods. So I started the TV show around five years ago and in the beginning I was using a lot of like millet. I love millet and I use that a lot. And people were like, oh, my God, but Bella, your food, it's like, no, it's impossible to find. One day I went to the supermarket and I was trying to buy millet and the guy pointed to the bird food section and I was like, yeah. You know, like millet with the husk, you know, the shell is bird food, but without the shell is human food. And so now if you go to a major supermarket in Brazil, you find millet next to the rice. You know, it's that what like people have to demand what they want you know, I didn't give up. I was like, no, I'm not going to change what I do because I want to change behaviour. I want to change what people have in their home. I don't want to cook with what they already have. I want to change, you know. And so that's one example. And I now what I'm working on is with reduction of food waste. And I cook a lot with like watermelon peels, melon peels, banana peel, papaya seeds, sweet potato leaves, radish leaves, things that people think it's inedible, you know, and they throw it out because they don't know what to do with it. So like if you go to my Instagram, maybe it's a little different from if you see, if you scroll on the feeds, it's going gonna be a little different from what you see around like the world. But that's what I try to do. To really influence people to love what our nation has. You know, love local cultural invasion as native food.

**Matt Eastland** [00:17:27] Thanks Bella and I'd like to stay with this topic of kind of like changing demand. So, Danielle, from your global perspective, I guess, do you see any sort of trends that are changing the way consumers are choosing healthier foods or not?

**Danielle Nierenberg (Food Tank)** [00:17:41] Sure. I mean, I think there's been a great momentum around this idea of transparency, which you talked about earlier, and also this idea of true cost accounting in the food system, which is gaining momentum, you know, knowing the actual costs of what goes into your food and really being able to assess them in a real way, I think is helping consumers demand better kinds of food and also demanding more of companies. I mean, the power of social media is so intense that, you know, a single tweet can go viral or an Instagram post can go viral and really change how people perceive a retailer or a company. And I think there's a lot of power that consumers have that they're not using with social media. They're understanding the power that they have and not just the power they have when they buy something at one of your stores, but the power they have to communicate with others and share information. And I think that's what I'm seeing globally. There's real demand for knowing the story behind your food, knowing how not just it was grown, but how the workers were treated, how animals were treated, the distribution of it, that transportation, the greenhouse gas emissions. These are all things that consumers need to know now. They're demanding it and social media can help improve that sort of communication process.

**Matt Eastland** [00:18:57] Thanks. And Ignace do you see that shift into retail stores as well? So are people demanding those things?

**Ignace De Nollin (Smart with Food)** [00:19:05] We see changes. So we have, for example, an application where people enter their profile, scan products that does match or

doesn't match so there we see changes in terms of which profiles they're indicating. So we have sugar, which is an important one. But then you have also these E-numbers. Is it bad or good? I don't know. I haven't worked on that. But at least, again, it comes through the transparency that we need to give or that retailers need to provide. But we see a lot of new diets popping up. So it's going very rapidly indeed. So I think that as a retailer, you need to offer the possibilities that consumers can find in an easy way.

**Matt Eastland** [00:19:44] Thank you.

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:19:45] So we're just going to open up now to the audience. If there's any questions from the audience that you want to ask our panellist.

**Matt Eastland** [00:19:50] Go for it.

**Audience member no.1** [00:19:52] Hi. I want to touch on two issues. One is educating the consumer and people say go to your doctor and doctors, at least in the U.S., get zero nutritional education. I mean, zero. So they have no idea what they're talking about. And the American Diabetic Association just recently acknowledged that perhaps they've been giving misguided information for generations on what diabetics should eat and how long is that going to take to filter down to an actual diabetic patient? The other thing I want to ask is, I'm from the U.S., obviously, and the ubiquity of junk food and attractive little packages of processed food that affects sustainability and all sorts of things with all that packaging. But it's everywhere. I mean, why do I need to go into an office supply store and face jars of liquorice and, you know, candy coated nuts? Is that a policy decision that needs to be made? I mean, I can't see retailers responding to consumers saying, don't sell me that. So how can we try to affect that?

**Ignace De Nollin (Smart with Food)** [00:21:02] In terms I fully agree what you said about the medical world in terms of food in the U.S. and Europe. There is still a lot of know how to acquire by doctors in terms of helping and supporting the patient. So from that perspective, I think what we're doing as Smart With Food, and what my vision is, is personally is really working on this prevention. I think prevention is key. And knowing that the system that we have in U.S. and Europe cannot work anymore. So it is already for me, I think, too late. So I don't know what is going to happen, but at least we need to invest quite a lot in prevention. And prevention is about food. But it's also about movement. It's also about sleep, stress. What I always use is this kind of functional medicine tree, which at the roots is really food, sleep, stress and so on. Then you have the genetic predisposition of stuff like this. But I think there is where we want to go and to support. So there is still a long way to go, but that's at least the vision that I have.

**Matt Eastland** [00:22:03] And Bella as a nutritionist, do you have a view?

**Bela Gil (Chef, nutrionist and food activist)** [00:22:05] I think transparency is the key there, because we see a lot of, for example, studies around food and diseases, especially with diabetes. A lot of the industry behind influencing their results and what doctors should be providing for the patient. So I think now as we have more information about this, we are discovering everything behind is these studies. There is the nutritionist, American nutritionist call Marion Nestle. I think maybe you've heard about her. She does an amazing job doing that, like disclosing information from food industry, sponsoring studies relating diseases and food. That really influence what doctors will tell you. So now, because we have this information, we have this knowledge, doctors are changing. Like, I mean, there is a pressure. Sometimes a patient goes to a doctor and he knows more about what he's

going to eat or not than the doctors. So there is a pressure there. And I think transparency is very key to this, because now we know, we know what made like sugar a big thing in the world.

**Danielle Nierenberg (Food Tank)** [00:23:29] Yeah. I would just add that in the same way that consumers influence retailers. You were mentioning that consumers can influence the medical community and you see this rise of food as medicine and doctors who are becoming chefs and or, you know, going back to school and taking more nutrition classes. And that's really important. But on your point about, you know, the big box retailers who are selling office supplies, also having these awful snacks available, I think retailers can take a stand. I mean, in the United States, one of our largest pharmacy chains, CVS, stopped selling cigarettes. So I think there's an opportunity there for, to demand that companies not act like companies have always acted, that they can do things differently and do them better even if their stock prices go down.

**Matt Eastland** [00:24:13] Thanks, guys. Was there another question?

**Audience member no.2** [00:24:16] Thanks very much. Really, really interesting. My question. We talk a lot about subsidies and how it pushes the wrong kind of foods. But my question to you three is whether you think there's a place for subsidies and taxes to discourage and encourage the right kinds of foods.

**Bela Gil (Chef, nutritionist and food activist)** [00:24:33] Oh, yeah, I think that's a big issue, actually, in Brazil. Brazil gave the producers free taxes, let's say, to pesticides, like if you buy pesticides you don't have to...

**Matt Eastland** [00:24:47] An incentive?

**Bela Gil (Chef, nutritionist and food activist)** [00:24:48] An incentive? Yeah, but it's totally wrong. Like Brazil lost two billion in 2018 because the government didn't tax on pesticides. So not only that, we have a big subsidies in sugary drinks production in Manaus, in the north of Brazil. And. Yeah. And so I believe that that's a big issue because if you go to a supermarket, do you find sometimes the soda cheaper than the juice? Because the producers have subsidies, so I believe that we have to reverse. We have to actually start subsidizing and providing incentives to small producers through change from conventional crops to organic crops and so on. So in Brazil, that's a big, big issue.

**Danielle Nierenberg (Food Tank)** [00:25:48] And you know, in the United States, every time the farm bill comes up every five years or every time the Common Agricultural Policy comes up. These debates happen. And there is this, you know, call for like shifting subsidies to do good instead of, you know, reinforcing the ones that exist around corn and wheat and all these other commodity crops. I think there is a real opportunity for, again, consumers to take the lead on this and demand from their local politicians and their their national politicians to, you know, vote for the kind of food system that consumers actually want and need. And I think there hasn't been in the United States at least enough of a push on those policymakers to actually vote for the food system. Vote for a better food system. So I think there's a lot of opportunity to reverse those subsidies, make them for good, make them for soil health instead of commodity crops. And what would that world look like? But, you know, you mentioned Marion Nestle before. She's very good at saying vote with your fork. She also wants people to vote with their vote. And I think that's important as we come into another political cycle. You know, in the United States, you know, in other countries as well.

**Matt Eastland** [00:26:52] Thanks, guys. I think we have time for one last quick question. I think there was somebody at the front.

**Audience member no.3** [00:26:57] Yeah, just a quick question. It's probably a little bit of an opinion as well in terms of the idea that healthy food is more expensive. And you did bring this up. There was a study and I understand different markets are different. But in Australia, where if you planned your shopping and you shopped for a family of four for a week, that a healthy food basket that met our dietary guidelines was actually less expensive than an unhealthy food basket. And so I just wonder whether we really need to tackle this idea that we hear a lot that healthy food and eating healthily is more expensive when that may not be the case. And maybe is it more that unhealthy cheap food is just so readily available that we see it so much that we think that unhealthy food is so cheap and therefore healthy food is expensive?

**Matt Eastland** [00:27:46] That's a great question. Ignace, do you think you can answer that?

**Ignace De Nollin (Smart with Food)** [00:27:51] I'm trying. No, I think you're right. One of the elements is in my personal perspective, it's also the readiness and the easiness of the healthy food, which is just over there. And again, I think that's also coming to the part of education and helping and providing and especially inspiring people of, how can I make something acceptable pricing, which is good in an easy and rapid way? And I think there is the role of a retailer, or at least also technology can help quite a lot. Speaking with companies for example, and they are helping people in providing with technology in a very easy way, selecting the right recipes in five or 10 minutes. Which steps should I do? Because people, they don't know anymore how to cook. And I think there is a thing to do. And another element in terms of I just want to add on what you said in terms of healthy food is not always more expensive. There are also a lot of opportunities in terms of discounts that you see in countries. A lot of discounts, you see discounts on healthy food. But the same discounts on non healthy food. Imagine that we could create these kind of platforms, these kind of ideas where we can only populate the healthy discounts and then providing inspiration of recipes and stuff like this to consumers. I think there is a lot of possibilities of doing that, providing acceptable pricing for healthy food.

**Matt Eastland** [00:29:12] Thanks very much, guys. Okay. We're all out of time. So just to say a huge thanks to all our panellists. It's been really interesting. I think we could probably talk about this for hours, actually. But yeah, we've heard about affordability. We've spoken about education. We've also spoken about data and the importance of giving it back to consumers and also actually just making consumers as like the change agents in this whole process. So really, really, thank you very much. Guys, can we just get a big round of applause to our panellists, please? Wonderful. Thanks, everyone. So that was The Food Fight. If you'd like to know a little bit more about what we're doing, go to [eitfood.eu/podcast](http://eitfood.eu/podcast). Or if you want to get in touch, it's [podcast@eitfood.eu](mailto:podcast@eitfood.eu) Thank you very much.

**Lukxmi Balathanan** [00:29:56] Thank you.