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Lukxmi Balathanan [00:00:06] Welcome to this bonus episode of The Food Fight podcast from EIT Food.

Matt Eastland [00:00:11] In these episodes, we want to shine a light on new projects and agrifood startups and hear about their efforts to fight for a better future. This week, we're handing over to Kristof Mertens, to tell us about Porphyrio, a start-up who've created a cloud based data management system to help improve the production of livestock farming.

Kristof Mertens [00:00:39] Hi, my name is Kristof Mertens, I'm the Managing Director and Co-founder of Porphyrio. We are an EIT Food Rising Food Star alumni and we are fighting for the future of food because the food is the pure foundation of our society. And by developing software, we want to tie the people back into the food where the food came from and to bring this foundation of our society back to the people.

[00:01:15] Porphyrio makes a cloud software makes dashboards, we provide dashboards to poultry farmers, feed mill workers, veterinarians which are all involved in poultry production. We use big data, artificial intelligence to monitor production of livestock. We are active in the field of animal proteins, which play a major role in most diets of consumers globally. So we help producers worldwide to improve production. We collect data from automation, which is today already present in farms or people key in data some manually, we are also linked with the IOD Movement that as more and more sensors coming up. So the information which is increasing on the farms, we are able to capture it. Information could also be restored with feed mills, slaughterhouses, upgrading plants, you name it. All the elements, all the parts of the production process holds data, we are collecting it, analysing it and providing insights based on analytics to any user, which is a stakeholder.

[00:02:30] So actually, I'm a grandson of a dairy farmer, I was growing up on the farm, the dairy farm of my grandfather largely. So I was always involved in livestock production, I've seen the passion of my grandfather for the animals. I started studying master livestock production and doing my PhD, I jumped into data analytics. At this time, nobody talked about big data, but we talked about biostatistics and how can data help to monitor a production process? And that's how I started my Ph.D. After my PhD, two years later, together with a colleague, I founded the company as a spinoff of the University of Leuven. So the idea came way back, I think in 2004 and today in 2020, we are a global company.

[00:03:27] Working with data intensively gives a poultry producer - today we're very focussed on poultry production - the tools to better know what's going on in his farms first of all. What is happening with my birds? Are they healthy? Do they get enough feed? Is the climate good? Yes or no? Second of all, it allows them to ok, if I continue like this, I know that in four weeks my birds will have this kind of weight, I will produce this type of eggs and this can be linked with the need of the consumer in the market. So the end goal is that we give the tools to everybody involved in production to produce the right bit of eggs and chicken meat that the consumer wants. We do this by using artificial intelligence biostatistics, predicting outcomes, early warning systems, health monitoring, you name it. Everything that you need to make sure that you have a good, sustainable production of poultry.

[00:04:39] One of the main challenges that the whole sector as an agriculture, not only the poultry sector, is that the demands to the food get more and more strict, which is also

normal. Margins are very thin. People are not to use to pay a lot of money for food. So the professionalism that you need to address in order to make sure that you produce the right product with the right margin is extremely high. And today, there's already a lot of data available, but it's really underexploited. And so being able to use that allows poultry producers to make sure they produce to the needs of our society of consumers and with sustainability also holds good money for the producer. Today that is not always the case. So to get to that balance, we support the sector with the software that we make. Of course, the challenge is, is that this is a complete change of production process and we are in a transition phase where data and digital can accelerate this support this and will be a crucial part of achieving this shift in the way of producing.

[00:05:54] One of the founding partners of EIT Food was, of course, the University of Leuven and as we are a spinoff company of the University of Leuven, we directly found a good possibility to join this actually great project linking primary production all the way to the food. Where it helped us, I think we were early to the party, but I would say the network that's opening and the possibility to reach out all the way to the retailers and that's important. It's about a whole value chain from the farmer to the retailer to the food company. You need that to make this change happen, to get to the challenge of 2050. So meeting people there and the meetings that were present, yeah was important, it was good.

[00:06:45] Well my hopes for the future is that we succeed in getting the consumers back closer to the food, to the origins of the food, because I see that most people have completely lost this. And when you don't know where it comes from, if you don't know how difficult it is to produce the top quality food that we all have in the regions, then you don't pay for it and the value is not there. Animals are a great convertor of proteins that we cannot use ourselves, and the nutrition values of animal products is so high that it will help us solve problems of food security in developing countries. So the chicken egg is a fantastic product. The chicken is an amazing animal. But people, they just forgot about that.

[00:07:39] I think the call to action linking to what I just said is, go talk to farmers and you will find the passion that I was finding so many years ago with my grandfather and then you understand.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:07:59] Thanks for listening to this bonus episode of The Food Fight podcast.

Matt Eastland [00:08:03] To find out more and to learn how you can get involved in the fight for a better future, head over to eitfood.eu/podcast.

Matt Eastland [00:08:14] For more information on Porphyrio, please head over to porphyrio.com.