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The Future of Food Conference 2022

16 June | Brussels

Conference Report

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Andy Zynga, CEO, EIT Food

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Matt Close, President for Global Ice Cream, Unilever

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The EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices: the role of voluntary initiatives and partnerships in the transition to a sustainable and climate neutral food system

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Sean Westcott, Senior Vice President R&D Europe, PepsiCo

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Ruben Brunsveld, Deputy Director EMEA, Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

Germaine Furaha, Director, East Africa, Rikolto International

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WORKSHOP – Inclusive food system innovation

Attracting youth to a career in the agrifood sector and tackling the skills shortages: the role of education

Moderator: Viktoria Soós, Founder of Climate Smart Elephant & EIT Food Youth Mission Working Group Lead

Speakers: Vivien Bodereau, Education Programme Manager, EIT Food

Bent Egberg Mikkelsen, Founder, FoodData4Good & Young Minds Lab

Remigio Berruto, Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural, Forestry and Food Sciences, University of Turin

Carl Edwards, Director, Education and Public Engagement, Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF)

Enrico Somaglia, Deputy Secretary General, European Federation of Food, Agriculture, and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT)

WORKSHOP – Accelerating innovative solutions

The transition towards protein diversification

Moderator: Gerard Klein Essink, Founder & CEO, Bridge2Food

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Damien Jourdan, Open Innovation Director, Danone I/O, Research & Innovation

Helene Miller, Head of European Affairs, Aleph Farms and Vice-President, Cellular Agriculture Europe

Paola Giavedoni, Innovation Director, EIT Food

Interactive Parallel Sessions – Breakouts

Scaling sustainability: accelerating the transition to climate-smart agriculture

Moderator: Barbaros Corekoglu, Advisor to the CEO, EIT Food

Speakers: Tiffanie Stephani, Director of European Government Relations and External Communications, Yara International

Alfred Grand, Farmer, Grand Farm

Philippe Birker, COO and Co-Founder, Climate Farmers

Esther Winterhoff, Head of Division for Fundamental Issues regarding the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Common Fisheries Policy and Food and Nutrition Policy, Permanent Representation of Germany to the European Union

Philipp Goedecker, Senior Policy Officer International Affairs, Bauernverband

The New European Bauhaus: Engaging citizens in the transformation towards more inclusive food systems

Moderator: Martine Van Veelen, Director, EIT Food CLC – West

Speakers: Stefani Novoa, Sustainability Expert, Basque Culinary Centre

Anu Seisto, Research Team Leader, VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland

Ruben Baldomir Martínez, Maître and Sommelier, LABe Restaurant, Basque Culinary Centre

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The case for Regenerative Agriculture: improving soil health, nutrition and farmer profitability

Moderator: Philip Fernandez, Agriculture Project Manager, EIT Food

Speakers: Abby Rose, Co-Founder, Vidacycle

Diogo Pinho, Soil health and microbiome specialist, Food4Sustainability

Ruben Borge, Agronomist, Rockinsoils

Iain Dykes, Managing Director (Czech Republic), Spearhead International Ltd

Sustainable and healthy food from algae

Moderator: Jayne Brookman, Acting Director, EIT Food CLC North West

Speakers: Felix Leinemann, Head of Unit, Blue Economy Sectors, Aquaculture and Maritime Spatial Planning, European Commission

David Bassett, Secretary General, European Aquaculture Technology & Innovation Platform (EATiP)

Sofia Kuhn, Head of Public Engagement, EIT Food

Vitor Verdelho, General Manager, European Algae Biomass Association (EABA)

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Introduction

The world is waking up to the crisis in which our food system finds itself. Black swan events such as Covid-19 and the Ukraine crisis have been followed by months of intense drought, a very real and widely noticeable manifestation of the effects of climate change. Wherever we look at our food system, we can see it's not working and needs fixing.

EIT Food's Future of Food Conference provides an ideal launchpad from which to generate the ideas and innovation that will begin the new chapter. By bringing together all the stakeholders involved in the EU's food system – policymakers, large industries, SMEs, entrepreneurs, innovators, producers, educators, consumers, environmentalists, youth – the event assembled everyone whose contributions, input and experiences will be vital in reform and redevelopment of EU agrifood.

Conference delegates engaged in keynotes, plenaries and interactive workshops, covering topics from decarbonisation to alternative proteins, from youth engagement to marketing, and at every step concerned with climate-smart, progressive practices to transform, improve and essentially reboot our broken food system.



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Andy Zynga, CEO, EIT Food



It's crisis mode for our food system, warned **Andy Zynga**, CEO of EIT Food, as he opened the Future of Food Conference.

Unsustainable in its current form, he developed on how the food system is the primary driver of biodiversity loss, a massive contributor to GHG emissions, and harmful to people as well the planet.

That's why we need a new chapter, he said, where we do things differently: there needs to be a paradigm shift. The conversation is shifting, and food systems are increasingly recognised as a powerful source of solutions, rather than just part of the problem. But what role does innovation play in the transformation of food systems?

Food systems hold unparalleled potential to reduce GHG emissions and contribute to a more sustainable future, and innovation will be critical in enabling their transformation. The war in Ukraine is an additional, powerful reminder of the need for innovation to ensure food security and the resilience of our food systems, without compromising sustainability. "With input from partners and stakeholders, we can select the most impactful solutions and show what agrifood innovation can help us achieve."

Beyond partnerships, however, we will need enabling framework conditions. In this regard, the European Commission's

plans for a new overarching EU innovation strategy are a very important step.

He identified three key priorities; resources, inclusion and vision.

On resources, Europe lags behind global competitors in supporting agrifood start-ups and entrepreneurs, whilst its Member States apply different regimes for IP, certification, labour taxation and more. There is too little presence from private investors, and we need more input from corporate and institutional investors.

Inclusivity, meanwhile, makes innovation programmes successful by leveraging the contribution of all members of society to deliver greater impact. However, women entrepreneurs still experience significant imbalances in access to funding opportunities. Special attention must also be paid to including youth in the conversation: giving them a seat at the table will bring creativity, energy and vision to building the future of food. More in general, not enough is being done to bring consumers aboard with new food solutions, making it extremely difficult to achieve scale and impact. Nutritional and environmental labelling can enable consumers to make informed decisions: that is why EIT Food will endeavour to harmonise the existing methodologies for environmental labelling, including the one developed by EIT Food partner Foundation Earth.

He concluded on vision. We're working to solve a broad spectrum of food system challenges. It's a global discussion, but time and resources are limited: there are just seven harvests left before 2030. In terms of investment and technology, 2050 is just around the corner. So let's define the big priorities – those we can tackle together – and decide how to do it. "Through strong collaboration, partnerships, and coordination across regions and value chains." He concluded, "together we can write the new chapter about the future of food."

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Virginijus Sinkevičius, EU Commissioner for the Environ- ment, Oceans and Fisheries



At the opening of the event, **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, reminded us that 'the future belongs to those who prepare for it today'. If there is one thing that the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shown, it's that we need stronger, more resilient food systems.

Some of the solutions to address these challenges will come from the EU's aquaculture sector. Offering year-round supply, aquaculture reduces dependence on imports while relieving pressure on wild fish stocks. Developed sustainably, it produces food and protein, taps into new species, and generates a lower carbon footprint – using less land and less fresh water – than animal husbandry. Innovation is elemental here, too: we're already seeing the benefits of algae as a replacement in animal feed, for example. Crucially, aquaculture can provide us with raw materials, jobs and income in areas where few alternatives exist: rural and coastal areas.

Aquaculture is one of the world's fastest-growing sectors, recognised for helping to decarbonise the food system, mitigate the impact of climate change, and maintain ecosystems

that can protect against rising sea levels. But in Europe, production is stagnating and we import 70% of what we consume.

So the demand is there, but we will need 47.5m tonnes of fish and seafood by 2050. How can the sector pick up its pace?

The European Commission's strategic guidelines released in 2021 propose objectives designed to minimise the negative impact, including farming low trophic species such as algae and molluscs. Next, the Commission is setting voluntary targets for environmental performance, to help producers and investors develop the industry and create jobs across the EU. Its stakeholder platform, "EU4Algae", will encourage production, consumption and innovative uses for algae, helping the EU to get closer to the Green Deal target.

The Commission has laid the ground for EU aquaculture to become a global yardstick. EIT Food is important for that implementation: "Let's work together to plan and create a sustainable path for competitive, resilient and profitable food systems that are healthy for us and the planet," concluded Commissioner Sinkevičius.



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Jindřich Fialka, Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the Czech Republic



Speaking on behalf of the Czech Presidency of the EU, **Jindřich Fialka**, Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, stressed that food is a fundamental human right: it should never be a luxury and it should never be used as a weapon. But we must also fit our world into the future; that means transitioning towards sustainable and environmentally friendly food systems.

Fialka acknowledged that it's promising that so many governments are committing to the transformative power of food systems, aligned with the UN's 2030 agenda. These clear and ambitious goals reflect the complex relationships between environmental and economic pillars; rather than new goals, we need to implement the actions necessary to achieve existing goals.

The incoming Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU is staunchly committed to delivering food security, reinforcing the resilience of our food systems, and recognising our obligation to preserve food sources for future generations.

But we must explore more than the available practices and business models. We must decarbonise, improve water

quality, decrease erosion, support biodiversity and soil quality, limit the excessive use of pesticides and fertilisers, and increase the area of ecological agricultural practices to 25%. We need more food, from fewer inputs.

That's why we must look at practices such as agroforestry, edible insects and alternative proteins, added the Deputy Minister. We need to identify and resolve the legislative barriers, increase public awareness of diet and the importance of local food chains, combat food poverty, improve access to agricultural land, explain again and again the benefits from science, attract a new generation to farming – and gain the trust of all our citizens for transforming the food system.

Fialka concluded by stating that the Czech Presidency is confident that the European approach – a clear strategy based on the Green Deal and Farm to Fork – is the right one. If we can apply new rules, whilst guaranteeing predictability and certainty to our farmers, our food businesses and our consumers, then we can achieve a more effective, more innovative, more resilient and more responsible food system. If we don't miss this opportunity, our children will be proud of us.



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Plenary Session 1

Ahead of COP27: What innovations will be key to decarbonize the agri-food sector?



According to the IPCC, the food system requires change at all stages – from producer to consumer to waste management. Emerging food technologies – such as cellular fermentation, cultured meat, plant-based protein sources, controlled environment agriculture – can bring substantial reductions in food-related GHG emissions. While solutions exist, the decisions of EU policymakers and agrifood stakeholders regarding funding, investment, roll-out plans and policy incentives will be crucial to accelerating them to a scale that will enable the transition to a more sustainable and climate-friendly food system.

To develop these transition pathways, we need a thorough understanding of agrifood's carbon footprint: its distribution across regions and value-chains, and what the latest science is telling us about food's impact on GHG emissions.

"Food is responsible for one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions," said **Esther Sanye Mengual**, opening the morning session for the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. The JRC has been examining the impact of the food

system on GHG emissions, both from a territorial and supply chain perspective.

The research shows how food consumption represents 36% of the EU's total contribution to climate change – a figure that has risen by more than 30% in the last decade. The climate change impact of the EU food system is now reaching 3.6 times the planetary boundary.

Transition pathways needed to be put in place all along the supply chain, testing scenarios to ensure optimisation and minimisation of trade-offs. For example, by substituting up to 50% of products of animal origin with others we could reduce the climate change impact by 20%. Even appropriate actions on food waste reduction could reduce the impact of EU food consumption by up to 12%.

However, Sanye Mengual noted that food system GHGs were not dominated by CO₂ from fossil fuels, but land-based emissions. While these needed dedicated mitigation options, energy reduction and decarbonisation throughout the chain would remain crucial.

From the Ellen McArthur Foundation, **Gaelle Le Gelard** asked what the acceleration of the circular economy would mean for food. "If we don't fix food, we won't fix the climate. And it's no good making food not just 'a bit' bad, we need to make it a force for regeneration."



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That needed a complete shift, she acknowledged. Instead of 'bending nature to produce food', we should be starting with nature and then 'designing' food products according to the crops available.



Meanwhile, the challenge for Unilever – the world's biggest producer of ice cream – was meeting its commitment to net zero by 2039, and zero GHG by 2030. Matt Close, President for Ice Cream at Unilever explained the two key thoughts to achieve the commitment. Firstly by putting consumers and citizens at the centre of the transition. Noting that they will choose to do the right thing if they see the appealing benefits.

He cited Sweden, where Unilever switched dairy ice cream ingredients to plant-based. Rather than promoting its vegan properties, they focused instead on the 40% reduction in GHGs.

His second thought was on putting technology to work. He gave an example of Unilever bringing their freezer temperatures from -18c to -12c.

But these changes need to happen throughout the supply chain, he said, accompanied by science-based targets and the roadmaps to go with them. "There's a lot of exciting things to talk about."

How we harness food to build sustainability was the question we're all trying to answer, concluded **Alan Belward**, Director

for Sustainable Resources at the Joint Research Centre. "But our take-home message is that time is not on our side.

"We've fairly quickly got to increase carbon capture and decrease any further release. That's got to include working with producers and farmers to communicate what we should and shouldn't be doing at the field level. "Farmers, consumers, scientists – we all have to work together, sharing real experience, communicating peer-to-peer, and sharing science with the farmer."

Plenary Session 2

The EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices: the role of voluntary initiatives and partnerships in the transition to a sustainable and climate neutral food system



Cooperation among food industry players, as well as between industry, farmers and other stakeholders, will help to develop and deploy innovative solutions to increase sustainability and resilience within the agri-food sector and achieve the EU's climate objectives.

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The Code of Conduct, one of the first deliverables of the Farm to Fork Strategy, encourages food system stakeholders to voluntarily commit to improve sustainability performance while fostering collaboration on best practices, learning, and blazing a trail for smaller actors. It also recognizes the importance of partnership to strengthen supply chain relations and identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration in R&I, capacity building, training, skill development and uptake of digital solutions and modern technologies.

What are the best practices and key learnings emerging from existing examples of commitments and collaborations made by signatories under the Code? Is the Code promoting the uptake and roll-out of innovative solutions? And how can industry and policymakers enable SMEs to join the journey towards more sustainable food systems, facilitating their participation in the Code?

As explained by **Dirk Jacobs** – Director General of Food-DrinkEurope, “Its seven aspirational objectives for a more sustainable food system are matched to a 2030 deadline. It’s all too easy for different players to do their own thing, but this initiative has brought them together around the same table, for social, health and economic benefits.”



Launched last year with 65 signatories, that number has already increased to 120 – including major multinationals such as PepsiCo. Asked how the Code of Conduct affects a corpo-

ration of that size, **Sean Westcott**, Senior Vice President R&D Europe for PepsiCo, noted that PepsiCo was already committed to making its products healthier and more sustainable.

He explained that consumer to prioritise taste over health and it’s the same with sustainability. PepsiCo have made commitments to making products healthier – such as their 2030 and 2050 sugar reduction targets – and to reducing GHGs.

Front of pack labelling is also very important, whether that’s the anchor point of Nutri-Score – where we’re moving €500m towards a B rating, and lifting other products to C, from D and E – or environmental labelling.

Explaining that PepsiCo was, at heart, an agricultural company, Sean cited the PepsiCo Positive programme. Designed to ‘change how we do business’, the initiative sought to find ways to source crops and ingredients in ways that restore the Earth, giving farmers support in transitioning, and finding ways of bringing public and private organisations together to make a difference.

What’s the Commission’s role in the Code of Conduct, now that it’s established? “We need innovation in the food system,” said **Kristin Schreiber**, Director for Chemicals, Food and Retail in the European Commission’s DG GROW. The Code supports that, and now we need to spread the word about it. But our other important role is reporting: recording what has happened, mapping the results, encouraging a holistic approach that covers all areas.

EIT Food, naturally, embraces the Code of Conduct, enthused the Chair of its Supervisory Board, **Michiel De Ruiter**. Now it is time to embrace innovation as a means to solving food system challenges. “EIT Food has been successful in building an innovation ecosystem, partnership is the key to making it work.”

However, the Code is missing the co-operation of SMEs, said De Ruiter, saying they’re needed to solve the puzzle. Much more agile, they take care of the innovation while it’s the corporations that scale up.

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Explaining that the role of EIT Food would change from creating the ecosystem to providing more direction – ‘to orchestrate and prioritise’ – De Ruiter said it is important for everyone to identify areas on which to work together, while remembering that the keyword is ‘farmers’. Working with them will be crucial to solve some of the biggest challenges, such as the impact of food production on the climate.

And indeed, one of the smaller actors the Code sets out to help, start-up ‘Fresh.Land’ – represented by founder and CEO **Mathilde Jakobsen** – resolved to put farmers at the heart of its business model. “We’re re-engineering the food supply chain, by cutting out the middleman.”

She explained that very often, fresh produce just isn’t as fresh as you might think. There’s a long supply chain with many intermediaries. Fresh.Land connects the consumer and the farmer, proposing a ‘just in time’ or ‘harvest on demand’ approach, she said. “A digital platform allows consumers to choose what they need and have farmers respond.”

But joining the Code’s signatories is challenging for an SME such as Fresh.Land, Jakobsen explained. One challenge is that you’re always in deficit of time and money, when you are a small company, and it takes time and money to report and undertake new initiatives. She also feared a potential imbalance: that SMEs with a business model that is already innovative and more sustainable, and with fewer resources than traditional industry actors, might be asked to do disproportionately more under the Code. Beyond the Code, she also flagged the need to ensure that legislation facilitates these efforts and does not place itself at odds with them.

Plenary Session 3

Spotlight on Youth: Empowering youth in food system transformation

The EU has declared 2022 the European Year of Youth, recognising that young people have the responsibility of

building a better and more sustainable future. With its commitment to inclusive food system innovation, EIT Food is working to ensure that youth have a spot at the table, shaping the future of food by educating young talents to think entrepreneurially and solve food system challenges.



Skills for the Future is a challenge-based programme, organised by EIT Food and supported by Junior Achievement, global non-profit youth organization. It promotes the teaching of entrepreneurial skills in Europe’s high schools and encourages the necessary changes in mindset required to transform the food system through creative solutions.

Focusing on food waste prevention, healthy nutrition and precision agriculture, the programme supports students in STEM subjects and digital skills while stimulating empowerment, creativity and teamwork through innovation camps.

The programme covered three crucial areas, explained **Alessandra Moretti**, an MEP who sits on the Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. “We’re committed to the defence of food safety and public health,” she said. Expanding that they have a moral duty to promote a healthy lifestyle and bring high quality food to the table for everyone. The key to diet-related diseases is prevention. One-third of food is lost or wasted between production and consumption. And we know of the importance of innovation in decarbonisation.

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Skills for the Future equips young people with the skills to develop solutions and mini-enterprises that can solve these challenges, following the path mapped by initiatives such as the EU Farm to Fork Strategy. Students aged between 16-19, from three of the best teams taking part in the 2022 edition, presented their ideas on the Conference stage.



These included **EcoTomPolish**, which harnessed the acidic properties of tomatoes in an eco-friendly metal polish, helping to eliminate waste within Italian tomato production (which has a 40% share of the world market) and replacing harsher, less sustainable chemicals; **Healthy Tiger**, a smartphone app for children, families and nutritionists designed to 'gamify' knowledge transfer in support of healthy eating and the risks of improper nutrition, creating a community of children and adults who know what healthy eating means; and **Demetra**, a technological solution for rainwater harvesting and water-use optimisation, which recognises that by 2030 47% of the world would be living with water scarcity, while agriculture consumes more water than any other sector.

Participating students cited the grasp of financial and economic skills, an understanding of teamwork and individual responsibility, improvements in self-confidence and a huge boost in motivation among the most important benefits of the programme.

Antoaneta Angelova-Krasteva, Director for Innovation, Digital Education and International Cooperation at the European Commission's DG EAC, highlighted that not only did this show the value of such training programmes, but the importance of starting such training at an early age.

"It's great to have EIT Food putting talent development at its core, displaying the distinctive features of EIT Food and its innovation and knowledge communities.

"We have a need for innovation and a need for skills. Programmes like this can equip young people with skills matching the needs of innovation ecosystems and the labour market. While this may be focused on food and agriculture, participants are acquiring skills in other areas too, such as digital and manufacturing.

"It's also building much-needed capacity in our educational institutions, preparing them for the challenges of today and the future, while emphasising the importance of having the private sector involved in discovering and nurturing new talent, helping them embrace a new way of thinking.



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Interview

Maciej Golubiewski, Head of EU Agriculture Commissioner Wojciechowski's Cabinet



As a conclusion to the morning plenary sessions, Andy Zynga, CEO of EIT Food, interviewed **Maciej Golubiewski**, Head of EU Agriculture Commissioner Wojciechowski's Cabinet.

How has the EU reacted to the effects of the war in Ukraine? And strategically, what are the most important challenges in agricultural research and innovation that the EU can help address?

In 2022, we've seen the effects of the war on food security and affordability. Events in Ukraine have made things difficult for the food sector, especially beyond Europe. Around 5M tonnes of grain each month should make their way from Black Sea ports to the rest of the world.

This grain shortage has been accompanied by a rise in prices, fertiliser particularly, linked as it is to energy prices and the EU's dependency on Russian gas and fossil fuels. Lack of grain exports increases prices for other food, inflating produce prices universally.

All this has put pressure on EU farmers and consumers, but food security in Europe has not been a problem per se. Instead, food affordability and farmer income are the threats.

The Commission identified three immediate measures. In the short-term, we addressed food security in Ukraine itself, through humanitarian assistance. Medium-term, to provide stability to European agriculture, we set up a package involving state aid for farmers and, for the first time in CAP history, a crisis reserve of €500M was made available.

But long-term measures will be the most valuable. We must make farming less dependent on inputs, especially energy. Here we see the importance of innovation, for example alternative fertilisers, precision agriculture, agroecology and better nutrient management. Chemistry had its heyday in the 1970s; now biology's providing alternatives to plant protection products without sacrificing productivity. Innovation and technologies can do much to help farmers and the future of food – and there'll be no future for food if there is no future for farmers.

Sustainable agriculture is one of EIT Food's focus areas. We're doing our part to provide innovative solutions, but isn't the main problem the limited uptake of innovation by farmers?



Adoption of innovation decreases the need for some of those inputs – for example, through the precision application of fertiliser. CAP finances and provides tools that support these solutions, such as the 'eco-schemes' that incentivise farmers if they engage in innovative practices. The Commission is also evaluating Member States' CAP strategic plans, which will feature the most optimal and innovative approaches to agriculture that provide the best 'fit' for their ecosystems. Then there's Horizon Europe,

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directing up to €9bn towards sustainable bioeconomy and agriculture.

Tools such as the Agricultural Knowledge Innovation System and EIP-Agri programmes promote the uptake of innovation by farmers. We also need business and financial innovation, to help farmers benefit from new practices, such as regenerative and carbon farming.

Innovation can also help with generation renewal. In too many countries farming is associated with 'old school' practices; promoting smart or climate-friendly ones can bring in new people, regardless of their background.

Some Member States suffer from structural problems, such as less developed agencies and networks. Some farmers fear change and productivity loss, but I'm optimistic. Innovation used to be considered as something to overcome nature. Now it's helping build and preserve nature, to help farmers realise their production ambitions without long-term negative effects.

When we put our minds together and translate this into action on the ground, we can make a difference and ensure farmers survive to give future to food.

Workshop

From traceability to responsibility: How can we make sustainable practices in the food industry the norm?

The Commission's recent proposals on corporate sustainability, due diligence and deforestation-free supply chains will increase the pressure on industry to identify, tackle and report negative externalities. Can these practices become mainstream? What solutions do we need? Someone will have to foot the bill for this transition: will consumers pay higher prices for food, or will the industry bear the brunt?

Hosted by EIT Food's media platform FoodUnfolded®, this session brought a panel of citizens to the table with policy-

makers and industry representatives, to discuss how to elevate the European standards of production and supply chains whilst ensuring a fair transition.



The session was conducted under Chatham House rules: neither the identity nor the affiliation of any of the speakers, nor that of the participants, may be disclosed.

The EU Due Diligence Act, which aims to ensure human rights and environmental standards are upheld throughout a company's supply chain, as well as the Regulation on deforestation-free products, have both highlighted the importance of transparency and traceability in our food supply.

Indeed, traceability – enabling to certify how an item was produced, where, by whom, and under which practices – ensures that increasingly environmentally and socially conscious consumers are properly informed on the impact of the production of a certain good. Regrettably, while this has long been a hot topic, consumers have been scarcely involved in the conversation.

Traceability has been a legal requirement since the 1990s. While accountability would traditionally fall only on the direct supplier, recent food scandals have led to increased demand for better and more information reaching far deeper into the supply chain. This is necessary for consumers to orient their consumption choices in line with their values, whether they be organic principles, local provenance or others.

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Consumers hold the ultimate power on industry practices. By enabling them to make conscious choices, information becomes a catalyst for change. As predicted by Unilever's Paul Polman already in the 1990s, traceability has become a key business issue, and powerful food producers are anticipating these regulatory and social pressures to stay relevant in tomorrow's market.

What's more, traceability is evolving. Originally, it was like a roadmap, proving the route a product took to get from A to B. Now there's an opportunity to add far more information: service stations, junctions, traffic lights and so on, certifying the product's social, environmental and economic credentials.

There are drawbacks. Palm oil, for example, has become so 'toxic' in consumers' minds that many manufacturers don't even feature the fact their products use responsibly sourced palm oil. This stigma also penalises smallholder farmers who rely on palm oil production for their livelihoods and social welfare, including notably Asian smallholders. There's a delicate balance to be struck between sustainable production and 'fair' production, and policy needs to be aware of this when deciding winners and losers: panellists were concerned that 'Brussels talks too much about smallholders and too little to them'. Despite talk of inclusiveness, farmers everywhere are often not included in these discussions and remain unable to bring forth their plight for increased access to credit and to markets.

Both consumers and producers stand to benefit from a transition to full traceability and transparency. Some brands are even prepared to pay for traceability information. This could make transparency the norm, incentivising the supply chain.

Social and economic mores also influence other thinking: that while everyone wants to eat more sustainably, not everyone can afford to do so. Consumers must be involved in this discussion, alongside other stakeholders: farmers, scientists and industry.



Workshop

Attracting youth to a career in the agrifood sector through education

The transformation of the food system will require the correct blend of skills and competences to be in place. This includes upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce, but critically also the definition of new professional figures and competencies to attract new talent into the sector. However, young people find agrifood careers insufficiently appealing, and the sector has for long experienced a shortage of new skilled professionals. Can education be the answer to this problem? This workshop explored the answer to this question, as well as how education can help students understand the multitude of opportunities that have arisen in this increasingly dynamic sector.

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'Filling the gap' was the subject of EIT Food's recent teacher survey across seven countries: what resources do teachers need to educate youth to the many faces of the agrifood sector and change the image of farming?

The results revealed a concerning lack of knowledge and interest even among teachers: 80% of respondents were unfamiliar with the concept of the circular economy, and most were not planning to hold any food-related activities in their classes. However, they also gave an encouraging signal: most of the surveyed teachers wanted material that could help them plan lessons. The survey will inform a pilot project involving 40 schools across three countries, to help teachers 'connect the dots' around food.

Students aren't the only demographic we need to reach, stressed **Remigio Berruto**, Associate Professor at University of Turin's Department for Agricultural, Forestry and Food Sciences. It's also difficult to reach all the 22 million agrifood workers in the EU – especially considering the extreme level of fragmentation, with SMEs accounting for 99% of agrifood businesses. The diversity in language, culture, regulations, and interests adds another obstacle, with training materials requiring adaptation. But the benefits were clear: a US study showed that, with the appropriate application of technology and knowledge, farmers can increase output by 25% even without increasing resource input.

"Not only do we need to find ways to channel knowledge to farmers, but targeted ways of training different people too," he concluded.

For agrifood workers across Europe, working conditions are the main problem, explained **Enrico Somaglia**, Deputy Secretary General of the European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture, and Tourism sectors and allied branches (EF-FAT). "They're not good. To attract the best talent, that needs to change. Workers see agriculture as an entry into the labour market, not a career. That means high turnover, making it complicated to address skills."

"We need trained people, a skilled workforce, to address the challenges posed by a growing population and climate change. Without workers, there's no future for the sector. Yet, this is a wonderful employment sector."



"Involving all stakeholders in a holistic approach will help define the future skills we need. For example, what does the EU's planned reduction of pesticides by 2030 mean for training resources?" Image and perspective mattered for **Carl Edwards**, Director of Education and Public Engagement, Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF). "We say to young people, you cannot be what you cannot see. Young people aren't getting the opportunity to understand the food system, the agrifood opportunities open to them."

LEAF works with teachers to facilitate the incorporation of agrifood education into existing subjects: biology, science, maths. The 75,000 UK children they took onto farms last year had their eyes opened to billion-pound businesses and envi-

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ronmental science, helping them to understand the sector and its career opportunities. "It's all about changing the image and changing mindsets," he enthused. "Learning should be lifelong."



That remark chimed with **Bent Egberg Mikkelsen**, Professor of Urban Food Systems at Copenhagen University. School is where children spend most of their waking hours, so they're key to the process. Education needs to start as early as possible, he said, explaining that in Denmark agrifood topics feature in kindergarten.

Bent advocates highlighting the link between food production and climate change, and Sustainable Development Goals. "Teachers are already working with sustainability; let's bring that into the 'mental foodscape' of young people."

"By showing children the diversity of what they can be, they take things more seriously."

Workshop

The transition towards protein diversification

Combining novel and traditional protein sources can address both food security and climate change concerns. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognises the importance of emerging food technologies, such as algal and

insect-based proteins, precision fermentation and cultured meat, in delivering substantial reductions in direct GHG emissions from food production. The European Commission's flagship Farm to Fork Strategy and Europe's Beating Cancer Plan also acknowledge the importance of increasing the availability of alternative protein sources. Moreover, the Ukraine crisis has highlighted the urgency of tackling the European dependence on feed imports and promoting a shift towards more plant-based diets, while ensuring a more resilient and autonomous food system.

What are the potential strategies and initiatives required at EU level to guide the transition to protein diversification?

To scale up the production of alternative proteins, the public and private sector should be better co-ordinated. As **Hanna Tuomisto**, Associate Professor of Sustainable Food Systems at the Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science pointed out, much of the research and innovation for cellular agriculture has been conducted in the private sector. That's in contrast to other technologies, where early research was funded publicly.

Looking at R&D priorities, nutrition was at the top: how can we make sure we get the right nutritional properties from alter-



native proteins, making them equivalent to animal proteins? Taste is of course another important element. The session highlighted how fermentation performs well on both fronts. Also high in the list of R&D priorities is the need for life-cy-

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cle assessments, as well as for mechanisms to ensure robust supplies of data about crops which are available or should be available to support the production of plant-based proteins in Europe.



Highlighted problems, on the other hand, included notably a lack of systems thinking, which should shape the contribution of alternative proteins and protein diversification to the transformation of food systems, and define their interaction with other parts of such systems: results and best practices are not shared between companies, even less so at EU level – pointing to the crucial need for a body like EIT Food, able to reduce such fragmentation and create an open platform for sharing. Collaboration between sectors could be improved, too.

The participants to the workshop produced a set of recommendations for scaling up the EU's production and consumption of alternative proteins.

Firstly, public institutions must fund more research into ensuring sufficient scale-up capacity. At the same time, alternative protein products must be made more appealing to the flexitarian market – an important audience in Europe. Thirdly, governments could play other roles beyond R&D, for example through public procurement.

As for which alternative protein solutions to focus on (among plant-based, algae, fungi, precision fermentation, cellular ag-

riculture and insects), participants found that, while markets and technologies are both at different levels of readiness, the answer might be to invest in those that are closest to market and which hold most appeal for the consumer. Proximity was also recognised as an important factor, stressing the importance of incentivising local production and local sourcing.

Regardless of the solution, consumer confidence is essential, as their purchasing choices will ultimately determine the success or failure of any new food product. Garnering their trust and enthusiasm will require solid scientific data proving the nutritional quality of alternative protein products, which will in turn require more research. Hybrid products, combining animal and alternative protein, may help with conversion. There could however be an issue with the affordability of alternative protein, especially compared to animal products, given the extent of subsidies granted to the latter. Price will be a crucial driver in encouraging consumer uptake; it will be important to find solutions to reduce it.

Farmers will be an important part of the transition: plant-based alternative proteins are an essential resource for the EU, registering rising levels of human consumption and extensive use as feed, but also registering a staggering dependence on imports to satisfy internal demand for animal feed. Boosting internal production and greater crop diversification is highly desirable.



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Beside their high-level strategic value for food security, plant proteins can also be greatly profitable for farmers. But the prevailing mindset in Europe, tending to pay more attention to quantity than quality when it comes to food, could work against alternative proteins, leading farmers to prioritise other crops. Governments can play a strong role in demonstrating that the transition is beneficial for farmers, including by facilitating dialogue between farmers and food producers, and offering incentives to help make transition sustainable.

Climate change might have a positive effect in encouraging farmers to start their transition, switching to innovative crops, or returning to traditional heritage crops. The farming sector will need help to tackle the problem of how to roll out alternative proteins in SME businesses, versus larger enterprises. While their needs might be similar, ways of approaching those farmers will be different.

As to what role the EU might play, it's perhaps less a question of willingness than knowing where to invest and what to do. For example, recent calls under Horizon Europe made no mention of fermentation, so there are still gaps in the EU strategy if it wants to play a leadership role. And then there's the Novel Food Regulation: the EU can't claim the leadership role while it takes two years to grant market authorization to novel proteins, compared to six months in other non-EU countries.

The EU needs to act more strategically and offer better planning and interaction with farmers on supply-side, if it's to step up to a leadership role in developing Europe's alternative protein sector.

Breakout Session

Scaling sustainability: accelerating the transition to climate-smart agriculture

Climate-smart actions could reduce EU-wide agricultural GHG emissions by 6% and add up to €9.3bn to farmers' incomes,

according to the EU Carbon+ Farming Coalition. But the feasibility and impact of this transition depends on the collective ambition and action of all stakeholders. This session brought together farmers and policymakers to discuss the challenges and explore collaboration: what's needed to accelerate climate-smart European agriculture?



"The status quo isn't acceptable and our window of opportunity to change is closing quickly." EIT Food's **Barbaros Corekoglu**, the session's moderator, made clear the stark reality.

It's not helped by the difficult situation for agrifood, said **Esther Winterhoff**, Head of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Division at the Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU. This situation is affected by the Russian aggression, input crises and high commodity prices. "It underlines why co-operation helps us address food security, farmers' incomes, environment and climate protection, biodiversity and sustainability."

Winterhoff highlighted how in Germany the government hopes organic farming will reach 30% by 2030, backed by financial support and research. At EU level, the new CAP and its strategic plans promise a big impact. Fertiliser-use efficiency must also improve to reduce energy consumption and support efforts to address global food security.

Yara's **Tiffanie Stephani** described a coalition comprising the fertiliser company and partners EIT Food, Bayer, BASF, Syngenta and WEF – among others, supporting carbon-positive

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agricultural transition. Its climate-smart measures include agroecology, conservation agriculture, nutrient management, irrigation, intercropping and others. “By identifying barriers to adoption, it will increase collective understanding and how co-operation can overcome them,” she said.

Science-based, searching for impactful solutions, the coalition is guided by its ‘North Star’: creating a sound business case for climate-smart farming, improving soil health, enhancing carbon sequestration, and upscaling best practices.

“Peer-to-peer exchange,” she said, “demonstrates economics and eliminates mistrust in new concepts, while supporting appropriate measurement, reporting and verification processes.”

That peer-to-peer approach chimed with **Alfred Grand**, an Austrian organic farmer who sits on the EU’s Soil Mission Board. His farm participates in the Lighthouse Farming Network, a European initiative backed by Wageningen University. It encourages farmers to discuss principles face-to-face to scale-up sustainability. The main topics are soil health, agroforestry and market gardening.

Organic farming will be commonplace within 20 years, he predicted, pointing to his own farm. Without pesticide use, the farm is more resilient because it forces him to diversify his cropping. Local food initiatives, such as his market garden veg box scheme, not only mitigate climate change and arrest biodiversity loss, but provide fresh, quality food while creating rural jobs that put young people on the career ladder. “Market gardens address 11 of the 17 SDGs,” said Grand.

“Scaling-up is itself a barrier,” revealed **Philippe Birker**, co-Founder of Climate Farmers. Only a few thousand farmers practise regenerative agriculture, yet it offers so many clear benefits. What’s missing? he asked.

Again, it comes down to infrastructure, specifically knowledge and finance: to change farmers’ mindsets, to get them to ‘think regen’ and exchange ideas, and then to make sure they’re viable. “We need model farms to make regenerative principles relatable to farmers’ own individual contexts, and to ensure eco-

nomic viability. That requires measuring and monitoring the ecosystem services provided and having society – consumers, companies, governments – pay for them.”

Further initiatives from Climate Farmers include a Climate Farming Congress, which launched in 2021, and a new regenerative consultancy database. It connects farmers with agricultural consultants who have been rated by other regen farmers. It recognises that regen advice is context-specific: there’s no one-size-fits-all.

The German Farmers Association (DBV) represents 270,000 farmers – 90% of the agricultural community, and senior officer **Philipp Goedecker** said we need to stop talking to farmers. Instead suggesting, we should talk with them. While farmers are perceived as polluters, they’re also part of the solution – producing food, protecting biodiversity, farming carbon.

Philipp explained the Humus Project, which starts in Germany this autumn in partnership with German ecological farmers. Involving 100 farmers from all regions and farming types, it seeks to ‘test the water’ to find ways of tackling climate change and sequestering carbon, recognising soil’s capacity to store water and nutrients.

Food has a special significance, he said, as noted in the Paris Climate Agreement, but farming has many variabilities and parts not seen by the public. Improved research, often mentioned as a key point, would help farmers – but it must have a practical application.



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Breakout Session

The New European Bauhaus



By creating bridges between different backgrounds, cutting across disciplines, and building on participation at all levels, the New European Bauhaus (NEB) inspires a movement to transform societies along three values: sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion. By bringing together citizens, experts, businesses and institutions, it tries to reimagine sustainable living in Europe – urban regeneration, improving the urban-rural connection, stimulating circular economies and encouraging public-private partnerships to deliver nature-based solutions.

Can we bring the Green Deal closer to the citizen?

In 2021, with EU funding, EIT Food launched a new programme dedicated to the New European Bauhaus. Focusing on citizen engagement, its projects sought to uphold social inclusion while offering solutions that meet the EU's environmental and climate ambitions.

Anu Seisto of Finland's VTT Technical Research Centre recounted the 'Adopt the Ugly Foodling' project. Encouraging the consumption of visually unappealing but edible food, it targeted young consumers – generating new understanding and respect for food – and elderly consumers, in whose youth food was far less abundant, to reduce food waste. Tied to local culture, it used art to evoke feelings and create experiences to

inform thinking and behaviour, particularly the importance of local food production.

Cultural and culinary identity also featured in 'Building a Green Gastronomic City', an EIT Food-funded project looking to counter the loss of gastronomic tradition – due, among others, to climate change – by applying circular economy solutions reducing waste in the HoReCa sector. **Stefani Novoa** and **Ruben Baldomir Martinez**, of the Basque Culinary Centre, explained how the project involved consumers through an engaging restaurant experience: first, developing zero-waste gastronomic solutions with chefs, consultants, and other experts; then, testing them with consumers, using local and seasonal products from local and small producers. The project revealed plenty of challenges and developed a ranked list of solutions.



Breakout Session

The case for regenerative agriculture: improving soil health, nutrition, and farmer profitability in Europe

A fringe interest until recently, regenerative agriculture might yet prove a solution for our environmental, economic and health challenges, while contributing to the EU's Soil and Biodiversity Strategies' goals. But can regenerative agriculture

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deliver on its promise to restore our ecosystems and produce healthier food, while at the same time allowing farmers to benefit from the food and ecosystem services they provide to society?



The core of regenerative farming is working with the soil, said **Abby Rose**, CEO of Vidacycle. Understanding the myriad interactions between its microbial inhabitants represents a major shift from previous thinking – how many farmers have been taught.

She explained that every farm is different. No single recipe says how to work with your soil. It needs a change in mindset: more knowledge intensive, supporting different types of decision-making.

EIT Food's '[Regenerative Agriculture Revolution](#)' project has appointed Soil Mentors, to support farmers with in-field observations, before building dashboards and benchmarks to learn from them. Monitoring provides both data and learning opportunities.

Ruben Borge, an agronomist at Rockinsoils, working with live-stock farmers in northern Spain to apply regenerative principles, detailed a case study involving 75 beef producers. "Meat is under the spotlight for contributing to climate change," he noted, "but that's unfair: cows are good at making food from grass, a crop that's good on marginal lands."

Species-rich permanent pasture that mimics nature by moving cows daily creates a powerful cycle where plants and mi-

crobes co-operate to generate new soil and increase organic carbon. Such grazing also improves animal welfare, and provides healthy food: meat from grass-fed and finished cattle contained five times more omega-3 fatty acids than that from grain-fed cattle.

Farmers must understand that conventional agricultural practices upset this natural system, said **Diogo Pinho**, a soil specialist at Food4Sustainability. Plants are 'solar panels' that catch light and convert carbon into 'liquid carbon' – the output from photosynthesis – that sustains soil life. But soil microbes that have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with plants – sugars in return for macronutrients – are at risk when applications of artificial nutrients disrupt this process. Diogo is working with almond farmers in central Portugal to help them choose the regenerative practices that best suit their farms and soils.

"Regen practices can be expensive to implement, but they're not expensive in the long-term. Go step-by-step," he advised.

Expense was also a concern for **Iain Dykes**, managing 80,000ha of European farmland across five countries for Spearhead International. Owned by private equity, he said everything the company did 'needed to deserve their investment but also deserve the right to farm'.



For more than 10 years, Spearhead has practised what has come to be seen as regenerative practices. "It's the right thing to do, and it's more productive," Iain said. By looking at the soil and supporting biological life, it becomes more fertile and

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more profitable. Regular soil testing, combined with drone and satellite imaging, allows variable application of nutrients: synthetic nutrients can be reduced in favour of organic fertilisers, although availability was the major limiting factor.

Increased fixation of atmospheric nitrogen was achieved by upping rotations from three crops to 16, including more legumes, while cover crops provided another source of organic carbon.

Iain pointed out that regenerative farming's long-term nature, and multiple external factors, made controls and comparisons difficult. However, highlights observed were an 11% decrease in the value of crop inputs, wheat yield increase of up to 25%, and an increase in sugar yield of 1% from sugar beet operations. Coupled with reductions in cultivation costs, Iain claimed an overall benefit of around €200/ha from Spearhead's regenerative approach.

Revealing that most of the company's land was rented rather than owned, he regretted that money and rent levels 'talk louder than quality' regarding farming practice. That's why regenerative farming education should focus on landowners as well as farmers.

Breakout Session

Sustainable and healthy food from algae



Climate change threatens our current food systems, so might algae be the solution to providing a sustainable food supply for the growing world population, simultaneously decarbonising the food system? Regulatory uncertainty and consumer engagement might be bigger barriers to adoption than technical hurdles, the session heard.



According to **David Bassett**, Secretary General, European Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Platform (EATiP), algae attract more attention than ever before, mainly for their environmental benefits. Expansion requires a better, multistakeholder market approach and a careful negotiation of the Novel Food Regulation.

Vitor Verdelho, General Manager, European Algae Biomass Association (EABA), echoed David's remarks. With more than 30,000 species, agreeing a definition for algae has taken four years. Although development has accelerated since large companies like Cargill and Nestlé took interest, regulatory uncertainty remains a deterrent. He also highlighted the importance of engaging consumers and sensitising them to innovation in this field, while also increasing political awareness of the opportunities offered by the algae sector.

Consumer engagement is a priority for EIT Food too: EIT Food's Head of Public Engagement, **Sofia Kuhn**, revealed the outcomes of a qualitative research on consumer perception of algae and algae-based products. The research shows an aver-

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agely scarce knowledge of the nutritional properties of algae, with some of the interviewees unaware of their edibility. Often associated with Asian cuisine by those more in the know, algae are perceived as exotic and expensive. Knowledge of the environmental benefits associated with their production, compared to other protein sources, is even scarcer. She put forth a set of recommendations to tackle this, including promoting species (e.g. spirulina) rather than 'algae', emphasising health and environmental benefits, and backing all claims with solid science.

Closing for the European Commission's DG MARE, **Felix Leinemann**, Head of the Unit for Blue Economy Sectors, Aquaculture and Maritime Spatial Planning, underlined algae's inclusion in both the Green Deal and the EU Aquaculture Strategy (mentioned by Commissioner Sinkevičius). He added that an Algae Communication was underway, and discussions to raise knowledge and awareness were happening at EC level.



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