

Matt Eastland:

Welcome to a special live edition of the Food Fight podcast recorded here at EIT Food's Next Bite flagship event in Brussels, where the theme this year is building the future of food together. I'm Matt Eastland and today's guest is a familiar face to anyone who's wanted to learn more about the joy of food and community on his incredibly successful YouTube channel. Ben Ebbrell is the chef, co-founder and creative heart behind Sorted Food, a global online community that's been helping millions of people cook better, waste less, and reconnect with food for over a decade. But Sorted isn't just about great recipes, it's a movement. And through the Sorted Foundation, they're taking the ethos of collaboration and turning it into real-world impact, supporting startups, building partnerships, and empowering people to make sustainable choices. So today, in the spirit of building the future of food together, we'll explore what the future looks like and what the rest of the food and climate world can learn from Sorted's model of community-led change. Ben, welcome back and welcome to NextBite. Yeah, this is very cool.

Ben Ebbrell:

Completely different to the basement studio in London where we last met.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, we have definitely had an upgrade here. So for any listeners, we are in a massive glass box. It feels very David Blaine. Yes, yeah, suspend us over a river and we're pretty much there. So, I mean, Ben, I think this is, is this third time? We're just saying it's been a while, but it's felt like not that long ago.

Ben Ebbrell:

Yeah, because every time we get to the end of the sort of 45 minutes an hour and we've still got more to talk about, it's the problem.

Matt Eastland:

Yes, indeed. A nice problem to have, though. So what always stands out for us about Sorted food is that sense of community. I know it started as four mates cooking for fun, and now it's this global movement. But for people who, shame on them, who don't know you and what you're doing with Sorted, can you give us a quick potted history of what you're all about?

Ben Ebbrell:

Yeah absolutely, so if we do the quick maths it's 28 years of friendship and this year we celebrated our 15th year on YouTube with well over a million video views. Congratulations! Which is mad because it did just start as four mates around a pub table talking around food and trying to help each other out with food and I was a

chef and I was helping out the guys on quick simple tasty recipes but fast forward 15 years And it's now a team of 23 people full-time in a studio space in London, Sorted Studios. We've literally just launched the space itself as another kind of arm to the business, which is doing amazing things, B2B and getting brands and charities and NGOs into the space as well. So it's more than just the four of us, but it's more than just that physical space and the 20 odd people. It's a huge community globally who are really enthused and excited and passionate to talk about food, the future food, but also where foods come from and what it means to people. And I think in a very divided world, which we are in at the moment, food is still one of those mechanics that can bring people together.

Matt Eastland:

Connect. Yes, indeed. And you mentioned the future. And as I said, so this year's theme, building the future of food together. What might that mean for you exactly? How, what would that future food look like for you?

Ben Ebbrell:

So, I mean, it's so many things and it is so complex, but the way we've always operated is listening to our audience. We always say it's the you part of YouTube. It's the you that we connect with in the community and that they can connect with us. So it's all about real stories. And therefore we listen. We do as much listening as we do broadcasting on YouTube. And actually, since we last spoke, a big sort of progression we've had is the food, is the Sorted Foundation. And that is essentially our impact arm. And it's designed to do good through food, but purely at whatever matters to our audience. So what is in the hearts and minds of our community? What do they care about? And how do we begin to shift the dial there and do good through food? And that's kind of, I guess, the whole motivation of the silly, fun and joyful endeavors we get up to on YouTube. And there's lots of jeopardy and games and cooking competitions and exploration. But so what if it stops there? A conversation is good, but actually what's the impact that that can have

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, we've been talking about that a lot. Actually, we had some people on yesterday were talking about we have like think and do tanks. And I think that's exactly it. Everyone's trying to move from just interesting conversations and fun to actually making a difference. And we'll talk about the foundation shortly. But is it right to say that it also helps with your kind of that listening ability to kind of hear from people and lots of different stakeholders as well?

Ben Ebbrell:

Yeah, because there is nobody on this planet who has all the answers. And we certainly don't. Even as a team of 20, we don't have

the answers. You have to listen. And actually, collectively, the assorted community probably do have all the answers. There's millions of them all around the world. So collectively, they will have the answers. So if we listen, and then feed into that experts from industry, many of whom are also in the community, and that's the beauty of this 15-year relationship we have with some of these audience members. They might have started watching when they were students, but they're now really, really good at what they do in their own careers and profession. So all of these people come together, and I think if we listen and work together, as a community we can do so much more. I think I mentioned it before and it still rings absolutely true is that sometimes people feel powerless individually but as a community incredibly powerful and that's kind of what gets us out of bed every day.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah and this is all what's part of your sorted squad as well isn't it so you don't just talk to people you co-create with them and can you just tell us how does that co-creation actually work in practice because you've got this massive community I can imagine for a lot of people it feels like they're at arm's length to you but if co-creation is such a big deal for you how do you make sure that people can get involved?

Ben Ebbrell:

Well look, some of it is just through audience behaviors. So we do look at a lot of data on YouTube and what people are watching, how much of a video they're watching, when they're losing interest and going away, where they're watching it. Nearly 50% of our views now on smart TVs. So people are committing, they're on their sofa, they're putting their feet up and they're committing to long form content and storytelling. We don't have to shoehorn in the key messaging in the first five seconds, because they might scroll by, we've got plenty of time to have fun, tell stories, and get beneath the surface. And it's often the people and the passion behind the food, the food and drink might just be the catalyst to get things going. But it's often when you dig in, you find the people and the passions and the culture and the cuisines behind all that that really drives change.

Matt Eastland:

And then, so when somebody does engage with you or you listen to the data or whatever it happens to be, how does that then make its way through, you know, your, what you all do into something else? So what's that, what's that flow through? How do you make sure that you then produce something which really then resonates based on what people have fed back to already?

Ben Ebbrell:

Yes, I mean, the data is only one part of that, as are there's lots

of external trends we keep an eye on and tough job, but eating out a lot of restaurants, because top chefs are often forging these new trends and tastes. And actually, if you follow them, you're often ahead of the curve. But then our audience, they talk to us in comments, but also we invite them into physical focus groups in our studio from time to time. We also do virtual digital focus groups with our squad where we can have thousands of people Join us for a live conversation on YouTube. That's the beauty of YouTube. We can have these, we have a chat rate, which is the number of comments per minute that are coming in as we are broadcasting live. And it's 50 to 60, one a second comments and this engagement that we can then drill into later on. extract out the goodness and all of that forms a pretty good idea of what we should be creating because essentially we're almost just like puppets right the community pull our strings often I think the word the word influencer gets a bad rap right I was gonna say I think you've probably been a bit humble there I'm not sure you're that's the only thing that you know someone's just pulling your arms no but I think People use the word influencer and I think it could have quite a negative connotation and there's lots of really bad influencer practices out there. There's also some really great ones. We don't think we're the influencers. Our community are the influencers because they are influencing the content we then curate and broadcast back out. So if you listen, they're going to influence the content we create because they want to hear it. And I think that goes back to the foundation is that's what we can make a difference in. Change the things that matter to them. And you can only know that if you listen.

**Matt Eastland:**

And that model of, let's say, deep listening, but then acting on that, do you think there are, you mentioned some brands that are working, but are there other stakeholders in the food system, the NGOs, the startups, the policy makers, do you think there's something that they can learn from that, or is this something that can only be achieved if you've got a YouTube channel with a massive audience?

**Ben Ebbrell:**

I think we've probably leaped, well I say leapfrogged, it's taken us 15 years but I think we're at that place now where we've got that and it takes a while to build up that trust and I think it is the trust and the authenticity and those two words are bounded around sort of willy-nilly but actually that really does come down to the core of what assorted community is. Trust, authenticity and a friendship and all the values that come with friendship but other people can do it as well. or partner with a community like Sorted to fast track that. And we've done that. We've recently, we've been sort of working with number 10 Downing Street around some stuff. We've consulted on the national curriculum review, working with the country trust as a brand ambassador and tackling food education in schools. And all of this, we can use and harness our community who are desperate for their opinions to be heard because they care.

well, let's give them a platform and actually begin to shape important things, whether that's policy, whether that's national curriculum, whatever it is, together as a community, we can begin to move that dial.

Matt Eastland:

And you mentioned authenticity. I mean, you've been going, like you said, 15 years. How do you how do you keep this authentic? Because you've obviously grown, you know, and there must have been days when you thought, you know, we could just grow so massive and completely lose touch with people and then the model falls over. How have you managed to keep that going?

Ben Ebbrell:

I think in the early days, it was all about growth and arguably chasing the viral video in the very early days. And we very quickly realized there's no point. There is no value in a viral video. And it is the longevity of building a community over time. We've never gone viral in 15 years, but we've had this steady growth, which means this incredible community are along for the ride. And that's really what matters, which is why After 15 years, we still bounce out of bed and come to work and do something fun. Because filming days in the studio, they're still the best days of our month. We have a handful of them each month that we create the content for the month. But then everything before and after that is helping to shape that, whether it's the research and pre-production, post-production, all the conversations we have with brands, NGOs, charities, policymakers. they're kind of what feed us with the information that then trickles into these videos. Like I mentioned earlier, when we first met, I've come to this event, Next Bite, like a sponge. And I just walk around and I just absorb from everybody as much as possible. And some of that will make it into a video at some point in the future, maybe. But you've just got to have so many external sort of inputs so that when we get on screen, we're not still just talking about the same cheesecake we were 12 years ago. So what?

Matt Eastland:

Doesn't it get confusing though if you're constantly absorbing everything you know how do you then how do you then squeeze that out into something which you know I know you were saying about the audience but that constantly resonates it's constantly authentic does it does it not get overwhelming sometimes?

Ben Ebbrell:

I think the food systems are pretty broken. Maybe broken is unfair, but certainly in this deadlock where industry, retailers, manufacturers, farmers, they are desperately trying to be more sustainable, more productive, more responsible. But unless consumers are there and ready and willing to jump on board, and sometimes to sacrifice something or to pay a little bit more for it as well, but

they've got to understand it. And I think that's the bridge that's missing. So that we constantly feel like that's our mission is to join that bridge between the two. Because without it, I think everyone works really hard in silos. And it feels like you're pushing something uphill, it's really tough. We're actually if we work together a bit more, I think that's what excites us anyway.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah I know 100% that's absolutely everything we're about here as well. You mentioned bridge and I'm just looking at your Sidekick app. So it's designed to make sustainability simple, not overwhelming as we're saying. So do you think that technology can be that bridge between awareness in action and this sort of future that we're all building together?

Ben Ebbrell:

Yes, but you've got to understand what the consumer wants. And we very rarely use that C word, the consumer, or clients, or customers, because for us it's all just the community, the C word. Genuinely, we started Sidekick as a recipe planning app with food waste in mind. That was our motivation. And we came up with this construct of three recipes that share similar fresh ingredients so that you get to the end of three recipes, you know, three days of cooking, and you have zero food waste. Because the half of cabbage you used here, you use the other half there. Two thirds of a pot of sour cream here, you use the other third there. So there's zero food waste. That was our plan. Actually, several years in, it's an incredible app now, and it is so intuitive. It has so many functions that make everyday midweek cooking just easier. Most people love it and become addicted to it because their relationship with food is better. They're inspired more, it's easier, it's tastier, it's quicker. They've connected people to food again. I don't really care. I don't think about the food waste. They care about all the other values that matter to them. Now, as a by-product, it's wasting less food. And what that means is it's saving them money. Now that they do care about. So they save money and have all those benefits. The food waste almost becomes ancillary, even though that's where we started. And we work with so many brands as sponsors. And we always say to them, stop shouting about what you care about and what your campaign is this year or what your KPIs are. think about what the audience want. And even we didn't necessarily do that with Sidekick until it dawned on us that we just got it the wrong way around. We can still do good and save food waste, but we need to dial into the fact that it's easier, it's quicker, it's simpler, it's tastier, it's more inspiring, it saves you money. Oh, and by the way, it reduces food waste.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love that. Let's talk about doing good more then. So the Foundation's mission statement talks about supporting startups and ideas that make food smarter, more sustainable, more

accessible. For listeners who may not know, maybe you can just give us a brief bit about what the Sorted Foundation is, and then maybe some examples of who and how you're collaborating with people through that.

Ben Ebbrell:

Yeah, so it's kind of evolved over a couple of years, but essentially is the impact arm of Sorted. And therefore it's there to do good. And the reason I say good is because there are already so many brands out there, startups, so many innovative entrepreneurial people out there making a difference. But I think they often struggle with a voice and a platform and a narrative, whereas we kind of have that platform, but we don't necessarily have the genius spark that we've just invented the best new thing since sliced bread. So again, it's joining the dots, it's becoming that bridge. And we can't do it alone. We've got a huge audience, they are massively engaged and we know every single day it's having an impact on their lives and their shopping baskets and in that space. But we want to scale it. If this is a real problem, which we believe it is, then we need real, real scale and therefore we need to work in partnership with other organizations. Now whether that's brands and retail partners, NGOs, policy makers, just change makers really, innovators at the heart of it. So many people doing CSR and ESG really well. But we need to work with those people as a coalition because it's not us and them. This is a real deadlock situation with food and our food systems. And if we want a healthier sort of being ourselves and nutrition and a healthier community and relationship with food and a healthier planet, if you wanna tackle all three, no one's gonna do it on their own. So we're really keen that the Food Foundation is something where we bring partners together and that might be you're bringing expertise, you might be a media partner, you're helping beyond the bubble that we have on YouTube, which is huge, but it's still, you know, a drop in the ocean compared to the planet we need to fix. What can we do together that will just begin to really move the dial.

Matt Eastland:

Did you know you'd end up here? Like, when you started off, were you thinking, in some future there'll be some kind of impact stuff we're doing, or has this kind of naturally grown as you've gone along?

Ben Ebbrell:

Across 15 years, naturally, I think it's been more strategic in the last couple of years where we've realised there is a problem and there are not many people, organisations like Sorted, in a position where we can really drive change. We already shine a light on amazing food trends and food start-ups that we think are interesting conversation in formats we have on the channel. And we often do it completely as consumers. We don't speak to them before. We don't have a relationship with them. We buy their products as consumers so we can be completely honest and authentic in the conversation we

have about them on screen. And we then hear from often the founders and the CEOs and they contact us whether it's on social media or LinkedIn or however. and they're just so thankful for the mention because it wasn't an advert because it wasn't a brand sponsorship our community get behind the things they care about and they act on it and whether they just go across to read more or subscribe or follow on socials or whether they literally add their product to a basket we see the impact that the Sorted community make when they get behind something they care about. And we know they care about it because they told us. That's why we're doing it in the first place. And that full cycle is just so powerful.

**Matt Eastland:**

Yeah, I love that. I love that. I mean, I'd love to learn more about the sort of impacts you're having in this space. But you've built the kind of Sorted squads, which I know is a community driven model. So how do the squads work in terms of how they feed into the foundations project specifically?

**Ben Ebbrell:**

Yeah I mean it's one part of the foundation really is the squad and that's that's a percentage of people who are already engaged with us as a YouTube channel and then they've basically said do you know what I would love to be more engaged, more involved and I'm willing to give up some of my time to offer up my opinions and I think that's it's kind of completely flipping the research or insights model that has existed with agencies and businesses for years, where you kind of have to pay people in a focus group to sit around in a quite sterile environment and tell you what they think about a product. Well, in that environment you're never going to get the whole truth you're going to get a bias and what they think you want or the kind of people that are getting involved in that are a slightly already skewed demographic whereas granted our audience is also slightly skewed to foodies but they are volunteering their information because they know it matters and they know it cares and individually their voice isn't heard but collectively it can be so The squad is basically a rich pod of thousands of our community who are willing to get involved in different conversations. And not all conversations. Look, right now we're having a conversation about food education. Who's interested in this? Come and join us. And then we basically have almost like a video questionnaire, focus groups, some of them virtual, some of them physical in our studio. And we just get this wealth of information of people who care, have expertise already, and they want to contribute to something that we can then shape put together into a white paper or report and that can be useful in industry B2B and policy makers and in the case of the food education with a national curriculum.

**Matt Eastland:**

And I think this is obviously the power of your community right that people are willing and happy to just step forward whereas like you

say previously you'd have to pay people for that. Now it's like I care about this. I want I want to help.

Ben Ebbrell:

Yeah, and we don't ever want to take that for granted. We don't want to use that community and manipulate that community, but we're all doing good here. And I think as long as we then feed that back in to make sure that we're reporting back on the difference that that has made and the power that has come of that conversation, then everyone does feel rewarded. Because deep down, everyone knows the system's a little bit flawed. But how on earth do you fix it? Because it is a mammoth task.

Matt Eastland:

Yes, it is. Yes, it is. Well, that's why we're here. So let's talk joy. We like talking about joy. Something that you do better than most, I think, is definitely around this sort of sustainability, joyful piece. So you talk about waste and behavior change through humor, not guilt, which, you know, rightly or wrongly, people tend to resort to. Why do you think that approach resonates a lot more than this sort of doom and gloom narrative messaging that we often see, particularly at the moment? Why does humour work so much better?

Ben Ebbrell:

isn't life hard enough? Genuinely, I think like everything is, sometimes can feel quite tough and quite a struggle and everyone feels like they could be doing better. And like, maybe that's just the Britishness in us, but we're always, oh, we could probably do better. Which is, we don't necessarily have that kind of self-confidence of other nations in the world who, you know, stand up proudly and say we're the best. And we're always a little bit like, oh, we could probably do better. And if you're not careful, it all comes very doom and gloom. Food is the one thing that you can find great joy in. It can bring people together and it can put smiles on faces. You can communicate even if you don't speak the same language. You can sit around a table and eat together or even cook together, street food in another part of the world, you can point and smile and eat and smile and thumbs up and just your eyes can say thank you. That's what food can do. So all we've ever wanted to do is bring joy to that conversation because otherwise, you end up preaching, I think. If it's the alternative, it's doom and gloom. You teach and you preach and people will switch off. We are in an attention economy. Everyone is fighting for attention online. And the moment you are fed an ad, an advert, all that has done is interrupted your viewing habit. You were coming onto this device to watch something that you chose to voluntarily watch. And in front of that, you've been fed an ad. Well, that's already annoyed you. So you're definitely not going to listen to it. You switch off to ads. So stop making ads. Start making really entertaining, joyful content that will educate through stealth and begin to shift behaviors. And

that's all we do. We have great fun doing it. We hope that everyone watching has great fun watching. And hopefully, when you finish the video, A, you want to watch another and B, you'll have walked away with some little nugget of information that's useful and whether in a day, a week, a month or whenever, it changes your perception on an item of food you pick up in a supermarket or you're out and you're walking and you see something in the hedgerow and you just connect food a little bit more to what you eat. All of those things matter.

Matt Eastland:

It's funny because we were talking to one of our speakers yesterday So a guy called Jack Bobo and he's big into outrage in the sense that similar to you He's saying that outrage tends at certainly at the moment It tends to have kind of elevated right to the front algorithms all that sort of thing But there is a better way to do this. Do you find that? that what you do in terms of joy counteracts the outrage, particularly in food, because people seem to be... Food connects people, but it can also divide people's opinions on certain things, particularly when you start talking about old proteins or that kind of thing. So, yeah, does joy trump outrage?

Ben Ebbrell:

It does for the long term. it doesn't if you're looking for a viral hit and back to the point we've not gone viral in 15 years because we don't say this is the world's worst or this is the best let me just say like this is a fun conversation and between the four or five of us you see on screen we don't always agree because that's also kind of healthy and a bit weird in a friendship if you all think exactly the same way so that's helpful but at the same time we don't always have a definitive opinion we leave that to the extra person in the conversation which is the person watching so we're not there to preach and tell you you're doing this wrong you're doing you should do it this way we're just there to offer a catalyst for your own conversation as well as the one we're having on screen so for us Yes, outrage will probably get you more eyeballs, maybe in the short term, but it won't have a lasting better effect.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, well, thank thank goodness for that. We're talking about how you communicate and storytelling. So do you think that the future of communication lies more in this collaborative storytelling where the audience isn't just a listener, but is an active participant? Do you think that's the kind of the emerging model?

Ben Ebbrell:

Yeah, so interesting, so another something I do every year because I absolutely love it is go and spend some time up at Edinburgh Fringe. Yeah, I've never been actually. I've always wanted to go. If you like the city, it's amazing. Love Edinburgh, yeah. like a completely different city for that one month a year there's just so many

additional pop-ups and spaces and I go every year for a few days with some friends and I switch off when I say I switch off I really dial in because you go to so many shows and they're one-hour shows in the dodgy basement of a pub somewhere and it's usually a one-person show written and performed by but they tackle all sorts of quite challenging topics and it just gives you thought matter and you leave it sometimes quite emotionally drained but for days and weeks and months after you're thinking about it and I think that is the power of an experience and a physical thing which is what restaurants can do with food and hospitality it's all very well watching food through a screen but actually I think you need to experience these things whether it's in a basement like a one hour stand-up comedy about drug addiction that actually has you both barely laughing and crying in that hour that's amazingly powerful because of the experience. I think restaurants can do that with food and I think people are keen to try and replicate some of this at home whether it's hosting or with friends or family or whatever or even just Tuesday night getting home and finding the time to do self-care and food can be that. So I think those experiences are really important and they won't go away Even though I speak from Sorted Food and we're mostly a digital food offering, it is those experiences that are so key and that won't change.

**Matt Eastland:**

Well, that's good to hear. Can you extrapolate going forwards then? So 10 years from now, what do you see as like a truly collaborative food system? The model that you're building, this community piece is really incredible, but where do you think this is going to go?

**Ben Ebbrell:**

I think the biggest challenge is consumerism. So all they want to do is sell you more. And the answer to a lot of our problems is not more. It's different, better quality, less, or shifting, sharing. but it's really more, more, more. And yet that's kind of what every brand is desperate to sell you because that's bottom line. So until that, until some really forward thinking, really innovative change-making brands stand up and say, actually we care more about the long-term, not the short-term, it's going to be difficult to shift. But I think if we look 10 years down the line, we're going to have got there. It's just, it's going to be a rocky path and there'll only be a handful of brands sponsors and organizations and retailers that jump in early to really shift this because otherwise it's just trying to get more people to put more stuff in your basket and that's not the answer.

**Matt Eastland:**

How do you sell that with a big brand who's got shareholders who let's be honest they want you to do more sell more that's that's where the profits are so isn't this just a really hard message to swallow?

Ben Ebbrell:

Yes, and I think the challenge is you therefore need to go back to what matters, people. And all the brands we've worked with over the years, it's the people behind the brands that we've really got on with. It's that relationship and partnership to both create something together. that works, and actually, interestingly, 15 years on, a lot of the opportunities with brands and sponsorship we now do, which is a part of our business model for sure, but it's certainly not the only part or the most important part, but they are now opportunities that come to us from members of our community who are now in decision-making roles where they have their own KPIs and challenges and strategies in businesses, and they trust Sorted Food to work with that brand to actually do something and unlock something.

Matt Eastland:

That's amazing. So basically your community is other people who are connecting you back into their brand.

Ben Ebbrell:

And selfishly if you're in a job and you're looking to climb that ladder, how do you do that? Will you succeed in your job? What's the sort of minimal risk in succeeding? Working with someone that you trust and you get on with and you know their values are as true as what you're trying to get across. That is where 90% of the brand collaborations we now do come from. It's people who've been watching for years and they already understand the value that long-form storytelling, narrative, unsorted can do. Because it's not about click the link in the description and buy the product. It's about changing and shifting behaviors. Again, it comes back to the same thing, people. And people can unlock that. So yes, the shareholders and stakeholders are still going to be driving for profit. But if you can get beneath the surface and get a few people, the right people who really care about something on board, and you almost get a coalition, whether it's a few brands or a media platform, or a charity, or all four. and get the right people in the room who actually care about making a difference then we can do something but you need that coalition otherwise everyone's just fighting for the next bit of attention yeah because i was going to ask you about that so you know right people

Matt Eastland:

what would the ideal coalition look like in order to get to this great place? I mean, given your community, the people you're now dealing with, the brands, the NGOs, the foundation work you're doing, is there like a magic group of people that you would want round a table with you to crack all of this?

Ben Ebbrell:

Yes, probably. I don't think we've narrowed it down to a definitive list, but it has to have kind of stakeholders from across the board. We are in our own right a creative studio with a community and therefore media and publishing, but we'd love to have another media partner on board that maybe is less about YouTube and more about B2B industry kind of conversations or a broadsheet or whatever, but a media partner to help tell the stories that we tell in long form video in another place to another audience is helpful. But you do also need these incredible innovative startups. We've worked with the Earthshot Prize for a number of years, but also you walk along the startup village here at NextByte and there's 70 plus amazing, amazing small businesses that are doing phenomenal things in their own little silos. Well, we need to tap into that kind of innovation. But then you also need big retailers who can begin to take that to scale. And then you need somebody who's going to fund the whole project, who's going to make all that possible and actually align themselves to all the values they care about. or at least they say they care about in all of their mission statements, well, come on, let's bring this together and actually do something. And at the same time, you kind of need policy to change as well, because top-down has to happen at the same time as bottom-up, otherwise you'll never get there.

Matt Eastland:

And is there in your travels, in your kind of journey through all of this, is there something you've come across maybe recently like an innovation, a startup, a movement or something which you've looked at? I mean like you talk about the Earthshot Prize for example, where you've looked at it and said that's something to be really hopeful about, these people have got it.

Ben Ebbrell:

Yeah I mean there's lots of sort of incubators that help with that. We work with an organisation called Mission Kitchen in London and they are almost the WeWork equivalent but for food startups where they provide kitchens and test kitchens and they've got all the expertise in packaging and labelling and food safety. So to get new food products off the ground and into market because I think we talk about the foundation, but two main pillars, two things we think we can tackle, because there are so many problems with food that we can't tackle them all. I think that's we have to be realistic, but we really want to dial into sustainable future ingredients. So that's new ingredients that are coming up that are better for the planet and better for our health. And even just walking around here, there's new Fermentation is a great example and it's tackling lots, but also then regenerative farming and whether that's biodiversity or more cyclical economy, upcycling more by waste kind of options, those two pillars, whether it's sort of future sustainable ingredients or the regenerative farming of the ingredients we already have, they're the things we can do and have the most impact on we think. So with that in mind, let's surround ourselves with people who at some point can feed into that system, either the

inputs and the innovation and the expertise, or once we've got those kind of products there, and the audience know about it, and that's our job to tell the story, then somewhere for them to be able to get it, whether that's a retail partner or into industry, where one small twist can equal tens or even hundreds of thousands of meals because they're in hospitality or the service industry but we need all those partners in the coalition really to make proper impact otherwise it's just great storytelling and we already do that and we're already making a difference we just want to make more of a difference because we think it's important and making more of a difference then so

**Matt Eastland:**

let's say, next by 2030, we're still here, we're still having these sorts of conversations. What kind of impact do you want to have achieved by that point? So another, let's say, five years. What's next for Sorted Food, basically?

**Ben Ebbrell:**

It would be amazing if the foundation at that point is self-sufficient. So in itself, it is sustainable. Because at the moment, we are funding all of that because we think it's really important. We think it's so important that we constantly fuel more resource into that. We've got an incredible team back in London who are really driving on that. At the moment, it's not sustainable. We're just doing it because we think it matters. But we need to try and make that sustainable. And by doing that, we can then hugely elevate a whole bunch of real sustainable products that are actually doing things, whether it's on the farms or in schools or wherever. Those impact points can only happen when, for us, the foundation is itself bigger and better than it is today. So whilst we haven't necessarily put a metric on it for us five years from now, Assorted Foundation should be something that new startups want to come and be a part of, that industry want to be resonating with, whether that's reporting on or taking the solutions that come out of it and running with them. But that would be the dream because we know that we're not gonna get there year one, but five to 10 years is an exciting sort of ambition.

**Matt Eastland:**

Yeah well I really wish you all the best success with that and I guess here's a bit of a call to action with people anyone who's interested right get in touch.

**Ben Ebbrell:**

Exactly that and we are all ears and there's any ways you can do that either contact us through the website myself directly on LinkedIn and I can loop you into the right people at the foundation on our side to have all the conversations.

Matt Eastland:

Cool. And a final parting words or advice, you know, let's go full circle. We're talking about building the future of food together at NextBite. So any kind of last bits of advice or inspiration, I say, for our guests in this space?

Ben Ebbrell:

I think the future will rely on innovation and tech, but I don't think we should forget how brilliant it has already been, and the fact that we already have a phenomenal population that we can feed, albeit not to the best of its ability. So I think actually it's not always about completely new, but the new old is also kind of cool. And listening to some of the speakers here, indigenous foods and local foods and sort of heritage varieties are also super important. So I think we shouldn't just draw a line under our current, inverted commas, failure, because it's definitely not. Instead of just thinking about new innovation and brand new, let's look at how we can revitalize some of the stuff that's already worked before, because there's communities out there already doing it really, really well.

Matt Eastland:

Nice. And this very much echoes a lot of the conversation we've had over the last couple of days, actually. People trying to make sure that people remember that things have and are getting better and it's you know it's too easy to doom and gloom over it but it's actually there's loads of positive stuff going on I mean just look around like you know all the innovation all the cool stuff coming out it I think it is definitely It's a time to be excited, I feel. For sure. Optimistic, I think. Optimistic, indeed. What a lovely way to finish. Ben, pleasure as always. Thank you for coming back to the Foodfight! podcast. No, thank you. I'll come and sit in the box anytime you want. Into the big garden house. That's it for this special Next Byte edition of the Food Fight podcast. A huge thanks to Ben Eberle and the Sorted Food team and to EIT Food for hosting a community that's truly building the future of food together. You can find Sorted Food on YouTube, Instagram and at [sortedfood.com](http://sortedfood.com) and learn more about the Sorted Foundation at [sortedfood.com/slash/foundation](http://sortedfood.com/slash/foundation). I think that's right. Thanks, Ben. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it because collaboration starts with conversation. I'm Matt Eastland, and I'll see you next time. Thanks, everyone.