HEALTHIER LIVES THROUGH FOOD
COMPILATION SCRIPT

Hello and welcome to The Food Fight podcast from EIT Food: a show exploring the biggest challenges in our food system and the innovators dedicated to solving them.

I'm your host, Matt Eastland, and this week we're diving into one of EIT Food's core missions: creating healthier lives through food. Our goal is simple but ambitious; improving quality of life by increasing the uptake of balanced, sustainable and healthy diets.

This mission took centre stage at Next Bite 2025 in Brussels earlier this year. The event brought together a remarkable concentration of breakthrough technologies—from alternative proteins to smart labels and personalised nutrition. Innovation is accelerating fast, and with so much happening at once, it's not always obvious where to look first.

So we set out to discover what stood out to attendees themselves, asking which innovations captured their excitement and why.

We began with Pericle and Dean from the Protein Diversification Academy…

[00:01:20] Dean: alternative proteins and, uh, the reason is that it really is at the intersection of so many of the most pressing global and European problems from antibiotic resistance to, uh, healthier foods.

To, uh, land use to greenhouse gas emissions, which are enormous in animal agriculture and, uh, alternative proteins can really tackle all of those and improve our agriculture system, improve our, our health, um, improve life for the animals, uh, out of which, like 80 billion or, uh, are killed, uh, every, every year for food, including just land animals.

So alternative proteins can play a part in all of that, so no matter which reason resonates the most with you. Working on alternative proteins, ultimately tackles all of them.

[00:02:10] Pericle: Yeah, and I will just add that, ~~that, um~~, there has been, ~~I mean,~~ several approaches, several uh, interventions have been suggested throughout the years, and I guess alternative proteins might be the right solution because they're complex.

It's an incredible complex field, and we need complex solutions, complex, uh, let's say approaches to the complex challenges that we're facing. So I guess it's really the most interesting, uh, area to, to focus on at the moment.

I might be a little bit biased here, but I guess the whole field of cellular agriculture and specifically cell cultivated products. So not only meat, but also seafoods. And so it's really, really exciting at the moment and, uh, sometimes a little bit skeptical because the technology is such an incredible, uh, let's say. Element there, uh, is super sophisticated and sometimes they're just a little bit skeptical of because, uh, what they make is just burgers or just nuggets, which are very simple, actually products. But we can also see a lot of startups like think about vowel, thinking about also a lot of research happening in Europe, in academia, and they're really creating super exciting product from fo gras to cultivate the CBOs.

Olivier Tomat from Genopole – a research centre focussed on genomics and biotechnologies shared his nuanced view on some of the different areas of interest in the innovation fields…

[00:03:07] Olige: So that's, that's a great question and I love all, all the same, right?

But the, the thing is. We've got a great generation of scientists. We've got a great generation of entrepreneurs. We are very well, uh, placed as Europe as a geography to sort of carry that, that sort of burden. Um, so I, I'm really into, of course everybody's into precision fermentation, for example, because precision fermentation is sort of related to neur technology.

So we sort of know the in and outs of that, but I'm really willing to push forward, um, uh. Newer technologies as well. So cultivated meat, which is sort of becoming taboo in that continent, uh, is something I'm very keen on and we've got very great entrepreneurs around that. But also, um, something even sort of more nascent.

So molecular farming is a great example, right? It's, it's really at, at the dawn of things, we're already at the dawn of things. A lot of very great and very interesting.

People are working on that. Do we sort of, and I think that's probably why EIT and that that sort of of program exists. Uh, do we push the envelope through that gathering? Uh, corporates, investors. Entrepreneurs, scientists to sort of see where it goes. Yeah, I would, I would advocate for that. Yeah.

New technologies are accelerating forward at an exciting rate, but not all the answers emerge from the laboratory. Sometimes the solutions we're looking for already exist in nature. Here is Deniz Ficicioglu, co-founder and CEO of Wunderfish, which looks at bringing more seaweed into the food system…

I've just come back from Aoga, which is the largest, uh, food and beverage trade show in the world. Um, and what excited me the most there was actually to see more hybrids, um, coming up and, uh, being accepted by industry players. Um, and the openness and the curiosity about the next generation of ingredients, um, that's obviously a huge thing for us.

Uh, as a seaweed company. We've been around for a couple of years and when we started there was very little interest in seaweed ingredients or seaweed based products. And, um, this has shifted completely like with a trend to move to more clean label formulations. Um, there's suddenly also an interest to new ingredients.

And furthermore, seeing, um, supply chains collab, collapsing, or, um, being at risk at least of flavors that we are used to at, at land, not really being, um, available to us anymore. Suddenly the attention shifts to the ocean. And um, yeah. So for us it was a great way to see, um, yeah, that there's a new openness for new ingredients and hybrids.

From cellular agriculture and molecular farming to new ingredients and hybrids, perhaps the most exciting developments are not coming from just one place, but many…

[as technology management expert, I would rather say that, uh, the excitement comes from the diversity. So the fact that we live in an age when you see such a broad portfolio of technologies that consumers and producers have so many fascinating options to.

Develop or embark on a consumption journey, this is what matters most to me. So of course there are, um, certain technologies which are. Maybe overly hyped nowadays, uh, some are on the downward slope of the hype. But at the same time, you know, for example, when you think about resilience and uh, uh, climate change aspects of agriculture, I think this is very timely that, that, that's where I food is focusing and also the promise of biotech and the.

Potential of leveraging all of the laboratory experience, you know, to go beyond labs to start commercializing innovations and use the economic potential of the sector. This is what I would say is really promising. Mm.

That was Krzysztof Klincewicz from the University of Warsaw.

Now of course, the goal of these new technologies is not just to deliver healthier options for the planet, but for people too. We asked food innovation expert Zagorka Blazevska where the industry needs to move next to ensure more people can access nutritious diets…

[00:01:25] Zagorka: Um, personalized diets are necessity for the future because every organism needs, uh, some specificness, uh, how to handle the future. Uh, in general, protein diversification is also one of the topics that we need to consider very, uh, carefully, but not avoiding, uh, protein sources from, uh, real meat eaters.

So reducing the diets, personalized nutrition so we can have a benefit. For healthier lives and um, let's say healthy aging in the future.

Reduction of sugar, reduction of salt, reduction of fatty acids is also a, a need for the future to be resolved. Why? Because in terms of non-communicable diseases that are very, uh, important topic and very urge topic, especially for cardiovascular diseases, obesity, that it's in hive. Prevalence in the future to come. We need to think about reducing or reformulating, uh, recipes and products and reducing those, um, sugar salts and other ingredients that could, uh, influence, uh, the product or the, the purpose for it in order to be healthier in the future and live sustainable life.

One thing which Dean from the Protein Diversification Academy pointed out was that many of these innovations share a common struggle

[00:03:40] Dean: A challenge here that in Europe especially, we need a lot more scale up infrastructure because a lot of those startups are now reaching the phase where, where they need to scale up.

And that's very risky for and private investors. And we really wanna see more funding from governments, from, uh, public sources going into de-risking those, uh, solutions. So, I think we. We wanna see like an acceleration of the field through scale up funding.

Another challenge, of course, is ensuring these new processes and products are actually adopted in order for them to reach people’s plates. Education plays a central role in making that happen:

[00:04:29] Pericle: You're really trusting an important area for us because we as Academy or the Protein Diversification Academy, we just focus on education actually.

Uh, we were super disappointed actually to see, uh, a gap in education in this field. Even within yet food, there were no courses, anything about, um, educational alternative proteins and future of foods. And that's why basically we decided to, let's say stop up and, and try to make something to fill this gap.

And we see a lot of curiosity. Because what happens is even at, let's say conventional, let's say academy, universities, master's students graduate and they have no knowledge about, for instance, cultivated meat or how do you make plant-based products in most of the cases. And so we see a lot of interest to, let's say, hard on, have more education on this topic.

For instance, our last course we got for only 30 seats. More than 340 applicants. So it was a really, really big demand. And what makes them excited is really not only talk about the technical challenges or the technology behind that, but also have a comprehensive approach to education. So think about social impacts, think about consumer accept and the sensory of this products, and that's, I think it's really an incredible wide space that we need to fill as much as possible.

Yeah.

[00:05:40] Dean: And just in terms of numbers, I guess, like there's, there's gonna be over 10 million jobs globally in alternative proteins. Uh. In 2050. So the, the gap is really big. And, and in terms of Germany for instance, um, there's reports from, uh, consultancy group, uh, systemic that there's gonna be, uh, 250,000, uh, new jobs in alternative proteins just in Germany.

So we really believe that not enough is being done to train the future workforce. And we think that this needs to be happening now. And that's why we're, uh, doing what we're doing with the Protein Diversification Academy.

Food companies wield enormous influence over what ultimately ends up on our plates, but consumers still vote with their wallets. When it comes to improving dietary habits, responsibility is often passed back and forth between the industry and the public. So we asked attendees where they believe that responsibility truly lies, and what role the industry should play in expanding access to healthier foods.

Here’s what Deniz had to say…

[00:05:38] Denis: Hmm. I don't wanna blame anyone here. Um, I think, uh, if you go to the supermarket and start reading the labels of the products, uh, that are available to us actively and, uh, you know, questioning the ingredients that are in there, you pretty much, uh, notice that the whole industry is messed up.

Um, and that's because we have built a system that makes it also easy and incentivizes them, obviously, to use the resources we are currently using. At the same time we, we, um, educated the consumers that food's supposed to be cheap. So it's, um, obviously the whole system is messed up and, but I think the producers have the biggest, um, influence on it.

Um. I, I know they have all the, the targets, the revenue targets, uh, et cetera. Um, and, uh, change, even if they, um, announce it publicly on their website, needs to tickle down to every employee. And they also need to give, uh, need to be given the power to, to actually change something. Right. So if we are talking to, um, new product developers, um, they, they have a very clear guideline of what they're actually allowed to exchange or not.

Um, so when I think, um, being a bit more brave and, and, and that part of the food system is really needed and also, um. I know it sounds a bit idealistic, but I don't think we can continue the system in the sense of how we are profiting of it like we're doing now.

We kind of need to think about postponing the revenue, kind of, you know, so maybe we are not gonna have, uh, necessarily a highly profitable product that we are used to in the industry, um, uh, today or tomorrow, but probably in the next, uh, let's say two to three years.

Um, and that's, uh, a mindset shift that needs to happen.

Krzysztof – who works as an activity lead at EIT Food's Consumer Engagement Labs – viewed the responsibility as shared, explaining that it is through collaboration between all layers of the food system that will drive meaningful change…

[00:03:04] krzysztof 6: Explanation would probably somehow refer to EIT food projects that we implement. It's called Consumer Engagement Labs. And uh, we bring together groups of consumers and food producers so that they co-create, they jointly work on discovering consumer needs and wants, and then.

Designing specific products. And, um, now we've been working with, I think over 60 companies in the last eight years. So it's, it's been a bunch of players, but most of them benefited mostly from the fact that it was like an eye opener. So they started. Talking to consumers, they started understanding that maybe, um, there are certain aspects of, uh, producer's responsibility and conduct that they could modify.

Maybe there are ways of making the food better and also of ensuring that there are certain responsibility or sensory aspects that they could deliver. Mm. So the dialogue, the. Acknowledgement of the importance of consumers, this is what really matters here.

You know, with some products that were brushed to the market thanks to consumer Engagement labs, I think outcomes would not be possible without EIT food's project. Like, um, you know, in Lithuania, we, uh, used to work with a group of older consumers who expressed specific desires for products that would not be, uh, nutritionally suitable for them.

Or even save to date teeth. And the company found a practical way of, for example, making, uh, granola from backwards. So something that is crunchy. That does not need to include sugaring standard form, and it's not dangerous to teeth. Or, uh, recently in Poland, uh, a large producer, a dairy company, worked with, uh, groups of consumers, busy professionals who were suggesting that, well, they need something for the coffee breaks.

Something that would be much healthier than chocolate bars or, you know, traditional snacks. And again, they came up with, uh, not one but three lines of functional drinks based on, uh, daily sub products, which turned out to be a huge market hit this summer in Poland. So basically, office workers were just queuing to, to buy them in convenience stores.

While producers can gain valuable insights by listening to consumers, the industry still faces the challenge of bringing people fully on board with the new technologies, products, and ingredients entering the market. To do that effectively, it's essential to understand the barriers that still stand in the way…

[00:11:02] Pericle: ~~Yeesearcah. And~~ as a younger rher in consumer psychology actually of, uh, alternative proteins, um, definitely there are a lot of variables, uh, especially sub psychological construct behind, uh, resistance or acceptance of, uh, alternative proteins.

We can see from representative studies that, uh, there are at least three main, uh, let's say, elements in play. First of all is the trust. Trust is really important. Trust in companies, but even more trust in full safety authorities. And we saw also in Italy what happened with the Farmers' Law Code directly, uh, some months ago, uh, striking against that and or yeah, um, trying to, let's say, pull some more barriers on cultivating meat.

But definitely trust is something that, uh, should be developed both from companies but also from, uh, public institutions. The second element from a perspective is the food technology, neo phobia and your education can really play an important role and we hope we are here doing something on this matter.

And another one is this called natural is Better heuristic, which means that if you think about gonna super market, we looks like we are all natural food, natural. The word nature is always everywhere. We believe that if a food is natural, it means that it's automatically out here, more trustworthy and tastier sometimes even.

And so there is a lot to do to educate people and to make them aware of our own bias and theistic that we have on this matter. So yeah, there is a lot to do here on this. It's a really good question. Yeah.

When it comes to addressing the challenges of the global food system, trust is essential not only for consumers, but for all the different players at all levels of the food system…

[00:08:19] Zagorka: Think of innovators as risk takers on the other way. Round innovators think of policy makers as bureaucracy. So putting them on one table and providing very quick actions so they can sit. This is not something for wider consumer awareness. We are discussing about innovators and policy makers where the trustability is a crucial to start something innovating for the future of food at, at the end.

Consumer's. Guests, the best needs to get the best of it and safest of it. So definitely trustability.

It can sometimes be tempting to focus just on the global networks which have the benefit of scale on their side. However, could local and regional networks play a vital role in this transition. Pete Russell, founder of Ooooby, thinks so. His ecommerce company connects small farms and food hubs with local customers to deliver fresh seasonal produce without the need for supermarkets…

[00:01:08] Pete:

I mean, in terms of health, what it means is that people are able to access food that is just much healthier for them. And one of the main reasons for that is just it's way fresher. And so when you look at nutrient density in food, a lot of it has got to do with the time between harvest to consumption.

And so what we're able to do is facilitate super healthy food, um, in, in that it's often been harvested the day before or even the day of. Delivery to the kitchen. Um, so that's a huge one in terms of health. Um, but we're, we're also working on facilitating is the price and convenience factor. I mean, the, the issue with demand is that.

Everyone wants better food, fresher food, more flavors than food, but ultimately it comes down to pricing, convenience. Am I willing to pay for it or am I willing to go out of my way for it? That's where it's like, Ugh, I want it, but I'm not gonna have it. I'm gonna go to the supermarket instead because it gives me the pricing convenience.

So what we are really focused on is solving the pricing convenience problem. And the convenience problem is solved now within the, within the regions that. Farms and food hubs are running on ubi. Um, you, it's, it's a, it's the shop on your phone delivered to your door. It's the farmer themselves often that deliver the food right to your doorstep.

So they've got the grubby mitts knocking on the door, they're handing the food out and going. They are love. And it's a real connection, just like you would have at a farmer's market, but you're on your own doorstep. Um. So the convenience factor is solved, but at the moment it's solved in patches in certain parts of the country where these farm operations are happening.

And so we need to solve that convenience problem more contiguously across the whole population. The price factor is also solved again in patches. And the reason the price factor solved is because when the farm handles its own supply chain from the gate to the plate. They are collecting the, the margin that would otherwise go to distributors and wholesalers and retailers, and therefore they're getting 100% of the retail value of their food.

They're putting more work in to get it to you, but they don't have to sell it for as much as a retailer would need to sell it to cover all of those overheat costs between the gate and the plate. And so what we're finding is that the, when people are buying direct from the farms or direct from local food hubs.

Um, where the operating costs are really low and the supply chain costs are really low, it's very price competitive. So that's what we're working on. The final part that we need to focus on is, is awareness. And that's driving the awareness to the people who want the food like that, but they dunno. They can get it.

Where does all this leave us? We asked people what they would like to see happen towards creating a healthier, more nutritious food future…

[00:12:50] Pericle: Yeah, I can start. Um, I would like to be very pragmatic here. Sometimes we see a lot of, uh, revolutionary approaches saying, okay, we need to stop eating meat.

You stop eating products. Or some other side just say, yeah, no, we cannot accept, uh, alternative proteins, make plant-based burgers, for instance. So my perspectives a little bit more pragmatic and. Both as maybe in the long term distance talkable centers, maybe, uh, we can move to just non-animal, conventional animal products at the moment.

But we need both and we need a diversify system. And, uh, we always, uh, listen about you need to diversify your business, uh, when you're to bank times that you try to diversify. And we are like, why We cannot also try to follow the diversification approach in food. And so I guess that's what my ideal world would like to have.

Uh, let's say consumers with the freedom and the right not to make their own choice.

[00:13:43] Dean: Yeah, I agree. I, I would, I would like to see consumers, um, I would like to see that the. The choices for con, it's easy to make a choice for a, for a consumer, and that that like a food choice, that, that, that choice is healthy, that it's, uh, sustainably made, uh, that it is, uh, good for the planet and good for the animals.

And I would really like to see that those choices are very easy and, uh, natural for consumers to make. And I think, again, uh, alternative proteins are a great way to do that.

[00:09:16] Zagorka: Difficult question today. I, I, I was watching, uh, one of the digitalization of, uh, of farming concepts, uh, and I was thinking, okay, what will that be in 20 years from now? Um, we didn't expect it 21st century to be the fastest moving century of digitalization, of era of digitalization, but definitely. Uh, if we think of food, it has to have a nutritional value because our organisms need to have all the ingredients necessary for their survival.

Uh, nutritional, well balanced diets are the crucial moment. That in 20 years from now, it's done in one day. We are fast moving forward. If it's done in three days, then it's a lacking process, but I'm pretty sure that, uh, it will come, uh, a possibility to choose your meal in one day and choose well balanced diet in one day so you can have a nutritious and safe food on the plate for every people on the planet.

[00:16:17] krzysztof 6: Well, um, a apart from, uh, the basics, so ensuring, um, environmentally sustainable production of food, that that's what we've covered. I would say one, uh, new topic. Something that will be important for the consumer of the future is, um, well, I'm, I'm not sure if there are many publications about this in the context of food industry, but you know, in online markets you talk a lot about hyper personalization, but it's more about hyper personalization of, uh, communication.

You know, you can get, uh, commercials that are designed just for one consumer, but with hyper personalization in food sector. You could think about the foods that, uh, you like and you know, you are different from any other person in the world. So there might be ways of, um, targeting specific nutritional profiles, microbiome, uh, avoiding allergy factors, and um, at the same time matching the sensory.

Preferences of consumers and future technologies, including 3D printing and different types of, uh, you know, um, sort of home-based setups of, of food that we consume would enable this type of nutrition.

That was just a snapshot of the incredible conversations we had at Next Bite 2025 in Brussels. Next week, we'll be turning our attention to the challenges and breakthroughs shaping the journey toward Net Zero food systems – drawing on more of the inspiring stories we heard at the event, so stay tuned for that.

But for now, thank you for tuning into this week's episode, this has been the Food Fight podcast. If you'd like to find out more, then check out the EIT Food website at www.eitfood.eu and join the conversation via the hashtag EITFoodFight on our LinkedIn channel @eitfood. And of course, if you haven't already, please hit the follow button so you never miss an episode.

END