Matt Eastland:
Welcome to the Food Fight podcast recorded live here at Next Bite 2025 in Brussels, the flagship event from EIT Food bringing together global leaders in agri-food innovation. Join us for the next few weeks as we catch up with some of the innovators and changemakers from the event. Over the course of this series we'll be diving into the big ideas shaping the future of food, from cutting-edge science and sustainable farming to the stories that change how people think, eat and act. And we're starting with something completely new for NextByte, a visiting delegation from Canada. It's a real privilege to welcome such a dynamic group to the podcast and to kick off this series by exploring how transatlantic partnerships can help us go further and faster together. Hello and welcome back to the Food Fight podcast from EIT Food, a show dedicated to exploring the greatest challenges in our food system and the innovators committed to solving them. I'm your host, Matt Eastland, and today's episode is coming to you live from Next Bite 2025 in Brussels, EIT Food's flagship annual event where global leaders in food innovation, sustainability and policy gather to shape the future of food together. It's been an especially exciting year this year and we're here welcoming a Canadian delegation to NextBite for the first time. Joining us today are three key voices from that delegation who represent Canada's agricultural policy, investment, regional innovation and future vision. We'll begin by hearing from Ron Sovey, Corporate Financing and Senior Accounts Director at Farm Credit Canada. Later in the conversation, we'll be joined by Karl Hoyder from Calgary Economic Development and Chris Patterson from AgroSphere to discuss the regional vision for Calgary's new food innovation hub. Welcome to the Food Fight, everyone. You've just arrived here at Next Bite. What's your take on the place and what's your first impressions? What stands out for you here?

Ron Sauve:
Maybe I'll kick it off. Matt, thanks for the question. To be honest, it's my first time actually here in Brussels.

Matt Eastland:
Okay, wow.

Ron Sauve:
I'm quite amazed with the city itself and the venue here, like the venue itself here with the Gar Maritime and just the people and the attendance out there and the guest speakers. It's definitely going to be an exciting couple of days here in Brussels and looking forward to participating and being part of the next couple of days here together and really trying to, I think, bring awareness to Canada. and how Canada can really support the global food needs globally basically as well with our land space and population. And we're the second largest country globally. 10 million square kilometers, a 10th of that is fresh water. So we definitely have the

resources and the land available to really assist with feeding the world. I think with Farm Credit Canada, we are a crown corporation. We have 3,000 employees east to west across the country. We really provide lending for the primary producers, is our primary mandate, but also the other part of our mandate is really on the corporate commercial side, on the agri-food business space, to really build out facilities, processing. You know, we do a great job in Canada of, I said earlier, we grow cucumbers, you know, we have wheat. We produce, but we don't actually make, you know, facilities. So we're really focused on bringing more processing, I think, to Canada. So instead of just shipping cucumbers across the border and buying back pickles at three times the price, we actually want to really focus on, we've got the land and the resources to actually do so.

Matt Eastland:
Amazing, amazing. I really didn't know that. That's fascinating. And Chris, from your position in Brussels, how would you describe the current Canadian agri-food landscape and how is it evolving? It's obviously, like you say, it's an enormous, enormous resource, but how is that changing?

Chris Paterson:
Yeah, so Canada, just like Ron was saying, has a history of exporting commodities. We're very good at growing beef and wheat and canola and pulse crops, but we have to get better at adding value. And so just a few years ago, as an example, there were no agri-food investment funds in the prairies. Really? There was no ag-tech accelerators. We, you know, we lacked a lot of the resources to validate cool ideas or startups, you know. So a lot of that has evolved now. So we have several agri-food investment funds. We have ag-tech accelerators. We have you know, ways to validate their ideas and move efficiently into commercialization. So it has been evolving, but still at its infancy stage. So when I look across the floor here, I see a great example of, you know, an evolved ecosystem, more so than what we have available. And I think we have a lot of the ingredients we need. We got a major market, we have a talent pool, we have you know, the urgency right now in terms of trade disruption and demographic shifts and there's a lot of things going on in the world right now that are the urgency we need to move the needle fast right now and we have capital to support it.

Matt Eastland:
Is it the urgency which is the reason that is pushing everything now or what, can I ask why it's taken this long for the sort of innovation in the sector to really take off? Is it because the urgency wasn't there or was there another reason?

Chris Paterson:
We were joking this morning over breakfast that like, you know, we've been to a lot of events where we very accurately identify all

the frustrations and the problems at events and roundtables and conferences and everything, and then we all go home. And next year we get together and talk about all those same problems. The actions that fall out of those thoughtful roundtables, have been lacking like so the initiatives to do stuff and I think there's you know but the frustration with that has been growing and now some external factors have given us, has forced the urgencies I think and we do have this baseline that's got better in the last few years so we have a baseline to build from now. We're not starting right from scratch. We understand Innovation, you know, we've seen some companies be successful in our sector. We've seen other companies fail. We've learned from that. So I think now we have a lot better idea on what it's going to take to scale up the innovation process.

Matt Eastland:
Okay. And do you see similarities between the innovation challenges that you're facing in Canada and Europe, or do you feel that Canada is quite particular?

Chris Paterson:
Canada is unique. We are part of North America. Our biggest trading partner is the USA. Our trading patterns go north and south a lot. We have a I don't know if, I will call it a higher regulatory standard than the US, but they might be offended by that. But it's just that we, other people would say we've got a more red tape bureaucracy, but we do have a stricter regulatory culture than the US. and far more strict than, say, Brazil or something like that. So if you're trying to commercialize a new innovation, a lot of companies would just shortcut to commercialization and go to a market like Brazil, where they can move very fast into cash flow. The US would be, I would say, middle tier. And we're on the other end of the spectrum, where it takes a long time to get through the regulatory. And I'd say Europe is more like Canada in that way, to try and get, so the standards are very high, and I think we're matched, we're equals on that front, so the timelines of innovation and how you approach innovation would be more similar to European companies than American counterparts a lot of times.

Matt Eastland:
Okay, so there are some good synergies then, so that's encouraging.

Chris Paterson:
Well, that's just on the, I would say, the culture of innovation and the opportunity I know, well, Kyle will highlight this a lot more, but I mean, we're just saying like a flight from Calgary to Eastern Canada is five hours to get to say Amsterdam or Paris, it's like eight hours. So, it's only a few hours more, right? So, geographically, it's not a huge issue and there are a lot of really good examples of opportunities to increased trade and it has been increasing. We just heard this morning, we've actually doubled the

amount of trade between Canada and EU just in the past year. Is that right? Really? In the last year? Yes. Agriculture trade. So that's a data point right there that shows the potential is there and it's being realized already. So, you know, the trade disruption we're experiencing with U.S., it was painful, but I think it's created this urgency to look elsewhere and it's working. So, and innovation is a big part of that. The leverage we get off investments into innovation is I might have to fact check this, but I believe in the farm credit report that was done on innovation investments is 17 to 1 is what they've measured to be the return on investment dollars for our economy. And EIT has published a similar data point which says in Europe it's about 13 to 1. So anyways, it shows that the returns are there to invest into innovation. So we're looking at how to approach innovation. We believe that through the European model here in EIT Foods, there's a model here that's been successful. It's got a lot of proven processes. What is it now, eight years or something like that they've been at it and trying some things that worked and things that didn't work and rejig and try again. So the hope is that we can learn from that in Canada. and not have to recreate the wheel right from scratch, we can shortcut to a proven model with a partner that we want to deal with. So that's why we're here.

Ron Sauve:
I think that's key as well. You know, as you talked about Chris, like we are the eighth largest producer globally of food, you know, in Canada for, you know, the size of Canada, but we don't tell our story enough. You know, as you talked about Matt, it's our first time here at EIT. So I think as Canadians, we don't tell our story enough. We've been too dependent on, you know, northern, you know, southern kind of food transportation for the last few years. But we have to do a much better job east-west in Europe here as well with the, you know, we've got, there's a lot of interest in Canada right now, particularly Alberta, you know, because of the price of land right now. So, and what we're really focused on, As Chris talked about with ag innovation and facility builds, we found the last probably seven or eight years, there's a more intimate need right now to really move forward. And probably a lot more, we're seeing a lot more government grants for companies that want to build facilities and process facilities in Canada, in Alberta. There's a big push from the Canadian government right now to really move forward, you know, from our ideas. Like, I think we thought we learned from COVID that we're a bit of a captive market. And, you know, COVID went away, went back to the same old ways. It depended on kind of one partner. We need diversification right now. We look at the opportunities within Europe to really diversify right now.

Matt Eastland:
It sounds like Canada is right on the cusp of something really big, which is very exciting. You talk about stories. Let's tell one of those now. Ron, Farm Credit Canada recently launched a $2 billion Canadian investment fund. Incredible achievement, you know,

congratulations. So what does that signal to you about Canada's priorities in agri-food innovation and food system transformation? Is this just the start then?

Ron Sauve:
No, I think it's just a start and more to come. I think kind of what we're really Finding with that also, Matt, is there's a lot of startup companies right now that are lacking some capital for the companies right now as well. So historically with farm credit, we definitely will do primary lending to primary producers. Our role is more in the corporate side with larger facilities, larger build-outs. But with a $2 billion announcement, we're really also looking at not just debt equity, but also capital equity right now as well. So some of the startups, they're lacking some equity into the company as well. So the larger corporations, we can leverage some of that money towards the startups as well to inject some equity into it basically as well. But primarily also on the innovation side, as Chris talked about as well, huge opportunities on the innovation side to really look at efficiencies that way as well.

Matt Eastland:
And Kyle, I'm coming to you in one second. One last question. Is this changing your risk appetite, do you think? Or is Canada starting to feel that you can take more gambles, let's say? And to what you were saying, Chris, about some things might not work, but you've got to start somewhere, right?

Ron Sauve:
I think what you find with farm credit, there was a lot of expertise in agricultural. within the entire team. So I would probably say more calculator risks. I'm fine and we're doing things now we might have not looked at four or five years ago. Because as long as we can tie it to the ag sector, either the inputs or the outputs, or the revenue from that product, so we're actually seeing, we're actually probably taking more calculator risks, whereas maybe a few years ago it was something we'd maybe shy away from, but it's something we're actually focusing on right now as well, because we realize the sector needs the support. And with us being a crown corporation, we're a crown corporation, and we give report to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, so really our mandate really is to support the ag industry, basically.

Matt Eastland:
Amazing. Thank you. Kyle, you've been waiting very patiently over here. So Kyle, Calgary specifically has positioned itself as a city of innovation, especially around agri-food and blue food. So what does that mean in practice to you? What's driving the momentum? You know, why is Calgary the place to be in this space?

Kyle Hoyda:
Yeah, so that's a great question. And it's great to hear, you know, Ron and Chris to share about, you know, Canada and Alberta in general around the innovation and what's kind of going on. And so within Calgary, Calgary is a bit of a unique history that we are predominantly known for oil and gas. And that's been kind of the backbone of the city for a long time. And it's been good for us. But at the same time, being really reliant, which is funny enough to say kind of the story of Canada, too, being overly reliant on one thing that works really well for a long time until it doesn't work like we're experiencing today, that when that was no longer something we could rely on, Calgary took a really long-term view of how do we really reinvent ourselves and focus on the next generation of Calgarians. And what we did was we created the Opportunity Calgary Investment Fund. So that's a really unique municipal investment fund. The council showed a lot of vision at the time to provide OSIF, Opportunity Calgary Investment Fund, with about $100 million Canadian to invest in new industries, in innovation, in new companies that are going to help to provide new economic opportunities and a long-distance view of where do we want to go as a city. With that original $100 million, they created innovation hubs, such as Life Sciences Innovation Hub, Energy Transition Center, Aerospace Hub, and now help to attract some really, really exciting companies like Dufthansa Technik from the EU, some other emphasis from India in the quantum space. And so what we look at is how do we position Calgary for long-term sustainability and long-term viability? And one of the really, really exciting things that I think we're really proud of is in a recent report, Calgary now has more people employed in tech than in oil and gas, which never would have been something anyone would have thought of at any point in our history. But we have more people by a few thousand now that work in the tech sector versus the oil and gas sector. Still a very large employer for us, and not something that we're shying away from, but we have a diversified economy that most people don't know about. And that's a really important thing for us to be able to share and showcase, is that there is diversification, and with that, innovation has been the linchpin of this. we actually at Calgary Economic Development, we created the innovation strategy. And so we're the stewards of the innovation strategy for the city of Calgary. And with that, we have other hubs that we've identified to create as well. But this next one that we're focusing on is that ag tech and food tech and agribusiness sector, because we have a lot of strengths. We have a really dynamic capital system within the city that predominantly, almost all of the ag tech capital on the venture capital side, flows through the city. Whether that's VCs that are funded by FCC or other VCs or family offices, Calgary has a long and storied history and attachment to the agriculture and agribusiness sector. Whether that's our stampede that I would encourage everyone to come and visit in July.

Matt Eastland:
My colleague Lucy has told me about this.

Kyle Hoyda:
It sounds amazing. We'll give you a cowboy hat if you show up. Everyone gets to pretend for 10 days. We can all be the biggest cowboys. And so, you know, whether it's Stampede or just like a great culinary scene or all these different things that we have this relationship. And so even people that have made their money in oil and gas, they still have that connection to the country. They still have that connection to the land. And so with that, there's a lot of emotional attachment to it. And so we're looking at that and saying, you know, just like Ron brought up, OK, well, we're great at growing wheat. We're great at growing barley. We're great at growing canola. We grow the best beef in the world. What do we do with that next? So how do we take that next step? And that's what brings us here to, you know, bring it back full circle back to EIT and to Brussels today, is we want to engage more with places that are really good at taking that next step of food production. How do we turn that into, you know, that next level of, you know, if you're in Europe, all of your pasta, it might be made in Italy, but that Durham's coming from Canada. Well, how do we make a bit more here, right? Because we buy it right back and bring it back over the ocean. And how do we tell that story more effectively? The fact that through really innovative farming practices and our cooler climate, that Canadian grain has to be transported across the Atlantic 17 times. This is a recent report by the University of British Columbia, that it has to be transported 17 times to have the same CO2 score as grain produced in Europe. Wow, really? Just through advanced farming practices, scale, and technology that we added to our farming practices really early on. So how do we tell that story that we produce some of the best quality but also best environmental products? And so now it's that next stage for us. We do that really well. Let's bring in that European expertise for the food innovation and creating products. And whether it's indoor farming or other things like that, we want to continue to expand. And we think that Calgary can be the base point for that because like Chris said, It's an eight-hour flight. We have direct flights to Amsterdam, direct flights to Paris, direct flights to London, that you can connect really easily into Calgary, take advantage, like Ron said, of our cheaper land, great water access, really booming population, and find your next opportunities in Western Canada, in Canada in general, but obviously I'll be a little biased here and say within Calgary. But we think Calgary can be that nexus point that unlocks capital, unlocks innovation, unlocks all these different types of things to create that next wave of opportunity for us, for Canada, and for the European Union.

Matt Eastland:
Amazing. Sounds like a really great place and time in Calgary, particularly at the moment. So that, yeah, I'm totally in for the cowboy hat thing. Just staying with you very, very briefly, Karl. So you talked about the transition from, you know, major focus on oil and gas and now moving much more into kind of the agri tech space. How has that transition been? Have people embraced it?

Kyle Hoyda:
Yes and no. It takes effort, right? When you're trying to break what we're traditionally used to, it takes time. It is definitely happening. I mean, for a long time, if it wasn't like an oil and gas win, you maybe didn't hear about it very much. But more and more people don't work in that sector within the city, right? It's still something we celebrate. It's still something that we really hold dear. But we are starting to celebrate those other wins and those other really, really cool companies that we have in Calgary. We're starting to finally celebrate that we have this amazing veterinary school in the University of Calgary that has an 18,000 acre cattle ranch with 1,000 head of cattle on it. It's a heck of a gift. We're starting to celebrate the fact that we have this amazing tech sector that's, for the last two years in a row, we've been the fastest growing tech sector in all of North America has been to Calgary. So we're starting to celebrate that. It just takes time. You know, Canadians, one of our biggest faults is we're not necessarily the biggest, loudest, outgoing celebratory people about our own achievements. So we need to exercise that muscle a bit more. And that's, you know, part of what we're trying to do here is tell our story more effectively. But we're starting to get there. It takes a bit of time, I think. This last year has kind of shook us a little bit awake and we've had to kind of wake up a bit here. And so we're doing a better job of it. It's, I won't say the battle's won by any means, but it's a process and we're starting to get there.

Matt Eastland:
Okay. Thank you for that.

Ron Sauve:
I think what you even speak about too, Kyle, is like just see, you know, transitional skills, our workforce in Calgary, you know, probably the, you know, the last that I heard for Alberta or Calgary is the average age of 34 years old. You know, we have overall a younger population geographically versus the rest of Canada demographics. So, a lot of transferable skills in regards to what they're moving to with curiosity and different roles right now as well, but lots of opportunity, you know, with the population of Alberta and the land space, basically, as well. you know, a lot of bright folks in Calgary that are just curious for other opportunities for employment. Thank you.

Kyle Hoyda:
And actually, sorry to interrupt you there, but that's one big thing when it comes back to the overall innovation strategy of Calgary. It's that we think there's a lot of transferable skill. We have a lot of engineers. We have a lot of really highly educated people within the city that maybe haven't necessarily looked at something like agribusiness, agri-food as an opportunity. So one of the things that we're trying to do is that we're not just creating these hubs,

we're creating what we like to call nodes that have a number of different resources within that node and a hub being one of them. But the idea is that a really good idea in agribusiness might be transferable to life sciences, which might be transferable to energy transition or hydrogen. And we want to create a city where ideas collide with each other and that we can take someone that has an expertise in oil and gas exploration, or aerospace, or XYZ types of things, and see if it can't work in another industry as well. So that transfer of knowledge and information, that's one of the really big drivers of what we're trying to do innovation-wise within the city.

Matt Eastland:
It sounds like a very enlightened position because often those, it's hard to get those people to collide or collaborate in a way which actually works. So the fact that you're already halfway down that journey is amazing. And then just talking about the hubs themselves. So Chris, so AgroSphere is a leading development category's new food innovation hub. Can you tell us a bit about what the hub's going to do and maybe a bit on what ecosystem it's intending to support?

Chris Paterson:
Yeah, well, you're getting a bit of a sneak peek here because officially it has not been launched yet, but it's no big secret. We've been giving people warning that this is happening. So yeah, we are going to be building AgroSphere as the hub of the prairie innovation ecosystem for agri-food. So there's innovation assets across the prairies. The University of Saskatoon has some good stuff, the Green Exchange in Winnipeg and stuff. On a global level, we want to be competitive as the prairies. And it's very consistent crop types and farm types across the prairie. So that's the geography that we thought we could be truly globally competitive. So we are going to be the hub of that innovation ecosystem in Calgary. And there's a lot to be said there, like the talent pool and the cross-training availability. I know I was recently working with one of the global life science companies And, you know, the talent pool that we tapped into to build the digital product we were trying to build, you know, we had to find data scientists as an example and some programmers and some modelers and stuff like that. So they were people who didn't really identify as, oh, I work in the agri-food sector. They consider themselves, you know, engineers and data scientists and programmers and everything, but they were all in Calgary, you know. So how did I find them? I went to a bunch of tech events where data scientists would hang out. And that's how I did my recruitment. It was actually difficult. But that's an example of where, with AgroSphere, this process of sourcing that talent pool should be more streamlined. And I've also been in the investment space. And when we say agri-food investment, that crosses over a lot into, you know, it could be material sciences, it could be avionics, you know, like if you're wiring up an airplane or a jet, or wiring up an autonomous sprayer, you know, the skill sets are the same, right? So we got that deep talent pool right in Calgary. And we also

got a lot of the head offices there for the big global companies. So we've got probably 10 companies there that are global in agri-food that are based in Calgary. So we got really good access to the market through that. And we can drive a half hour from downtown Calgary and be on world class beef, canola, wheat. Drive another half hour and you're in irrigated potato and onions and stuff like that. And so we got really good market access. So that's very attractive for companies from Europe, for instance, that would want to access that big market. We got, you know, 100 million acres out there and a lot of beef and stuff like that. a huge market for a company who's got a good innovation. So to facilitate that we can attract companies there and vice versa, we've got companies that have already built innovations there that have worked well in that market that are eyeing up the EU market saying, well, there's, what is it? 400 million, what were you saying, people here? It's a big market here too, in terms of adding value and having a consumer market. So AgroSphere is trying to exploit those opportunities. and better align the capital investment with the investment opportunities. And so to do that, there has to be some, say, some validation assets. So we've got like, just as an example, the Olds College Smart Farm, you know, that didn't exist not very long ago. Now we've got a place where we can, if it's a farm ground type investment, or they got a beef operation there too, we can test stuff there and work the kinks out of that technology. and prove, does this work or not? And can we do that repetitively before we go to the farm? Because one of the challenges with innovation in agriculture is that it's a seasonal business. There's a lot of risk on every angle, whether it's weather risk, or interest rates, or tariffs, or whatever. It's high-risk, capital-intensive, seasonal, and so they are not the ideal place to be testing technology. They are busy, and they're working with very little wiggle room. So testing that technology pre-commercialization is critical, and those assets are now there. That's where Agrosphere can coordinate, whether it's somebody coming in from the EU or whether it's a local company, either way, to say, we can help you connect with capital, the right kind of capital. You don't have to, like a lot of entrepreneurs today spend maybe 80 or 90% of their total time chasing capital. And a lot of them, as an investor, I'm looking at the type of companies they're chasing to be investors. And they're the wrong type of capital to begin with. And they're not very good at chasing capital, right? So as AgroSphere, we can help guide them to the right kind of investor and coach them a bit on how to do that. And vice versa, the investors don't want to waste a lot of time talking to a whole bunch of companies that haven't really been validated yet and stuff. So there's a lot of that kind of stuff and it's accessing the corporate innovation and corporate venture arms. And it's a lot about how do I find an actual farm when it comes time for commercialization? And some guys think, oh, I got an Uncle Larry that's a farmer. It's probably the wrong kind of farm. So having access to the, there are innovation, well, innovative farm networks, right? So farmers that are interested in being that first guy in. And they want that competitive advantage of earlier insight into innovation. and exploring that technology before their neighbor gets there.

Matt Eastland:
Right, that's interesting.

Chris Paterson:
And so being able to know who those guys are and how do I find them and how do I get a connection, that's another way to facilitate innovation. So these are the kind of things that Agrosphere is looking at. It's market access, it's validation, it's connections to capital. connections to talent pool and developing those things further. And so it's an ecosystem map, you could call it maybe a concierge service. And then there's a lot of things that EIT, for instance, has done, you know, in terms of events around that. and like XPRIZE type challenges and, you know, like hackathons and, you know, different things you can do to accelerate the process and take advantage of those assets once they're there. You know, how do you get that, you know, 17 to 1 return on capital to be 25 to 1? You know, like, there's ways to do that and that's what AgroSphere will be. So it takes a lot of involvement from the universities, the corporates, the farmers, the entrepreneurs, the investors. So it's identifying who they are and facilitating the connection between them and then accelerating that whole thing.

Matt Eastland:
Got it, got it. And is the idea then to scale that nationally or are you looking for it predominantly to solve regional, local challenges but just in a new way?

Chris Paterson:
Yeah, the low-hanging fruit for us is the prairie region, which is, you know, it's 100 million acres, so it's a big chunk to start with, but it's very consistent across that geography, so that for us is, the prairie region is the right geography to start with. Now, it has the potential to certainly go national, but we don't want to get too diluted too quickly and lose our focus, so we want to focus on where we can be truly globally competitive and be the best at something. So we don't want to, you know, start with mediocrity, right? So we want to say what can we be the very best at that we can attract talent because they know we're the best. We can attract entrepreneurs to move there because we're the best. Those are the areas where we want to start and focus very strongly on those. And then we can start saying, how can we make something else the best? But that'll be a little later. We've got to get the flywheel turning profitably first.

Matt Eastland:
Sounds wise, really. Sounds like the right place to start. And we started to talk about the connection between Canada and Europe and EIT Food. Kyle, so why would you say now is the right time for

Calgary to connect with Europe and what makes EIT Food the right kind of partner for that ambition?

Kyle Hoyda:
Yeah, so, I mean, I think we've talked a lot about a lot of the why right now earlier on, you know, trade instability, the Canadian world really got thrown upside down there with comments and tariffs and things like that when we are so overly exposed to one trading partner. And I don't blame us for the position we found ourselves in. We're next to the largest consumer in the world. You're going to sell products to them if they want to buy your stuff, right? And it's easy to ship it via highway or train south. But what that led us to is a point where we are over subscribed to that trading partner. And so when instability does come, It creates issues for us. So when we look at why the EU and why EIT, it's again back to what we talked about earlier. The Calgary has a lot to offer. Western Canada has a lot to offer. The Prairies have a lot to offer. And we get to a point where even Ontario, Toronto doesn't necessarily know about what we have to offer in Canada. So I don't expect EU to know about what Calgary can offer. So we need to do a better job of telling our story, showcasing the fact that we have incredibly sustainable crops and incredibly sustainable operations, high quality, and we also have a lot of opportunity. You know, the fact that we can get a 17 to 1 return on investment in innovation says that there's a lot of opportunity for that to potentially dilute down, or if we do a better job of it, grow it even higher, like Chris said. And so for us, how do we create that awareness? How do we attract investment into the Calgary region and showcase that? Well, that awareness comes through groups like EIT Food, you know, co-funded by the European Union. It's an amazing event that we're at here today. So when we look at how do we create that awareness and how to create those connectivity points, EIT is a great central partner for us there that we want to continue to move forward with to create that awareness and opportunities and connections and conversations. to have those touch points, right?

Chris Paterson:
The fact that- And it's the largest in the world at agri-food innovation. Exactly. Yeah.

Kyle Hoyda:
Ecosystem. Exactly as you said, Chris. And the fact that something like over 20% of all, you know, all venture capital in the food tech sector came through EIT funded or EIT partnered companies. You know, how do we bring that innovation and build off what we do really, really well already and take that next step. It's through partnerships like this. And as Chris said, we've already doubled in this year, our agri-food exports to the EU. We think that can grow. So how do we continue to grow that? How do we showcase the opportunities? It's through partners and partnerships and opportunities and events like this that'll help us take that next

step.

Matt Eastland:
And you mentioned opportunities. So what do you see are the most promising opportunities for that deeper alignment between Canadian and European innovation ecosystems? And I guess I'm talking not just in theory, but in practice. Where are you trying to focus? Ron, maybe I can ask you.

Ron Sauve:
Yeah, I think that's key. We're here to learn. We're here this week to learn also as well. I think, you know, within the Canadian economy, currently with our GDP, 7% of our GDP is driven by the food sector. We've got one, you know, of every nine employees out there, there's one that's actually employed in the food sector, basically. So it's a big sector for us in Canada, but we're here to learn, to grow. I mean, things are working well in Europe. You actually have things figured out. We're kind of playing catch-up right now as well. It's really for us, it's awareness communication, you know, simply just talking about like the doors are open, we're open for business, and we've got the land, we've got the resource, we've got the availability. I think it's just events like this where we can make some key connections with some key partners. I think as Chris talked about, it's not just a discussion, it's a follow through from that point as well. It's not just a discussion, it's like how do you kind of follow through with that and learn in regards to what's been working well over here as well.

Matt Eastland:
Do you see any kind of key thematic areas which you're going to focus on? In EIT Food and certainly on the podcast, we talk about regenerative agriculture, we talk about all proteins, digital traceability. Are there any kind of key themes, let's call them, that you really want to go after?

Chris Paterson:
Yeah, I was just going to follow on to what Ron says, and then I'll answer that. But just as an example, Kyle and I were in Paris the last two days, and just said, well, who should we look up in Paris? And there were a number of meetings we had there with like an innovation hub there, agri-food innovation hub, a couple of startups in that sector, one that's more, I would say, more of a scale-up size company, and all of them are immediate opportunities to do what we're talking about here, this two-way, so they either want access to the Canadian market, or, you know, there's the exchange of capital, And so that's an example of what this opportunity is and how it'll happen. And you asked about like sector. So I could like digital and AI thing or AI models. That's a really big one right now. That's an opportunity that's there and there's a lot in the autonomy and the AI leads us into, you know, gene editing kind of

stuff, you know, a lot of building traits and stuff. And how do you do phenotyping a lot more efficiently? Like the whole plant breeding process takes a long time. It's very labor intensive the way it's traditionally been done. Using AI, you can really accelerate that. So those are examples. In the material sciences, I know we've been looking lots at, you know, plastic replacement products and that's historically been, there's nothing as cheap or as effective as plastic until, you know, now there's, we got like, like I seen a hemp resin the other day that's being used for, you know, snowboards and stuff like that. And it's price point is good, it's quality is better, you know. So we're starting to get to that level of stuff. And then in Canada, we grow a lot of pulse crops. that protein fractionation and what do you do with the meals and stuff like that. So we're getting a lot more sophisticated. I think maybe the one thing that we fight a lot is the hype bubbles, like when somebody spots something good. The money rains in really big, and it builds these crazy hype bubbles. And then everybody says, wait a second. This isn't as good as we were told. And the capital leaves. And then the whole sector gets a black eye and has a bad reputation. And yet, if you take away those little hype bubbles and the crazy capital that entered the arena for a short term, if you delete that from the sector analysis, There's actually been a really nice high performing sector there for a long time. It's been tried and true for quite a while. If you remove the hype bubble, and that's what the media doesn't like to do. They like to report. Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Oh, this is amazing. And now it's terrible. You know, that's what that sells a story better. Right. Yeah.

Matt Eastland:
Yeah, absolutely. And can I just talk more about events like these? So, you know, how how is important is it to to you to have events like Next Byte when transatlantic partners meet in person and I guess moving beyond that, beyond policy I guess into relationship building. Is it these sorts of events that really drive things or are you looking for things which provide that deeper collaboration?

Kyle Hoyda:
Well, I think we can all say we love our teams meetings to death, right? So getting in person is always a more enjoyable experience for us. And I think being able to have that conversation just goes so much further when you do have that one-on-one connection point. You know, technology is great. It allows us to have, you know, things that we never would have had before, but I think we've also, we're starting to realize more and more of it that human contact point is so critical for these types of things because you just, you lack a lot, right? It's nice to know that everyone here is wearing pants today, things like that, right? We're all fully dressed, so. You don't get that on team spells. So it's valuable right and you never know who you have a conversation with also that's you know we had a couple of great conversations last night at the opening drinks and that reception there and you just have conversations that go lead into other directions that you weren't expecting and you meet

people and you Just exchange ideas and when our big mission is to create awareness There is no better way to create awareness than have those conversations in person When I can see the person that's engaged in a conversation that goes so much further than sending an email or something like that So I think by all means conferences and those types of events, you know, they've got to face a future here it's gonna be different but opportunities like this, and I will say I'm purposely choosing the word opportunity a lot here because I do think this is something for us to build off of, that events like this create times where we can really drive value for Canada, for Calgary, for the European Union, to showcase that we can be the stable trading partners that we both require today. And we can rely upon each other more than necessarily other places. And I think that's the really exciting thing for us, is just to create that awareness and showcase that opportunity and showcase that reliability as well.

Ron Sauve:
And it's the relationships, as you talk about. But I also want to thank the entire EIT team here, Matt. It's been amazing. It's good to hear. Attending the event last night and the next few days here, it's just been an amazing experience. And just the welcoming group of team members EIT actually has to ensure that we're connected to the right people and having the great conversations like this has been a fantastic experience for us as well.

Matt Eastland:
So that is very, very pleasing to hear. I'm very glad that that's been happening. Thank you. And then talking about collaboration, but from like specific events to to more general. If you each had to sum up what collaboration work across geographies, sectors and mindsets, what What makes it work? What would you say? What are you looking for? What have you found from your experiences in Canada, but also here in Europe, which is really working?

Ron Sauve:
Maybe I'll start with that. To me, the key word is trust. Trust is key. You've got to trust the partner, trust the collaboration, and open communication, and transparent communication at the same point, basically, as well. So I think trust is key, but then from that, building the rapport from that point going forward.

Matt Eastland:
Okay.

Ron Sauve:
Anybody else?

Kyle Hoyda:
I was going to say the same thing, to be honest. So I'll keep mine pretty tight. I was going to say trust. I think especially right now where we are at in Canada is that we're a little, uh, little fingers are a little burnt. We're lacking a bit of trust in the world. And so that's the opportunity that we have similar, similar laws, similar culture, similar trading habits that we can have trusting conversations and be trusted partners. Um, that's what I think is really important to us is to have that trust. So yeah, great.

Chris Paterson:
I will say awareness. I think there's a lot of really good collaboration opportunities and you don't know about them. We're not doing this often enough to be aware of these opportunities, so to drill down and have these meetings is critical, just to be aware. We think of ourselves on the other side of the world What relevance do they have with us? And yet, when you're in a meeting talking, all of a sudden, all these things, oh, this is good, this is good, you know, so that awareness is what is working good by being here, and it's like a a lot in a short amount of time. So I think for it to be effective, it's all about the follow-up following this. And that's where the Zoom meetings and stuff can be very efficient way to follow up, but you don't accidentally bump into people on a Zoom meeting and you don't build any relationship equity and you don't build that trust on a Zoom call. These kind of events and the follow-up is how you build the relationships that turn into really solid opportunities.

Matt Eastland:
I think that's the great thing about innovation, isn't it? It's borderless. That's the joy. And then one final question, which I very specifically wrote down here. So what's your hope for the future of EU-Canada cooperation in the food system? And more importantly, what do we need to do to make that happen? Who would like to go?

Kyle Hoyda:
My hope, more, I guess, simple, you know, deeper connection. I think my hope would be that Canadians learn that it's, you know, it's only an eight-hour flight to the EU versus, you know, it's how many hours to get to the States or something, too, right? It's easier to get here than we realize. And there's more, like Chris said, more in common than we realize with our farming practices or food production and things like that. I think no one would fight if we could get some more French quality baguettes or things like that in the Calgary grocery stores. So maybe that's a hope for the deeper trade relations.

Matt Eastland:
We've come to baguettes. I love it.

Kyle Hoyda:
But yeah, I think just more, doubling that trade again, creating more opportunities, more investment, And just a diversification of the economy. So how do we get there? I think this is the starting point. It's awareness conversations. I'll steal what Chris said, creating that awareness, and then steal what Ron said, that builds to trust.

Chris Paterson:
Nice. Thank you. And building a roadmap. I think if you're an early stage company, or an entrepreneur, or even an investor, And you're thinking conceptually about, wouldn't it be cool to do business with somebody in Europe? That might be pretty intimidating. Like, how do you start that process? Who do I call? What do I do? And what don't I know about this? I think to know that there's a roadmap on here is you go step one, step two, step three. And by the way, we've got connections. And they'll support you. Their job is to help this happen. what unlocks a lot of these opportunities is building that roadmap out and having people whose purpose is to help that thing happen. So that's what we want to do a lot more of. And then make sure people know it's there. And it's a two-way street. It's also for the company in Europe that says, oh, wouldn't it be cool to hit that canola market in Canada and my product would explode in size? Well, how does that actually happen? Because they might not know who to call in Canada, right? putting those things on a map and saying, here, this is here, take advantage of it, and we are going to, this is our job to help. So that's what I think we're I'm hopeful that that's going to be there and a very obvious path on how to engage in business across this map here, so.

Matt Eastland:
Love that. Thank you very much, Chris. And Ron, any closing words?

Ron Sauve:
Yeah, I guess, you know, the hope is this is just the beginning. Fundamentalist opportunities down the road and collaboration and partnership and trust back and forth together and just the awareness piece basically as well at CEA. So that's my hope. It's just we're at the starting point here of a long future together kind of thing.

Matt Eastland:
Amazing. Well, thank you, Ron, Kyle and Chris. It's been an absolute pleasure talking to you. I have learned a ton about Canada, the relationships and the potential, I think, that that exists here. So, you know, in your vision and kind of leadership in this space, it's just brilliant. So thank you for coming to Next Byte. Thank you for coming to speak to us on the podcast. And thank you, everybody, for listening to today's episode. This has been the Food Fight podcast.

If you'd like to find out more, head over to EITfood.eu and follow the hashtag EITfoodfight on LinkedIn or connect with us on our channel at EITfood. And if you haven't already, please hit the follow button on your podcast platform of choice so that you never miss an episode. Thanks, everybody.