

Marie Louise Lendal:
Welcome to Next Bite 2024.

Sera Roversi:
We need innovation that involves everyone. And we've seen generations fighting. It's your fault that you're going to save the planet. No. We all are living in one planet and we all have to find a solution together.

Anya Gandi:
Darwin did not actually say survival of the fittest species. He said survival of the fit species. And fit is plural. A fit species fits their ecosystem niche.

Tony Hunter:
I believe there is not a problem on the planet that cannot be solved by the correct application of technology.

Matt Eastland:
Welcome everyone to the Food Fight podcast. It's Matt Eastland here and here we are in Rome at EIT Foods flagship event where we have gathered all of Europe and possibly the world's game changers in the food system looking to make the food system more healthy, sustainable and resilient. So as I sit here, there is all sorts of bustle. There are people moving in and around. We have three different tracks of the day across our missions, healthier lives through food, net zero food system and fair and resilient food system. We have an agri-food tech ventures place upstairs where all the startups and the entrepreneurs are at. We also have a startup village. I'm literally looking at possibly a hundred different startups showing their wares. We've also got a meeting space for people so they can connect which of course is one of the key things that you get out of this event and basically there's a whole load of stuff going on and what we're doing here on the Food Fight podcast is we are going to be distilling all of those great conversations down into some episodes for you all so if you weren't lucky enough to attend the event today and tomorrow then you can still listen in. What I'd like to get out of this personally is I'm really looking to connect with those people that are really pushing for change in the food system. And I want to hear from them. I want to hear the passion. And I really want to know what they are looking to get out of this event as well, because that's the kind of stuff we should be pushing.

Richard Zaltzman:
Welcome to Rome. Thank you very much to the few Romans here for hosting us. I think Everyone's pretty much got in a Roman spirit. We're definitely on Roman time already This is our very first next

bite you can get a bit twisted on that But it's the first time we've brought the whole community together in one room bringing together our entrepreneurs bringing together all of the research and the incredible universities and the broad ideas that we've got, bringing together an astonishing range of speakers across a packed agenda to have one single conference that brings the food community together to look at some of the difficult challenges and the incredible opportunities that face us as a community as we look ahead. So why NextBite? Why do all of this? There's acute challenges every day on many people's plates across Europe and the world. It's not everyone who can afford food on the table three times a day or even once. And when I read statistics such as 20% of people in first world countries are dependent on food banks, that is a really stark challenge for us as a food system sector to look that in the eye and say, this is simply not acceptable. Something has to be done. And we are the people here to do it.

Matt Eastland:

So for a man who literally needs no introduction, although I am now going to introduce you, Richard Zaltzman, CEO of EIT Food, back on the podcast for the second time.

Richard Zaltzman:

Welcome. Thank you, Matt. Second time in a year. I feel very privileged, actually. You are indeed very privileged.

Matt Eastland:

So we are at EIT Food's Next Bite event in Rome. Amazing. Can I ask you, why is this event important to you and our community?

Richard Zaltzman:

We are very much at a cusp, we say this very often, we're at a cusp, something's going to happen. This time, now, we really, really are, for many reasons. If we look at the state of play, we can see that risk has moved into damage, that what was a probability is now a reality. So if we just look at the floods across Europe or the droughts that are affecting South America, the food system is now, has moved from this might happen to this is happening. As a food system community, we have to move into action now. We haven't been passive, but I don't think we've been active enough and we haven't had the ambition for change at a global scale that we really need. So why now? Next bite is... I think putting some real energy into the wheel to say, yep, we've been a great community, we've done some amazing things and now we really need to think much, much bigger. We need to put ourselves on the line and say we're going to tackle these incredibly difficult problems and use everything we've learned, we're not throwing anything away, use everything we've learned to take a big step forward into addressing the food system challenges that we face. At the same time, to bring a note of optimism, we're seeing more and more incredible opportunities from

the really simple, re-embracing farming techniques that have been around for thousands of years, to the deeply technical, the opportunity from the new technologies we're seeing around AI, around satellite technology, et cetera, giving us the opportunity to change an awful lot quicker. So it's a confluence of positives that say, yes, there's a lot on the table, and we can do a hell of a lot with what we've got.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, and actually just talking about all the tech, we are literally facing the startup village behind us, where there must be over 100 startups just here, you know, itself, which is amazing. So that's the kind of the community aspect, Richard. Just personally, what are you specifically looking forward to over the next couple of days?

Richard Zaltzman:

Well, I mean, as you say, startup village is always something to just wander through and just be amazed at what people have done. And every single startup is a journey of huge commitment, of love, of passion. And the hundreds of other startups who are in our community who are either here attending or couldn't make it, every single one of those entrepreneurs and their stories and the teams is a fascinating story to go and talk to. So I do love the opportunity to go and talk to startups and just kind of wish I had that bravery to do something that they do. Yeah, I think I'm also looking forward to this being the first of many. So for us, NextBite, it's a very different concept of the event. We're moving from actually doing a partner event, is where we've come from, to doing a community event, much more open, to this being what I hope is one of the two or three really significant moments in the food systems calendar. We're going to go into COP in Baku in a few weeks, actually, where we run the Action on Food Hub in Baku. And I want NextBite to be part of that escalator that the food system, people like us who are in the food system, choose to use as a high point of the year to get inspired, to make connections, to feel that sense of momentum. And that's what I'm hoping for from this event.

Matt Eastland:

The dialogue around food systems change and the commitment around food systems change has changed even in the last year?

Richard Zaltzman:

Yeah, completely. Far more people are involved in the dialogue. So when I think of COP last year was the first food systems COP. And now when people are looking at their value chains, they're realizing how integrated they are into the food system. So we're talking about logistics, food system logistics is a key component of global supply chains. People are understanding the critical part that food plays. I feel also that the dialogue understands the complexity of food systems more. So previously we were, I feel, an outlier, a bit of a

wait till tomorrow problem because let's focus on decarbonization, let's focus on renewable energy, let's focus on zero carbon transport, let's look at the urban environment because food is there but kind of out the corner of our eye, it's there but it's kind of difficult and we'll leave it. Now, maybe because other decarbonization elements have built momentum and are, certainly in the case of energy, more mainstream, food has muscled its way center stage and said, hang on, we're the next kid on the block. We need real attention on this. And I sort of feel many more actors are involved in the food systems dialogue. But we're still at a dialogue stage in many cases. So for us as a community here, I try to say this in my opening address, which is you're going to get lots of ideas and inspiration, but the key is how we translate that into action. How do we how do we leave here so that configurations of organizations of people of ideas convert into action and actually affect change? And that's probably next step for us.

Matt Eastland:

Okay, amazing. Thank you, Richard. And just a perspective from your own journey you've been on with EIT Food. So you've now been CEO for almost a year. Almost a year. As you look back, could you give us some of your proudest moments from EIT Food? Anything that kind of really jumps out for you?

Richard Zaltzman:

Well, I'm going to go with the obvious and I think walking into the hall today was a real kind of cold shiver down my spine moment to think of. We're here in this astonishing venue in Rome. It really is amazing. We've been oversubscribed for this event. So it's moved from an event to a true conference. And I just look at the organizations who are choosing to be here. The people I'm speaking to here say, I met a bunch of people in New York, said, oh, I'll see you in Rome. It's, wow, okay, I didn't. Oh, they were already going.

Sera Roversi:

They were already coming.

Richard Zaltzman:

Amazing. And then to see that translate into this incredibly vibrant atmosphere we've got here. I mean, I don't know whether you'll cut some of the pictures into the podcast, but it's amazing. It's a proper grownup. conference and so we as EIT Food have come from a journey of we had events for our partners, we brought our partners together, then we opened the door and brought our community together. I think now we have brought the food system together truly here at Next Bite and it's a real kind of cold shiver moment for me. and to think that, okay, what does this mean going forward? It's really exciting. If we can do this today, just imagine what we can do with all of the organizations who've been here. If we can align

their passion and their energy, we're really onto a good thing. So that, I would say that the momentum we've seen in our partnership is fantastic. So I love the change in the conversations we've had over the last year from seeing EIT as we used to be as a grant funding agency to seeing EIT as in a neighbor of change and partners coming to us and saying Can we do this and the answer is nearly always? Yeah, of course we can do this and that I think is something I I really passionately wanted to bring that mindset to the company and so to start to Have that play back to us by our partners is is really exciting and our partnership teams who are involved in that

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, that's great and it's amazing to see the growth in the partnership and I know that the team are doing an amazing job. How pivotal do you think that EIT Foods role is in food system change? Is our role to drive the change or are we guiding the change? What's your perspective?

Richard Zaltzman:

Well, first of all, we're one of a group of organizations who exist for the purpose of effecting food systems change. So whether you're a world food organization or whether you are an amazing organization, Food Tank, who did a lot of the programming in New York, there are a lot of organizations, WBCSD, who have a food agenda or a partial food agenda. So number one, we're one of a community. One of our key roles, I think, is to align that community. And honestly, in many cases, we're arm wrestling for the same space. And what I'd like us to do as EIT Food is do what we're brilliant at, which is orchestrate. We're starting to see some of those partnerships come together. We have a formal partnership with the World Economic Forum. We're building towards a really strong partnership with OP2B around the regen landscapes. So one thing we can do is support the alignment of those voices so that we are stronger together as a group of organizations who care about the future of our food systems. And then what do we do? Well, look around. We bring this amazing innovation community to bear on the three challenges we've put on the table. Net zero food systems, healthy lives through food, so health and diet, and reducing risk and improving resilience in the food system. We bring an amazing community to focus on those on those issues and we bring innovation as action to tackle those issues Many many other organizations can take action to scale and we need to partner with them better many organizations can bring ideas or policy influence and we can weave that in but we we take innovation and we convert that into action for transformation and I think that's If not unique, we're certainly in a very, very good position to do that with real focus and real intent in the areas where we're choosing to play.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, I mean, I agree with you. And I think it probably is unique. And if it's not, like you say, I definitely think we are the go-to

community for that. So that's great. And as an employee of EIT Food, I think it's the reason that people work here. And can I ask then, looking forward, so what's next for you, you know, so if I was to interview again in another year's time, which I'm sure I will. I'd love that. Thank you. What's next for you and where would you like to take EIT Food?

Richard Zaltzman:

My personal desire is to see us and our community continue to build momentum for change in certain areas, to demonstrate it can be done, to sow the seeds of inspiration that, yep, if you commit to something and you back it and you bring innovation to bear, we can create that rolling momentum for change. So if we look back in five years' time, what do we want to see? I'd love to see some real momentum that we're no longer involved with, like the regenerative landscapes. We might not have a part to play in that. Or some elements of the protein transition, or these startups are now being written about in Forbes. For me, that's the case. Build momentum and let that momentum carry the community forward. So you'll probably hear me talk quite a lot about momentum, and that's a long process. So when we do talk again next year, It's going to be a check-in on are we building that momentum and what does that feel like? Who's involved? What does it feel like to be in this community as we move forward with Momentum?

Matt Eastland:

As we heard there from EIT Food CEO Richard Zaltzman, NextBite isn't just another conference. It's a pivotal movement aiming to spark transformative change in our global food systems. Now, continuing this journey, we shift to an inspiring conversation with Sarah Reversi from the Future Food Institute. Sarah delves into why Rome is the epicentre for progressive food dialogue, the integral role of regenerative practices and the power of open ecosystems to drive systemic change. Sarah Reversi, thank you very much for being on the Food Fight podcast. It is a pleasure to have you on the show.

Sera Roversi:

It's a great opportunity to spread this strong voice today with you.

Matt Eastland:

Strong voice, yeah. And for our listeners, Sarah has been doing some amazing work, doing a lot of talks, a lot of speeches, and unfortunately, as a result, she is losing her voice, but you sound fantastic, so come on. So Sarah, before we get into the meat and bones of what we're talking about, can you tell our listeners a little bit about who you are, what you do, and the initiatives that you founded? And I say initiatives because you are doing a lot.

Sera Roversi:

Absolutely, yes. I'm Sara Roversi. I'm the crazy founder of an ecosystem called the Future Food Institute. We started 12 years ago. Finally, 10 years ago, we established this first organization. It is a non-profit organization. And within these years, we have been working a lot in education, community development, towards, let's say, our living lab that we're pushing forward, the integral ecological development model, and last but not least, supporting innovation at every level. We're working with industry, we're working with policy makers, teachers, schools, educators, farmers, fishermen. We need to innovate in a new way and so this is the reason why we foster innovation and innovative models to approach food.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. When you find time to sleep, I have no idea. So you're one of our keynote speakers at NextByte and it would be really great for people attending the event and for listeners at home. Can you give us an outline of your speech and any key takeaways that you'd like to leave with people?

Sera Roversi:

I shared a little bit with the audience today why we're here, why Rome, the United Nations established the headquarter of food, because at the end, the headquarter of food is not in Geneva, not even in New York, so there's a reason why it's here. historical reason, but also probably within the decades, many other reflections around food have been developed starting from here. If I'm thinking about slow food and the need of creating a more fair, clean, and tasty, and say, good food systems, started from here. And again, we're here today celebrating World Food Day, but not only, building a better future together. So this is exactly what I was sharing and I was sharing the need of spreading the real voice to accelerate the pace all together towards more regenerative models. I'm not only talking about regen farming, that of course is the starting point because we know that we cannot live healthy in a sick world. And through regenerative farming, we are starting from taking care of the health of our soil, taking care about the essential elements needed for human life. And from there, starting an approach to sustainability that is a little bit more complex, but I think it's needed, is the integral ecological approach that needs absolutely a clear political vision. then needs to start from regenerating the ecosystem, the environment. Then needs to point out the health of people that is strictly connected with the health of the planet. Talking about humans' fertility, longevity, not to extend life but to live healthy for the entire life. And of course, how much all of this creates prosperity that touches the third part, so the health of our society. Then we go on with our wheel of integral ecology, and we know that there is a very important pillar, that is culture, preserving living heritage, traditional culinary practices, and last but not least, economy. Because at the end, when we're talking about food, we're talking about the largest employer in the planet. And food is absolutely related to economy. And when we're talking about

food, we're talking about a critical political thing. Because related to food, we can talk about peace, we can talk about war, we can talk about massive industries and many other interests.

Matt Eastland:

It's like we always say on the show, it all comes down to food. Food connects everything and it drives so much and that's why changing the food system is so important. And we talk about regenerative food systems, not necessarily just regenerative farming, so I love that. And you spoke about ecosystems and we hear a lot about ecosystems. So can you explain from your perspective how important is collaboration between stakeholders in achieving systemic change? And have you got any great examples of how that's been really successful?

Sera Roversi:

Ecosystems are fundamental and need some specific rules to become successful. I've been seeing many different ecosystems or claims as ecosystem in the past that were closed ecosystem. An ecosystem closed die. Ecosystems survive and thrive thanks to generosity, and you need to feed the ecosystem. And you need to keep it open, to open up to critical perspective, to debate. And this is exactly what is needed to create a better, sustainable and inclusive food system. Nowadays we see that we have plenty of opportunities and I think that NextByte is exactly celebrating all of that. And what we're going to see around Rome at FAO and so on, I think wants to really create space for all the different voices, from indigenous communities to big industries, from the small one to the big one, from policy makers to the industry, from academics to start-uppers. And to achieve the goals, we need absolutely to work together. And we all know that it's not true that one solution fits for all. And probably we made too many mistakes in the past, approaching food in a silo mode. Since the beginning, we at the Future Food Institute, Struggling, maybe, from the financial perspective, because if you want to keep it open and create an ecosystem for investors, it's tougher to understand where I'm investing. We wanted and we fight to create an open platform, and this is exactly what we find in our Living Labs. Living Labs, we host and facilitate the creation of projects that are really connecting every different player within the ecosystem. And sometimes, we don't own the project. we become just facilitator but this project maybe is useful and impactful on our community so we try to support it and this is the kind of approach that we need to see we need generosity a lot because to make the shift that is needed we need also to have more people that can share and invest also on other success, other people's success. Sometimes we have been too much egocentric in the past, and now we need to shift this mindset.

Matt Eastland:

I love it. No ego, yeah, it's exactly what we need. Really inspiring. And you spoke about your living lab, which I love the

sound of this. So can you explain what have you learned at obviously a very high level about this new type of harmonious living And can that be applied on a wider scale, do you think?

Sera Roversi:

Absolutely, yes. The European Commission created a framework and created also a specific definition about what it is a Living Lab. What drives me crazy is that now many fundings arrived to support Living Labs and we see Living Labs that are virtual Living Labs. A Living Lab that is virtual, that is not alive. We need Living Lab with people there. And in the Living Lab, the interesting thing is that everyone can learn something. There's not a teacher, but the idea is to learn and thrive together. Living Labs are spaces where basically you host innovation, and innovation is not mandatory that is going to be just digital, because innovation can be in models, in policies, in many different level of approach. and you prototype and co-design and test with your community. And something that we really love to foster in our Living Labs is the multi-generational approach. We have been always thinking that innovation touches only youth, young people. We need innovation that involves everyone. And we've seen generations fighting. It's your fault. You're going to save the planet. No, we all are living in one planet and we all have to find the solutions together. So this is actually what we are trying to foster as much as we can. So hearing the voice of every generation and overall connect all the different players within the ecosystem. This is how we manage the Living Labs and the reason why we try to foster as much as we can this kind of collaborative places.

Matt Eastland:

Next we turn our attention to Anja Gandhi from the Net Zero Institute who brings a wealth of experience in guiding global businesses towards sustainability. Anja's journey from her hands-on work in ag tech and renewable energy to her roots on a regenerative farm offers a unique perspective on how companies can shift their strategies for a more sustainable future. Anya Gandhi, welcome to the Food Fight podcast. Thank you for your time. For our listeners and anybody attending this event afterwards, can you just give a little introduction to who you are and what it is that you do?

Anya Gandi:

Absolutely. So my name is Anya Gandhi, as you said. At this moment, I work as a sustainability consultant for the consulting firm Carni. So I'm working with companies around the world to transition their supply chain, their operations to be more regenerative and more resilient. My specialty areas are regenerative agriculture and biodiversity. Prior to working with Carni, I built and led the sustainability department at Anari Agriculture, which is an ag tech startup unicorn. Before that, I worked at Google, where I worked with the Renewable Energy Department and their Global Accelerator Program, a lot of focus on climate tech and ag tech companies. And

as one does before joining Google, I see laughter. I was a cowboy on regeneratively, as well as conventionally managed farms and ranches in Australia, New Zealand, and Texas, and Oklahoma, and Montana, and Oregon, and a few other places. And this background maybe makes a little more sense when you know that I grew up on a regenerative farm in Oregon.

Matt Eastland:

You see, this was going to be my first question.

Anya Gandhi:

Yes, yes, I'm preempting. And I grew up on that farm. My dad is a doctor, my mom's a nutritional counselor, and my dad is also a solar inventor. So my entire life has been a bit of this nexus between clean energy and agriculture and human health and nutrition.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. So this was all predestined for you then?

Anya Gandhi:

It's my parents' fault. Nature versus nurture, it all comes back to them.

Matt Eastland:

Well, thankfully it's all gone the right way and we are going to have to talk more about what it takes to be a cowboy. But in terms of the event, so you're speaking on a Healthier Lives Through Food track as part of one of our missions. So can you give us a little bit of an outline of the discussions that you're either going to have or you'd like to have and any key takeaways that are going to come up?

Anya Gandhi:

So my topic is One Health, and the idea of One Health is that we cannot separate human health from the health of our ecosystems that we are a part of, or of course animal, and I will add plant health. So we are all intertwined. I think this is such a fundamental paradigm shift because we have a tendency, and it's easy when we live in cities and we're surrounded by concrete and we're in these big buildings with fluorescent lighting to feel like we humans are separate from. There is a tendency to feel like not only are we separate from the natural world, but that we can control the natural world. And that is a very dangerous illusion because we are part of ecosystems. I like the fact that Darwin did not actually say survival of the fittest species. He said survival of the fit species. And fit is plural, a fit species fits their ecosystem niche. And we have lost track of what our ecosystem niche is. And so we are throwing every ecosystem around this globe out of whack and

it's threatening our own survival as well as we are in the sixth grade mass extinction, right? So we have to change what we are doing and so my topic here is talking about how can businesses incorporate this ecosystem perspective into their operations into their supply chains, and how can it actually work for businesses because. What we have seen is that in the 20th century, we could externalize a lot of the cost to not acting like healthy ecosystem members, but with climate change, with bad years becoming the new normal years, what we're finding is we just can't. And most companies can deal with a failed harvest in a couple of locations every year, but when you start getting multiple failed harvests and far more illness in animals that you rely on, and these kind of accelerating, amplifying crises all at the same time, which is what we're seeing more and more of, what we find is we desperately need for business health, we desperately need the resilience that comes when you invest in regenerative practices. And so when you invest in regenerative practices, you get things like anywhere from 5 to 13 more days when plants and crops are healthy during drought periods. When we have healthy soils, that soil can help the plants emerge even when there's been flooding. And so the field doesn't just turn into a puddle. And so there's very practical dollar outcomes for businesses as well as for farmers when we act like healthy ecosystem members. And so a lot of my work now is helping businesses look at their unique situation, their formulations, their supply chains, and figure out better ways of doing business that's going to serve them going forward.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. And I was going to ask you actually, you know, are businesses embracing this? But I guess based on what you've just said, you're sort of saying they don't really have a choice, right? Because there is a strong business health reason for doing all of this.

Anya Gandhi:

There is, and there are a number of business health reasons. Consumers are shifting. We just did some carny research and we found that in the United States, well over 80% of consumers would try a sustainable product if it was placed next to just the regular alternative. So if they're given that face-to-face option. If it was priced at the same price, 30% of those would pay more if it tasted good. And then in Latin America, those numbers actually go higher, and over 90% of Latin American consumers, or survey respondents at least, are willing to try the sustainable option. And so what we're seeing is that where sustainability used to really be a price premium play, there are actually increasing opportunities to drive volume and to drive movement towards your brand. Of course, the regulatory scenario is changing. So we're seeing consumer changes, we're seeing regulatory changes. And then as I've been talking about, the risk profile for companies is increasing exponentially if they don't start to actually treat the natural world with the respect that it deserves. Having said that, there is still a choice

that companies have to make, and it's really a, do you invest now and see huge ROIs and dividends on that investment, both in terms of reduced risk and from the consumer and regulatory compliance, or do you wait until the last possible moment? Do we have to run off the cliff for companies to go, I actually physically cannot operate in a climate-changed world

Matt Eastland:

So there's a massive risk element to this as well.

Anya Gandhi:

We're going to be forced to change one way or another. Right now we have a moment where we can choose what change looks like and we can take a path that is going to be, frankly, nicer for us humans and a more pleasant life. Or we can wait until we can't choose that road and we are forced to change by climate change.

Matt Eastland:

Fascinating insights into how businesses can embrace regenerative practices to build resilience and recognize the importance of integrating with the natural world. Now let's turn to Reniera O'Donnell from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, who offers a unique perspective through her leadership in circular economy initiatives. Reniera O'Donnell, welcome to the Food Fight podcast. What a pleasure to have you on the show. Thank you very much for joining us.

Reniera O'Donnell:

Thank you very much for having me.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, as I say, it's great to have you on. Before we get into it, can you tell our audience a little bit about who you are and what it is that you do at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation?

Reniera O'Donnell:

Sure. So I am the food initiative lead at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which basically means that I lead all of the work that we do in a circular economy for food as part of our mission to accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

Matt Eastland:

were one of our keynote speakers. And so for any people who couldn't make the event or our listeners in general, could you give us an outline of what you were talking about and any key takeaways that we can have?

Reniera O'Donnell:

Sure. So I was really talking about the Big Food Redesign, which is the work that we've been concentrating on at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in the food space over the last couple of years. About three years ago, we wrote a report called the Big Food Redesign Study. And in that, what we basically say is the way the food products that we find on our supermarket shelves are designed is ultimately the catalyst to the supply chain for what farmers grow. And so if we want farmers to grow things in line with nature to be able to rebuild our soils and our natural ecosystems, we really have to think about redesigning the food products that we have on our supermarket shelves. So our work is all about understanding what food design is, because it's a bit of a novel concept. We've developed a framework to help guide food producers in thinking through the kinds of circular design strategies that they might be able to use that then send that key message down the supply chain that says to farmers, farm in line with nature, we've spoken to you, we know what your landscapes need and we're designing what's coming out of those landscapes into the products that we're going to then sell to consumers. So that was the kind of basic framework. We also then a year and a half ago, we launched what's called the Big Food Redesign Challenge. No idea where we got that name from. And we basically laid the gauntlet down to the sector and we said, look, you guys have said that this framework is great. So go forth and use it and design or redesign food and drink products. so that actually nature is better off. And we developed an assessment framework working with the Sustainable Food Trust and Howgood. And I remember at the start of the whole process, and somebody said, well, how many products do you think we should be aiming for? And I was like, stick a finger in air. And I thought, hmm, 100? And everyone thought, you're never going to get that. That was a really big number. And actually, we had 186 product submissions. So we have kind of smashed through all the targets. And even better than that, the data modeling supports the theory that you can design food differently and nature is better off. So we looked at eight different metrics such as greenhouse gas emissions and soil quality and blue water usage and labor risk and animal welfare and a bunch of other ones and across the board the cohort of successful products within the challenge are showing up as better than their industry standards against those indicators. So that's kind of what I was talking about.

Matt Eastland:

That's amazing. And it's obviously been embraced, this challenge. I mean, what kind of stakeholders are you getting coming into the challenge? Is it all producers, or is it a whole mix of people?

Reniera O'Donnell:

So when we opened the challenge, we had 400 different companies apply to take part. And they were everything from the large, fast-moving consumer goods companies, through academia and innovation

organizations, and down to kind of people working in their kitchen who had a product idea. And we whittled it down to about 230 organizations who were actually making food products. Right. And we took them on a learning journey. And so we've had, you know, engagement from organizations big and small from across the value chain. So you've got kind of some small farmers who are selling direct to consumers. You've got other sort of slightly larger, I don't know, ready meal suppliers who have fundamentally transformed their supply chain as a result of this. We've got some really big fast moving consumer goods companies and everything in between. And then we've also managed to engage some retailers. So we've got some retailers in the UK and in Latin America who have offered six months of free shelf space to a selection of the successful products. So I'd like to think that we are touching on most parts of the value chain at some point through this process. Incredible.

Matt Eastland:

And have you got any products out yet from this or you're just waiting for them all to come to market?

Reniera O'Donnell:

Well, they're all being officially launched to market at the end of January. They will be on shelves from a similar time, if not the last week of January, the first week of February. However, some of them are already on the shelf, so there are already some products out there that came through the challenge that fit the criteria so that they can say that they are designed to put nature first. There are some that were low-level production, maybe just in a local shop, but now have the ability to scale up. There were others that were pure ideas. created as a result of the challenge. I love it when that happens.

Matt Eastland:

You take it from ideation all the way through to product.

Reniera O'Donnell:

We did, and we've, through our funding mechanisms, been able to support 19 small innovators with financial grants to be able to take their products into production. So we've got some that aren't quite ready yet, some that are already on shelf, and sort of everything in between. So it's going to be really exciting to see all of those products together, on the shelves, at the launch, and then being able to be bought by consumers.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, you'll have to send me some pictures of that. I can't wait to see them. And how amazing as well that you've basically supported potential startups as well with all of the work that you're doing. So huge congratulations on that. Reniera's approach highlights the

power of redesigning food systems for sustainability and resilience, which raises important questions. And we continued our conversation on sustainability with Marie-Louise Lendl from Think Tank Frej, who discussed the role that farmers play in driving change across the food system. Marie-Louise, what brings you to Next Bites?

Marie Louise Lendal:

Well, I'm going to speak at the stage, main stage, because besides being the founder and CEO of Think Tank Freie, who works to create a more sustainable food production and consumption through collaboration between the food sector, farmers, and the young generation, I'm also the chairperson of the first known government-paid food grant that invests in only plant-based food.

Matt Eastland:

Wow, really? Amazing.

Marie Louise Lendal:

And I'm going to talk about how we made that possible. How did we get a public-funded grant and an action plan for plant-based food that not just the government supported, but all parties in the Danish parliament supported this new legislation supporting plant-based food.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. Okay, so let's hold on that then. So I'm going to ask you then, it's probably a bit unfair because that means I'm going to scoop your speech later, but can you outline the speech for our listeners and give us some key takeaways?

Marie Louise Lendal:

Yes, so my main theme is that we need to broaden our minds and get out of our confirmation bias, which we all have, which means that we only speak with the people that we agree with. And we need to engage with the one we actually want to change. This meaning the food industry and also the farmers. The farmers are very organized in Denmark. So if we need any change in the food system in Denmark, you have to engage and understand farmers. I grew up on a conventional farm. I understand the farmers logic.

Matt Eastland:

You have an insider track.

Marie Louise Lendal:

Yes, so I spent a lot of time on the road talking with farmers, making lots of presentations to farmers about sustainability and why it's so important for them to engage in that and how it can be a

business model for them. Like in Denmark, we have the windmill industry as something we look up to because it has been such a business success for Denmark, where we transform an oil industry into a windmill industry. That's the same transformation we need to do with with the Danish farmers, where we today produce one of the countries in the world who produces most meat per capita, pork especially, but also dairy products. And we are among the ones, the populations in the world who eats most meat. We need to change that.

Matt Eastland:

I didn't know that. I didn't know that. That's interesting.

Marie Louise Lendal:

Yes. So if we can make it in Denmark, we can make it anywhere. And right now, Denmark is actually the leading way of this transformation. by having this public funding and support by the political sector. How we did achieve that was that we united the Danish Vegetarian Society and the Food and Agricultural Council, so the organization that unites all farmers in Denmark with the vegetarians. Together with us in FRI, we made an action plan for how to build a strong value chain on plant-based food. This means that it was easy for politicians to come together from the left to the right sides of the political parties, because both the vegetarians, which is normally the left-wing politician who will listen to them, when we have the Agricultural Food Council with us, which is normally the right-wing politicians who will listen to them, they could go together and accept this new legislation promoting plant-based food sector.

Matt Eastland:

So you've made that sound really easy, that you've just united all of these people together. I imagine there's a lot of hard work that's gone into that. So what were the steps that you've had to take to make sure that you could get everybody around the table?

Marie Louise Lendal:

First of all, it wasn't me alone and my organization alone. But we started to see that the green organization and the agricultural sector, they didn't talk to each other. They were fighting all the time back in 2019. They were arguing. They couldn't be in the same room, literally. Really that bad? It was really bad. I see it all around Europe right now. It's the same. They don't talk to each other. So we established Think Tank 5 to try to make collaboration between these two sectors, the green organization and the food industry. And what we did was actually just to, when we went to the farmers, we talked about the green transformation and why we needed to talk about sustainability because the issues are severe, especially when it comes to food industry. So they shouldn't just point fingers of the car, the oil industry, they should also point towards themselves. But when we went to the green organization to

talk with them, we always talked to them about how to engage with farmers and their perspective and view of things.

Matt Eastland:

So you're helping every party speak each other's language?

Marie Louise Lendal:

Yes, exactly. Translating the language between city and countryside, you can also say. And now they are like collaborating all the time. Right now in Denmark, the political parties and the government are negotiating the world's first carbon emission tax on farmers. And in the room who have invented it is the Nature Organization and the Agricultural Food Council together with the government. They are working together now. They know, they understand, they have the same understanding of what the issue is. And then they try to find out how can we still be here and try to move forward.

Matt Eastland:

Big congratulations on that. What an achievement.

Marie Louise Lendal:

Internationally, I want to expand the solution we have made in Denmark. So more people will go this way, more countries will move this way. And secondly, in Denmark, we need much more investment in plant-based food and we need the consumption to raise tremendously. I'm just trying to spread the message, but I hope that consumer organization and scientists will understand that they need to go out in the countryside, talk with the food organization and not just stay behind like the walls, talk with the people they used to. I hope that message will go through. I'm sure it will. Actually, the reason I started this was not to save the world. It was actually because I have a great love for the food industry, and I wanted them to survive and thrive in Denmark. And I couldn't see they could be able to do that without changing their business models from not very sustainable to a much more sustainable track. And we see transformations in Denmark, also in the big, big meat companies. They are changing their models slowly, but they are.

Matt Eastland:

It's always fun to gaze at the future, and we now turn to Tony Hunter, a food futurist and techno-optimist who believes technology holds the key to solving global food challenges. Tony Hunter, back on the Food Fight podcast. What an absolute joy to have you back here at NextBite. Welcome.

Tony Hunter:

Thanks very much, Matt. It's a pleasure to be here and thanks for all your support. You're one of the reasons I'm actually here and

enjoying myself in beautiful Rome at EIT NextBite.

Matt Eastland:

So Tony, like I say, is the second time. Just for the people who didn't listen to the episode previously, just catch us up on what it is that you do.

Tony Hunter:

Well, basically, Matt, I'm a food futurist. So there are lots of futurists around, but I just talk about the technologies that affect food. So I look at the future of food through a technology lens, but not just for industry, but how those technologies are going to affect consumers and what they want in their food. I've noticed over this last, say, five years at least, the amount of interest in the future of food and the understanding of the issues that we face in feeding a growing global population. As I said yesterday, it's 11 billion entities. So that's 9.7 billion humans and 1.3 billion, that's billion pet cats and dogs eating as much protein as a human. So we have to feed a planet of 11 billion, not 10 or 9.7, 11 billion.

Matt Eastland:

You've actually just set this up really well because you were speaking yesterday and I was listening to your speech, brilliant as always. So it was a keynote speech at Nextbike. Can you give our listeners and the event attendees a bit of an outline and some top takeaways in terms of what it was that you were saying?

Tony Hunter:

Yeah, well basically my talk was called Reimagining the Global Food System. And it's built upon one key concept, which is that there is only so much food we can make within planetary boundaries without deforesting the planet. And then on top of that, there's another 50 to 70% of food we're going to need as we get towards 2050 to feed the growing population, the growing middle classes. And it's that gap that we need to fill. And that gap needs to be filled by technologies that use less resources and pollute less. We cannot afford to keep adding to the greenhouse gas burden on the planet, and we can't afford to keep deforesting the planet and creating or using more of our arable land. So that's the top takeaway there. And there are several ways that people say we can feed the planet. Some people just say, look, We already grow enough food. We just need to get people to stop eating so much in one place and send it to another place. Good luck with that. We've been telling people to stop eating too much or they'll die of lifestyle diseases and they're still eating too much. Other people say we just need to reduce all the food waste. Yep, that's great. I don't think it'll happen fast enough. It's a generational change. And then there's the business as usual, which is let's just keep doing more of the same, which is not going to end well. So I believe that if we use

technologies and new technologies that use less resources and pollute less and don't use any or very little arable land and fresh water, we can, as I said at the end of the talk, create a world of food abundance, even with our 11 billion entities on the planet.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. And last time we spoke, and this also came through really clearly in your speech, you described yourself as a techno-optimist, which I really like. I've totally stolen that, by the way.

Tony Hunter:

There is a revenue stream that comes from royalties there, Max.

Matt Eastland:

I'll keep quiet. So why are you so optimistic about technology in the food system? And do you think that tech's going to solve all of the problems?

Tony Hunter:

I believe there is not a problem on the planet that cannot be solved by the correct application of technology. If you look at what has solved the world's problems time and time again in any field, it's been technology. Whether it's current agriculture, the invention of the plough, the invention of the wheel, Those are all technologies, the invention of the combine harvester. All the things we've ever needed to grow our food and solve our other problems have been through technology. And so, I mean, that comes back to the sheer inventiveness of the human mind It may be surpassed by AI, who knows, but the inventiveness of the human mind has served us pretty well for many, many thousands of years. And that's why I'm an internal optimist in terms of technology will enable us to feed the world. It's done it before, it will do it again.

Matt Eastland:

I've always loved the positivity that comes from you on tech. And talking of the tech, and you talked about a number of cool technologies in your speech, are there any technologies that you've come across recently in your research that you're particularly excited about at the moment?

Tony Hunter:

Oh, I mean, probably the one that I'm most excited about, I'll pitch my bets and have two. One is plant molecular farming, which is where you can insert the gene for a compound you want into a plant, grow the plant, extract that compound, and you can make food from it. So the example I use is Nobel Foods. They put the gene for casein into soybeans, they grow the soybeans, extract the casein to make cheese, and process the rest of the soybean. And the thing is there, you can

scale it much easier than having to build huge stainless steel fermenters. You just plant more acres of those crops. So scalability is very good with that one. And the other one I like is the cellular agriculture, human milk cellular agriculture. And I mentioned a company called Wilk in my talk yesterday, and they're hooking up with Danone to make human milk components for the infant formula. And those guys are at the cutting edge of what's going on in being able to produce human milk from mammary gland cells is identical to human milk, including immunoglobulins, human milk oligosaccharides, lipids, the whole lot, it's identical to human milk. And that's, I think, a phenomenal technology.

Matt Eastland:

Thank you to all the inspiring speakers who joined us at NextByte. But these conversations offer just a glimpse into the incredible stories and innovations we encountered. So over the next three weeks, we'll dive deeper into our core mission areas, healthier lives through food, net zero food systems, and fair and resilient food systems, featuring interviews with other changemakers from NextByte 2024. Join us for these upcoming episodes to hear firsthand from the trailblazers addressing these pressing food system challenges and driving meaningful change. Thank you all for listening in. This has been the Food Fight podcast. If you'd like to find out more, head over to the EIT Food website at www.eitfood.eu. Also, please join the conversation via the hashtag EITfoodfight on our X channel, at EITfood. And of course, if you haven't already, please hit the follow button so you never miss an episode. Thanks everyone.