

Next Bite 2024: Reducing Risk for a Fair and Resilient Food System

Matt Eastland:

Welcome to another installment of our EIT Food Next Bite Recap Series. I'm Matt Eastland and today we're diving into the critical theme of building fair and resilient food systems. In 2023, over 258 million people across 58 countries faced acute food insecurity, driven by climate change and fragile supply chains. EIT Food is tackling these challenges with our community through three key areas. Sustainable food production, shorter urban supply chains and equitable business models. Our vital mission to safeguard global food equity was a central focus at Next Bite 2024, where we connected with changemakers driving this transformation. Let's begin with Estefania Simon-Sasyk founder of Mycelium Gastronomy, futurist, strategic consultant and Michelin-trained chef. Estefania, welcome to the Food Bite podcast. It is a pleasure to have you on the show. Thank you for being here with us.

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

Thank you for having me.

Matt Eastland:

It's an honor. Well, it's a pleasure for us. Before we get into it, can you tell us a little bit about yourself, what you do and the activities that you run?

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

I am Estefania Simon-Sasyk I'm the founder of Mycelium Gastronomy Network, a network of food practitioners that are located globally. And we try to cover the diversity of what we call the gastronomy value chain, which is the food value chain, but through a cultural sensitive lens. So we have people working in retail, chefs, farmers, people working in the food industry, academia. The idea behind is to bring people across Silas together to collaborate in different projects, especially in the field of education, formal and not formal education, and product development, program development.

Matt Eastland:

OK, amazing. Thank you for summing that up for us. And I was reading your bio, which is amazing, by the way. So I'm going to read this out because there's a lot here. So you're a trained Michelin chef turned futurist and founder of a global collaboration platform that connects food scientists, hospitality groups, governments, institutions, local farmers to drive positive change in the food system. Quite a journey. So how did starting out as a Michelin chef set you on this road?

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

I was born in Venezuela. When I was a teenager, we started having a

lot of political unrest in the country that continues to the day. And, you know, food professions, vocational professions in food are very transferable skill geographically. So I think there was a bit of like, a way of learning a skill to find a better future somewhere else. I came to Spain after finishing culinary school in my country to a three Michelin star restaurant called Martín Verasategui.

Matt Eastland:
Three Michelin stars? Yeah.

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:
Wow. So I stayed there for two years and I really felt like the level of excellence was really hard to attain in my country in any other field if that makes sense. So I was really motivated of being like in the very best of something. Maybe I should have studied in a very great university but that's not what happened. I guess there's a bit of like a proneness to action and also in the kitchen you learn so much about the world. Like, you are confronted with people from everywhere in the world, with different cultures, different socioeconomic strata. It's really hard to get that kind of diversity and world outlook when you only work in an office, with all due respect. Like, I know my friends that work in, you don't have that kind of exposure. It's thrilling. And there's a lot of adrenaline, high standards. It was really exciting. But after I had a motorbike accident. Sorry to hear that. Yeah, I was like, I'm over reliant on my body. So I want to like explore other things and started exploring a lot of things. And one of them. So I got a great job at the Bass Culinary Center. Shout out. And he was in the R&D section. So that was run like a kind of like a startup, like It's a fire there, put it out and now it's there. So you're doing like recipe development, product development, running workshops, you know, doing a talk, like doing all these different things in the realm of gastronomy. It really broadened my perspective of what can be done with, you know, a skill set in the food space. And then I said, well, I want to bring in more diversity. And I guess it's kind of circling back to Venezuela and the global majority and how our voices need to be heard. in more mainstream spaces. So that's kind of the underlying motivation of my mycelium in a way.

Matt Eastland:
Yeah. Yeah. I mean, what a what a journey. And I can I can really sense that it's that kind of multicultural aspect plus the innovation side that you've got from working the kitchens that's kind of pushed you on, which is really amazing. Love that. Do you have any great examples of like success stories off off the back of the collaborations that you're now driving that you'd like to talk about?

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:
A couple of them that come to mind, we created a methodology for

workshops and gatherings called Transform that wants to leverage that. So in the kitchen, sometimes you have a box of mushrooms or a box of whatever that you need to go through manually, and you really get into this meditative state.

Matt Eastland:
To be honest.

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

And I was like, this is so amazing to kind of like, come to this conversations of strategy or policy advisory or whatever from a different place, then I have my two cents to say, I'm going to repeat what I think and then we'll have like a little debate. Like it's well known in like creativity theory that this kind of multi-modal ways of engaging really like broaden your creativity. And so we did this with farmers, politicians, restaurateurs, sommeliers, people from academia in the Navarra region in Spain, to just prepare a very traditional vegetable called cardos, in English it's called thistles. So everyone was doing it, and you can already see the power dynamics shifting because the fancy guy that has the best word for the post-it is like, what? I don't know how to process a thistle. And so the farmer's like, I'm going to show you all how this is done. and the chef. And so, you know, like it kind of horizontalizes the space a little bit. So they came together. We were talking about what do we want the sustainable gastronomy of the region look like. And they actually came down to a manifesto that was published. We have around 5000 signing or subscribers of the manifesto. And it's actually like a founding piece for the strategy for 2030 of sustainable tourism and gastronomy for the Nevada region. Amazing. So that's like a cool way that we have found that people can actually get to collaborate. And the other one, we're working with a huge private company from the US, billion plus revenue yearly. And they came to us because they didn't really know who to ask to train their commercial and sales team into like selling sustainability, like actually understanding what are the business benefits of... Sustainability in food or just sustainability in general? Sustainability is a holistic. So we can't really silo it or put it into little tight boxes like we've done. So of course, sustainability in general intersects with food in terms of like the energy in manufacturing, the gas in transportation, of course, like inputs and outputs of agricultural. So I'm not mansplaining or mansplaining this to you.

Matt Eastland:

The reason I was interested is because, you know, if they were coming to you talking about sustainability in general, then you've obviously done an amazing job in the space that you're in of projecting the fact that you're able to teach these things to people.

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

Listen, we have over 100 members in our network, so the usual way we go about projects is, hey guys, we have this thing, we sign NDAs because it's really important for people to feel comfortable with more innovative organization ways. And so this set of people that are both interested and have like the more formal hard skills that are in this certain subject, we will brainstorm like, how will we approach this? We have created an amazing training module workshop. We have created a custom chatbot and a lot of really interesting tools. And it's really sitting in an intersection of hard skills that no one really, no one can say, I'm an expert in sales and sustainability. Do you know what I mean? So it's kind of like this knowledge brokering and this being in the middle that we really like to do. And we put ourselves in that position of like, explain it to me like I'm a three year old, because that's really what we need right now.

Matt Eastland:

I'm so impressed and at NextByte you've just moderated a session on cross-disciplinary collaboration and now I really understand why. So any key discussions, highlights or takeaways that you think that it's really useful for our listeners to know about?

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

Right, so I think the EIT crowd comes from an academic sector, a more innovation, entrepreneurship, startup space, and I don't think we have yet tapped into the potential of food service to amplify certain messages that are really well known in this community, like net zero strategies, got microbiome, like you name it, right? Like things that in EIT food are just like everyday currency, but there's a gap between the big, bold ideas that we need to create a sustainable transition to avoid mass extinction. And, you know, bringing it down three levels so a three-year-old can understand that we can all get on board. Food service feeds everyone daily or by daily or weekly. I mean, I don't know what's your rate of eating out.

Matt Eastland:

These days, not so much because I've just had a baby. But yeah.

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

Welcome to Vietnam. Literally, I got told that when I had my kid and I was like, that's the most accurate thing I've ever heard. Anyways, food service feeds everyone and we have the ability of translating concepts into sensorial pieces of information. And I think, you know, cross-discipline between food industry, academia, science, innovation, startups, and the food service needs to be less of, hey, there's this mycelium substrate, something, can you now make it tasty for I can serve it? Rather, let's collaborate from the get-go, because there are some really interesting pieces of information

regarding the consumer acceptance culture that are held in the food service industry.

Matt Eastland:

Okay, I understand what you're trying to say. You start from the beginning and make sure everyone's part of that. Estefania highlighted how collaboration drives innovation in the food system, breaking down silos to create systemic change. Building on this, Adele Jones from the Sustainable Food Trust shares how data and transparency are empowering farmers and influencing policy, ensuring regenerative agriculture becomes both measurable and financially viable. Adele Jones, welcome to the Food Fight podcast at Next Bite. It's a pleasure to have you here.

Adele Jones:

Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me on.

Matt Eastland:

It's really our pleasure indeed. Just before we get into the topic, so can you explain to our listeners a little bit about who you are and the Sustainable Food Trust?

Adele Jones:

So I am Adele Jones, Executive Director of an organisation called the Sustainable Food Trust. We are a UK-based non-profit working to accelerate the transition towards regenerative food and farming on a global scale.

Matt Eastland:

You obviously come all the way to Rome, so can I ask you what is it that you are looking for next, what are you hoping to achieve?

Adele Jones:

So we're actually in fairly early stage conversation with EIT and many of the partners you work with about doing some work together, particularly on data and transparency, on regenerative agriculture metrics and how we use those to make supply chains more transparent, help government understand policy that needs to be implemented, as well as helping finance flow through to regenerative farms in a better way. At the moment, the best business case is to produce food without worrying too much about the environment or public health. And what we'd love to do is help shift that balance of financial advantage towards farming, which is good for nature, good for people and good for the climate. And to do that, you need data. It's a bit boring, but you do.

Matt Eastland:

It's not boring at all. We love data on the show. And I know that one of the areas that you're particularly focused on is measuring on-farm sustainability, right? So can you tell me how you're actually going about doing that? Because I imagine that's extremely complex, isn't it?

Adele Jones:

It is complicated and it's something we set out upon about eight years ago now, where we basically said to a group of farmers, big, small, from different parts of the country, starting in the UK, what do you think you should be measuring and what would you like to be paid for, in terms of the things that as society we don't yet value in monetary terms, like soil health, clean water, good animal welfare. And so we put the challenge back to the farmers and said to them, why don't you help us using the best bits of stuff you already do, design a holistic, so looking at the social, environmental and economic sustainability of farms, a holistic framework of metrics. And that's really where our project, the Global Farm Metric, as it's now called, began. And the Global Farm Metric is as much as anything a mission to bring people together to agree on metrics. But through that process, we have a framework, with 12 categories of assessment which farmers can use but also companies and government can use to help understand the holistic sustainability of farms.

Matt Eastland:

That's cool. So I imagine that farmers embrace this because farmers basically originated it, right? They fed into it and they've helped you decide what to measure. So they must be embracing what you're doing.

Adele Jones:

Yeah, it's been a journey and of course there's the more, you know, the farmers who have been thinking about this for a long time and then there's those who this is all quite new for and I think one thing just to be a bit sort of pragmatic about is that this is going to be a bit of a headache for everyone in the next few years. We don't have primary data from farms which tell us in quantitative terms the impact that individual farms or individual products coming from farms are having. So it's a new thing. We're going to streamline the process and there's going to be amazing tools and companies that help farmers do that. But it's not going to be easy. I think we'd be lying if we said this whole data thing, this whole transparency thing is going to be super easy. Just, you know, sit back and relax. It is going to be difficult, but we need to make sure farmers are involved in the process.

Matt Eastland:

From farmers all the way up to, because you advise lots of governments in creating these metrics as well, I understand. So what

challenges have you had to overcome in the policy space to make sure that policymakers understand the value of this and that they're really on board with it?

Adele Jones:

I think the biggest challenge is short-term thinking in government. Obviously, administrations are generally in for four years, but even civil servants who are around for longer than that, the benefit of collecting this sort of data is perhaps not going to be seen for quite a few years. We actually advocate for collecting both practice and outcome data with the Global Farm Metric because outcome data really only becomes useful after a few years. Because of things like climate shocks or perhaps what your next-door farmer is doing, which might have an impact on your biodiversity, it's actually all about context when it comes to outcomes and that context builds over time. So what we suggest is that we also collect practice-based data because we can then make an assumption about impact in the shorter term whilst collecting that actual impact data to start rewarding things like increases in soil organic matter in the longer term. And that's just something that governments don't get. They kind of want answers immediately. And so building that business case in to policymaking thinking is really key. And a great example is the National Health Service in the UK at the moment, which is on the verge of going bankrupt potentially, and yet we're funding industrial agriculture through the subsidy system. So turning around that sort of thinking is like an oil tanker. It takes a huge amount of time.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, and I can only wish you the best of that. What an important thing that you're trying to do there. Adele offered an inspiring perspective on how collaboration, transparency and a deep understanding of soil health are key to transforming the food system. Her insights on sustainability set a powerful foundation for innovation. Next, we turn to Lorraine Allen, a seasoned expert in incubating food startups, to explore how these ideas translate into real-world business growth and groundbreaking food technologies. Lorraine Allen, welcome to the Food Fight podcast. Thank you very much for your time today.

Lorraine Allen:

Great to be here. Thanks for having me.

Matt Eastland:

Thank you very much. So before we get into it, Lorraine, if you could give us a little bit of background about who you are and what is it you specifically do for EIT Food.

Lorraine Allen:

Sure, I suppose my background is of about over 25 years in the food industry, working for various multinationals across UK, Ireland and Europe. Always within innovation, both the kind of front end of the creation and then the commercialisation of that. So for the last five years I've been working kind of independently as a consultant, but more and more I was finding myself in the startup space. I love the space, connected with the IT food, working with the European Commission, working with some of the government bodies in Ireland that support startups. and scale up so I just love the space, I love the energy so as a result I was invited to work with the Seabed Incubator with the IT food which I was delighted to do.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing, amazing and you're right there is a lot of energy and is that why you're here at NextByte? I mean obviously you're supporting the startups but what is it specifically that you were looking to get out of the days should I say?

Lorraine Allen:

For me, I suppose, I have a massively keen interest in sustainability. I really want to see where the future of food is going, looking at new technologies, how those are being supported from start-up stage to scale up to being launched into the marketplace and being commercialized. There's so much amazing science being created in universities, and how do we transition that out into the marketplace? and support the scientists who are doing that. So they need commercial partnerships to do that, either via industry or via support as they spin out as a startup.

Matt Eastland:

Okay. And on that point specifically, so I'd love to talk to you about incubating. Sure. So how do you even go about incubating a company? Where does it start and where do you then come in to help?

Lorraine Allen:

Sure. It generally starts with a very passionate founder. They have an idea, they have a purpose. Either they have come from a science research background or they have a very purpose-driven mission. I've come across both. I've worked with both and they come from maybe a different background completely and they're looking to create something in an opportunity that they see. So it either is science-driven or opportunity-driven. Eventually they have to validate it in market, and I suppose they're looking for skill sets, complementary skill sets to their own skill set, and often that's a commercial skill set. So somebody who's created innovation, who's commercialized it, either a seasoned entrepreneur or someone who's been in industry and business and has commercialized and knows, I suppose, the skill sets that you need to mobilize and have that kind of multidisciplinary approach to get a product to market. Because there was a discussion earlier and they were talking about, you

know, a CEO of a startup has to be a jack-of-all-trades or a jill-of-all-trades, so therefore they're trying to find support systems on small budgets, they're on grants, so Places like EIT food where that's offer mentorship and offer incubation and offer supports is very attractive And what sort of challenges does a new business or a new founder face?

Matt Eastland:

I mean other than actually, you know, the commercial aspect of just getting some money But I mean what what is it that we're helping them overcome?

Lorraine Allen:

We're helping them overcome Obstacles and failures I always say fail early. The key to innovation and bringing it to market is de-risking it as much as possible. And investors want it de-risked. And they themselves as a company want it de-risked. They're first going to have more success in market. So turning as many of the assumptions that you've created around your business into facts as you learn, either from the marketplace, from the consumer, from the customers. And there's a lot of peer-to-peer learning as well that goes on. So they're the kind of obstacles they have to overcome. Obviously the funding landscape is another obstacle they have to navigate, be it early stage grants, spinning out from university, also protecting the IP that they've got in their company. So there's a lot that they have to upskill in very quickly and a lot of things that they kind of have to keep, I suppose, spinning all the plates that they have as a CEO of a startup.

Matt Eastland:

There is obviously so many startups here at NextBite. Are there any that you've come across that you're particularly excited or interested in?

Lorraine Allen:

I've just come from a talk on biotechnology shaping the future of food and I think food and biotechnology colliding is a really exciting space. I've seen and I've worked with a number of startups and I think the ones that have stood out to me are the ones that are very determined but they're open-minded. They're wanting to learn, they're hungry to learn, they're eager to get opinion, they're eager to get ideas bounced, and they're also bouncing off each other. So it's leveraging the network that's here, it's leveraging the mentorship supports that are here, and being willing to adapt and change. Having a vision for the future for their business, but at the same time being savvy enough that they know how to navigate

Matt Eastland:

Got to be flexible with it.

Lorraine Allen:

Flexible and dynamic to shift the concept slightly or reshape their value proposition. And the value proposition for me is a key to be really crystal clear about what your concept is. Being able to pitch it in a way that is meaningful to a customer and having that customer validation is a really important step to actually get that value proposition refined.

Matt Eastland:

Following Lorraine's insights on the challenges and opportunities in scaling food innovation, we now turn our focus to the next generation of food industry leaders. First we hear from the Future Foodmakers, a dynamic group of young food system activists at the forefront of revolutionising how we think about food production. Then we dive in a conversation with representatives from EIT Food's Young Professionals Platform, where emerging leaders share their perspectives on the future of food, bringing fresh, bold ideas to the table. Future food makers in the house, welcome to the Food Fight podcast. So in our studio today, it's a little bit cosy, but we have Carlos, Maria, Micol and Elena. Welcome to the Food Fight podcast. Great to have you. Thank you. Thank you for having us. And I think this is amongst all of you, I think this is the third time we've actually had you on the show. within different people. So yeah, it's great to have you back. Before we get into it, for people who don't know the future food makers, shame on you, who are you and what do the future food makers do? So what are you trying to achieve? Who'd like to start?

Carlos Navarrete:

So basically the Future Foodmakers is a job-led non-profit organization that we strive to make the food system here in Europe more sustainable, equal for everyone. We just had a manifesto called the Menu for Change where we outlined which reforms we think are priority for the European food system and we just actively strive to make it better through our actions, our activism and the dissemination of information in our social media. and also attending to events like NextByte. We are really proud to be here, thanks to EIT Food, one of our partners. Thanks to that, we are here with you, E. Amazing.

Matt Eastland:

Well, it's so good to have you back. I mean, really, we're going to talk about what you've been doing over the last year, I think, since we had you on, so we'll get to that. But before we do that, what are you hoping to achieve with NextByte over the two days? I guess we've had the first day, but how's it been? Any highlights and any takeaways that you have?

Maria Etessam:

So yesterday we presented one of the newer projects that we're working on with the YPP, Youth Professional Platform, alongside with EIT and YPART. And today we just want to network a little more, see if we find any useful connections at NextByte.

Matt Eastland:

Fantastic. And you mentioned the Young Professionals Platform. What's the project that you're working on together?

Maria Etessam:

It's a menu for change challenge. So we are looking for groups of three people who have a solution to one of the items in our menu for change. And the applications are already open and it's going to be like a yearly long process with the finish in the next byte. So next by 2025, we'll be announcing the winners.

Carlos Navarrete:

The winners. Yeah. So yeah, the proposals are as the name, Menu4Change, are based in one of the demands of the Menu4Change. So we are looking for those teams who have any local initiative that targets one of those demands and have any action. that want to, you know, level up, take it to the next level, we'll pick the best teams and they will have like a mentor and they can work on the proposal for more than six months and present it next year at NextByte where we will announce the winner. So we are so excited to be part of it.

Matt Eastland:

I can see that. That's super cool. Congratulations. And you keep mentioning the menu for change. And again, I know the menu for change very well, but for our listeners who don't, what is it specifically that you're looking to change through the menu for change? What's in there?

Maria Etessam:

We have six demands. We want to tackle the food waste in Europe. We want to tackle the agricultural practices that are being done.

Carlos Navarrete:

To be regenerative, like target as much as land as possible into the regenerative practice, which we are hearing that maybe it's not regenerative, but more back to traditional practices. also try to introduce true cost accounting in the lifecycle assessment of products to make the more sustainable and closed-circuit products accessible and easier for people so they can switch to healthier and sustainable diets. We have a strong focus on education to implement more focused and sustainable courses in the curricula. So little kids can start knowing about how the food system works and be aware

of the choices they are doing when they are eating, because they will have like a lot of meals in their life. So they need to be conscious about the impact in the long term. Maybe if we eat like a poached chocolate for breakfast, anything won't happen. But if we try to... We would never do that. Exactly. But if we ultra process food every day, it's not good for our health.

Maria Etessam:

or for the health of the planet, to be honest, because what's healthy for us will have also an impact in the health of the environment.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, I love the highlights of it. And actually, everybody, please go and check out the Future Feedmakers menu for change. It is brilliant. And I've been watching your progress over the last couple of years. So other than the menu for change, other than the work you're doing with the Young Professionals platform, what have you been doing together over the last year, I think, since we last spoke?

Maria Etessam:

On one of the first projects that we worked on was an evaluation report of the menu for change. So what has been done in Europe to work towards these demands that we have. And we put that out around early months of this year. And we have been working on a policy and we have also been working on the policy and deliberation challenge that we actually presented yesterday at the World Food Forum. Yeah, we were one of the three finalists and we developed this policy around healthy diets for humans and the planet. Yeah, it was really exciting.

Matt Eastland:

Fantastic. So you are the finalist at the FAO session, which is just okay.

Carlos Navarrete:

We were there yesterday. There were three categories and we were finalists in the health and sustainable diet presenting our proposal to try to implement healthier and sustainable diets in public procurement places, like taking university canteens as our pilot. As we are like a young lead organization, we just wanted to give that focus to young people who are studying and don't have time to cook or don't have the skills and resources. So we include not gene theory with true cost accounting, which is one of the demands of the menu. And we are just really proud. And actually we are trying to look out for parents who would like to try to employ implement this and do a pilot experiment. We are having first approaches with universities interested, but just bringing the call here on the

table that someone is listening and is interested more in the project, please reach out to us because we are open to discuss it with everyone.

Matt Eastland:

It's been so amazing to watch you evolve over the last couple of years and here you are, you know, going for finalists in awards, doing partnerships, you know, massive congratulations. And so going forwards then, so what does the future look like for the future food makers? What's coming up next for you?

Carlos Navarrete:

We are going to start this month our mentorship program that we've been working on for the past month. With Julia, you know her, like she's been in the podcast. And it's just a program focused for students and recent graduates that want to engage in the Agri-Food system and do a career there. We are connecting them with mentors that have a professional background in the Agri-Food system to give them advice into their career path and transition to the workplace. And we actually have the privilege to invite them to attend the Food Ingredients Europe next month in Frankfurt. And we are also doing workshops with them, with mentees and with mentors to give them soft skills and work on different aspects for not to help them into the development. And we'll tell you next year how it has been, but we have a really strong, we have more than 60 applications. We have 10 amazing mentees that we match with 10 mentors with lots of experience in the agri food. And yeah, we are really proud of what is coming up. And also that's why we have more people, because we need more hands in those projects to make them as easy as possible for them.

Matt Eastland:

Everybody, Young Professionals Platform in the house with the Food Fight podcast. Welcome everybody. I am actually slightly intimidated. There's so many of you in here. So we have, I believe, Maria, Jenna, Karina, Federica and Francisco. So welcome everybody to the show.

Karina Akopian:

Thank you so much. Thank you for having us.

Matt Eastland:

Great. So before we start talking about, you know, all the kind of great work that you're doing, can you just for our listeners outline what is the Young Professionals Platform and what are you looking to achieve?

Karina Akopian:

Okay, so the Young Professionals Platform is an initiative that was launched by EAT Food earlier this year. And we launched it because we believe that the youth are the actual change makers of today and tomorrow. And we want to build this community of youth-led organizations who share our goals of creating a more fair and resilient food system where there is healthy food for all.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. And what brings you specifically to Next Bite? What are you hoping to get from the next two days?

Maria Kolesina:

Yeah, I mean, we're really excited to spread the word about the Young Professionals Platform because we think that young people can take part in our organizations if they want to network together and learn more about the food system. But we also want to announce the Menu for Change Challenge, which young people can apply to with their interesting projects, win prize money, mentorship and visibility with YPP and EIT Food.

Matt Eastland:

OK, and just briefly explain to me the challenge. What can people do to get involved?

Maria Kolesina:

So they can apply through November 15th, of course, with either early phase projects that are at the idea stage, and they can also apply with their projects that are already started and already making exciting changes.

Matt Eastland:

OK, great. And my understanding is that the Young Professionals Platform and Future Foodmakers have had a kind of an integration piece going on here. So how does that all work?

Maria Etessam:

It's based on the Manifold Change and we have six demands that we believe can transform the food system and we hope to have different teams tackle these demands from regenerative agriculture to policy implementation. It's all on our website and they can look it up and see if they're teams align with the menu for change.

Matt Eastland:

Okay amazing and how are the future food makers and the young professionals on the platform going to work together as part of the challenge? Is there I believe there's some kind of mentorship thing going on is that right?

Francisco Luz:

So yeah basically once this team apply and we choose the team that most aligns with the menu for change We will provide a successful team, a mentor and some fundings to actually develop their idea further and that's how the mentor is going to help them.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing, thank you. And can I ask you all, as undoubtedly the leaders of the future of the food system that I have right here with me, what is it that you are all wanting? If you have a demand, what are you asking for as part of your work?

Maria Kolesina:

I mean, we would throw it back to the menu for change, right? This is a document that has been developed by young people, and it shows the demands. And we're using that to actually then say, OK, and young people are doing these things. We know that they're in the environment. Let's invest in that. So it comes back to that menu for change, I would say.

Matt Eastland:

There's a lot of work that's been done on the menu for change, so that really makes sense. And over the event, and I know you've been at other events as well, I'm interested, so how do we go about encouraging more young voices into the debates that we're having, but also the actions that you want to take off the back of this?

Federica Cornago:

Well there's obviously has been a struggle from some young people to get into the industry and to get involved in the food system in general and what we want from this YPP platform is that actually those people come in, they give the input and we facilitate the reaching out of either networking, industry, tools to like the mentors for the Many4Change. And this is basically our goal with the YPP is to bring all the youth together and empower them and give them a voice and make them feel like they are understood and they are heard and that they play the role in today's society.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. And it's so worthy what you're doing. I'm really, really supportive. And can you just say then what's next for the Young Professionals Platform? What is it? Maybe you have a call out to people that you want them to do other than to apply, but maybe there's something else.

Maria Kolesina:

Yes, I mean, they definitely should apply for the Menu for Change Challenge, but then also get involved in our organizations, right? Because we're connecting with each other. We're learning together so that you can make your dreams a reality or take them to the next level.

Matt Eastland:

And where can people go to find out more information? I need the website and anywhere else channels people.

Karina Akopian:

Well, you can find more information about the Young Professionals Platform on EAT Food's website. You can just Google Young Professionals Platform, EAT Food, and you will definitely find it.

Matt Eastland:

The future food makers and young professionals are clearly shaping the future of food innovation. Now let's shift our focus to Dr. Maarten van der Kamp from EIT Food. He shares vital insights into the critical skills needed for food system transformation and the importance of strategic long-term planning to build a sustainable, innovative future. Maarten van der Kamp, second time on the Food Fight podcast. What a joy to have you back. Welcome to the show.

Dr. Maarten van der Kamp:

Thank you very much, Matt. It's a very much pleasure to be back here and to do it as part of Next Bite in Rome.

Matt Eastland:

Indeed, indeed. And for people who haven't listened to the amazing episode that we had previously, can you please explain a bit about yourself, who you are and what it is that you do at EIT Food?

Dr. Maarten van der Kamp:

Yeah, so I'm the Director of Education for EAT Food and so I've been working really on those questions about how do we provide the right kind of skills, what are the skills gaps that we've got in the food system and how do we address that, particularly aimed at food system transformation. So it's the innovation skills, it's some of the food system skills that we really need to add complementary to what normal skills providers are already providing, but to really make sure that the entire food, the workforce in the food system has the capabilities to drive that food system transformation forward.

Matt Eastland:

Okay, so really making sure that we have the skills and the generation now that we're going to need now and going forwards for

the future food system.

Dr. Maarten van der Kamp:

Yeah, and so this is the really interesting thing. So we've got this very short term kind of timeline. When we train skills, it's very applied, it's very immediate, and you get interesting ideas out of it for now. But actually, a lot of the skills that we're training, people are going to only use that in their career, maybe in four, five, six years time. And so from an employability perspective, we're talking about a different timeline. When we talk about food systems transformation, we're again talking about a completely different timeline, and here we are already needing to anticipate skills gaps that we know are going to exist in 2040, 2050, to start addressing those now, because it is going to take that long to get a generation of innovators through the system to the point that they can actually be effective driving change forward. Yeah, we've got really these three timelines at all times in our minds.

Matt Eastland:

I don't envy the challenge there, Maarten, but well done for doing it. You've just come off a panel where you're talking about capacity building within this space. Can you explain for our listeners what you mean by capacity building and maybe give some key takeaways from the talk you just had?

Dr. Maarten van der Kamp:

Yeah, so capacity building is broader than just talking about skills. So we need to also have the structures to support this. Of course, we need to have skilled individuals that can drive food system transformation, but we need to have sufficiently skilled individuals. So in terms of the volume of people that we need to train, we need to really skill that up. and then they of course need to have the right skills. So that's part one. The second bit is that actually we need to look at the role of employers in this and how do they see the progression of their workforce in a way that makes sense with regards to corporate strategy but also with that broader impact in mind so that in 20, 30 years time they're still relevant businesses because if you now don't invest in skills then in years to come you're going to have issues with retaining talent, they're going to leak away, and you're going to have issues with attracting the right kind of talent. So what's happening there? But then once you start going down a little layer there, well, what happens then with regards to HR practices? How do HR teams actually make particularly those innovation skills apparent in your recruitment practices? Because actually, a lot of those skills are very difficult to get from a CV. So technical skills are very easy to gain. Okay, you've got a qualification, et cetera. You know that someone can do a particular task. Whereas innovation practices, that is a lot more difficult. But then, again, we need to go a further layer on this one because then also we need to start thinking about what's the role of universities in their local ecosystems? and how

do we need to provide capacity for them to become that integrator to actually be able to do technology commercialization, to do sort of industry-sponsored research in a more effective way in order to drive open innovation, etc. So we're talking not only about the individual, but we're also talking about the entire web of knowledge partners, industry partners, startups, to make sure actually that we really open up this conversation. And one of the things that we've noticed is that capacity and capability building is still far away from what people are talking. So the panel, I had a fabulous panel. And there are already some amazing examples out there, but because nobody knows about it, it's under-highlighted. So, for example, Yildiz Holdings in Turkey is having this amazing women program to get them as part of their workforce, but also as part of their suppliers into their systems. So there are these amazing examples out there, but yeah, it's not part of a conversation. So for me, it really is important that we start this conversation and that we take this seriously as an entire ecosystem and as an entire industry, that we actually start thinking about this because otherwise we're not going to be able to transform the food system at the rate that actually we need to.

Matt Eastland:

Okay, now I understand that and it does sound incredibly complex. Concretely then, what are the next steps in terms of making sure that we build this capacity? So what is it that you would like to see going forward?

Dr. Maarten van der Kamp:

I think for me we need to start that conversation and I think industry needs to start asking themselves when is the last time that they've thought about skills and capacities for where the food system is going and not to look at it in very short term of okay I've got a vacancy I need to fill it but actually to think more long-term strategically how do we actually prepare for the future because I said retention and recruitment is going to be an issue So I think that is one part. I think the second part is that as an ecosystem, we need to start thinking more about where are there capabilities, shared capabilities, or in some way, capabilities where we don't need to duplicate. Because I see still a lot of duplication in the food system. And that's costing resources, it's costing efforts, and so how can we be smarter about those kind of things? And then of course the final bit is sort of those innovation and entrepreneurship skills. to actually start investing in those, because when we talk with corporates, most of them say that, well, actually, we're really only interested in what's happening in, say, for example, algal biotech, the kind of the latest technology developments, or we want to know what's happening with the microbiome or with protein diversification or something like that. And that's fine, of course that question is there, but actually what is never part of that question is that, hey, what do we need to do to make sure that our workforce can actually have effective collaborations within and outside of the boundaries of the

organization? How do they actually engage with startups that have such a different culture? So we're talking about a whole range of skills. that we are also going to need to develop. And here I would like to make one plug. So a lot of people are calling these soft skills. And this is where you might remember from the previous podcast. I am very, very allergic to that skill because that would almost imply that they're optional. Well, they're no longer. They are really underpinning everything that we can do as an ecosystem, as an industry. So let's also then talk about them as underpinning skills in that way and really to start building up those stories.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, thank you, Maarten. Actually, off the back of that, I have stopped saying soft skills, so it has stayed with me. As we've heard, building fair and resilient food systems requires innovation and collaboration, supporting startups and developing the skills needed for future transformation. For more insights, visit EIT Food's website at www.eitfood.eu and join the conversation using the hashtag EITFoodFight on our LinkedIn channel. In our final Next Bite series episode, we'll explore healthier living and the role that food systems play in improving public health. Thanks for tuning into the Food Fight podcast. Don't forget to hit the follow button so you never miss an episode. Thanks, everyone.