

Swell AI Transcript: EIT WildFarmed V2.mp3

Matt Eastland:

Hi everyone, I'm Matt Eastland and welcome to the Food Fight podcast from EIT Food. Exploring the greatest challenges facing the food system and the innovations and entrepreneurs looking to solve them. As many of us know, food holds immense potential to drive sustainability from our farms to our forks. This includes reducing agriculture's environmental impact to preserving wildlife habitats and enhancing biodiversity. However, several challenges stand in the way of realizing this vision. We need to reskill farmers, we need to navigate government incentives, and we need to help consumers to understand the critical importance that their food choices have on their own health and the environment. And that's to name just a few. So how do we accelerate the transition to a food system that nourishes both people and the planet? Our guest today is aiming to solve this very question, co-founder of Wildfarmed, Edd Lees. Wildfarmed is a company revolutionizing the way that we grow, produce, and consume food. From the regenerative farming standards of their award-winning wheat, to their commitment to fair pay for farmers, Wildfarmed is at the absolute forefront of a movement towards a more regenerative, resilient, and ethical food system. Today, we'll delve into the challenges facing modern agriculture, the importance of regenerative practices, and how initiatives like Wild Farmed are paving the way for a brighter, more sustainable farming future. Edd, it's a pleasure to have you on the show. Yeah, thanks very much. Edd, so we've spoken quite a lot on the podcast about regenerative farming, so in loads of detail. So we've spoken back on episode 32, we spoke about how modern farming has it failed. We've also had Patrick Holden on the show, who's the founding director of Sustainable Food Trust, when he was talking about how to start out in regenerative farming and others beside. But just as a quick, like, refresher, shall we say, for our listeners, how would you describe regenerative farming?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, I would describe regenerative farming as growing food using biological systems, principally, as opposed to chemical systems, and doing it in a way that is relying on and increasing soil health at all times.

Matt Eastland:

Got it. OK, super clear. Always comes back to soil health, which I love. And in terms of wild farmed, you know, can you share a little bit more about your founding story and how the concept of regenerative agriculture kind of inspired the inception? So where did this all begin for you?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, our founder story is long and well documented, so if anybody is interested in anything that we talk about today, I recommend that

they look it up. But to tell the elevator version, My co-founder, Andy Cato, was previously working as a musician in a band called Groove Armada. He was touring the world, came across an article about modern agriculture and some of the implications that had for both human and planetary health. And at the end of this article was a wonderful bit of journalism that said, if you don't like the system, don't depend on it. Now, that kickstarted a series of events that dragged, first of all, Andy, then a lot of us after him, down a rabbit hole of soil health. Initially, that meant him growing vegetables for his family and him where he was living in France at the time. Very quickly, that led to him taking the awful financial decision to sell his publishing rights that should have been his pension. I'm buying and buying would never have happened under my watch and then buying a farm in France. He was hopelessly naive, he'd be the first to admit, didn't even do a soil test because as I regularly say, the farm that the French will sell to a six foot nine DJ from Barnsley is not the best farm in France. When he tried to take the approach that he'd had on his vegetable patch and he took it to a farm with degraded soil, what he got was a nature's response which was vicious and predictable, which was a large number of weeds. and he by necessity had to focus upon soil health to give his farm the opportunity to give him cash crops that he wanted, so things that we could actually sell for food. When he finally figured this out, and it was a long and arduous journey that's well documented elsewhere, he realized that food grown in healing soils doesn't command any greater price than any other food. And this was where I started to help him because my background was working in financial markets where completely fungible items, what I deal with day to day. And I pointed out to Andy that we had to travel up the value chain to realize the value he'd added. And that meant opening a small bakery in France and selling the product to the local community who had transparency and traceability about what he was doing and how he was doing it. In a short space of time, that started to work and Andy got back on his feet. and the thing in France was working very nicely, built a farm-to-table network where we were growing food in a healthy soil, people could see where it was coming from and they were happy to pay a little extra to sponsor that activity and to understand their food had come from a system that was doing this. With our third partner, George Lam, who was from a broadcasting background, We decided we want to scale this operation and take what we learned in a tiny corner of France to a much greater scale. And that's what started Wild Farmed and essentially Andy's real deep knowledge of farming that he acquired very quickly the hard way combined with my experience of finance. and George's experience in broadcasting and storytelling was the foundation of how we decided to form a business based around the same principles of what Andy had done in France. So therefore, a completely traceable supply chain growing in a way that we think creates a higher quality, healthier crop, and then explaining that to consumers in an engaging fashion such that they feel that they can be a part of it. So that transparency and agency are key themes that have been with us since we started.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. What a journey. And I think it's probably worth saying for all the listeners out there, I was explaining to Edd before we started recording that I am like the biggest Grieve Armada fan. So to have Wildfarmed on the show is a real moment for me. Edd, just on that point, has Andy's sort of fame, and you spoke about him selling his music licenses, but has that made it easier or harder maybe to kind of build this amazing brand that you have?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, I think it's worth mentioning that not just the three of us, but everybody who's come to work here, or certainly all the senior people or people with more experience who've come to work here, we're doing other things before that were inverted commas easier ways to make money but A crucial reason why I'm here is that there are not many businesses in the world where profit and purpose are so tightly intertwined. George has a very strong background after broadcasting in the philanthropic sector, and he did an amazing thing with a project called We Are Grow, which was a charitable foundation teaching about healthy soil and food from these systems to kids in schools, which was great. But the reason why I wanted to get involved was that when people ask about businesses that have profit and purpose intertwined, there aren't that many shining examples. And it's exactly where I wanted to spend the next bit of my career, having worked in finance, where the only real measure is how much money you're making, irrespective of everything else.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah. And I really kind of value that, Edd. And I think that, you know, profit with purpose and, you know, businesses doing the right thing is just so, so important, particularly in the regenerative space. And, you know, you've already started to talk a little bit about kind of impact as well. So how does wild farmed differentiate itself then from traditional agriculture models? So and what impact are you looking to have on the food system?

Ed Lees:

So the interesting bit is Andy was struggling. He'd figured out how to grow the crops in a healing soil, but he couldn't find a way to monetize what we call the externalities, which I'm sure many listeners would be aware about the idea of internalizing externalities. I started looking in detail at Andy's financial model, which was the incumbent financial model. What I was faced with was a business model where you don't know how much it's going to cost you to produce the thing you're going to try and sell. You don't know how much of it you're going to make. And you don't know at what price you're going to sell it. I couldn't design a worse business model. The incumbent model is stacked against the growers. And furthermore, there's very short windows to make decisions that will determine the financial outcome. There are huge things completely out of your control such as weather and politics and

these kind of influences on your outcome. So to answer your question in a very long-winded way is We tried to get rid of some of the known unknowns and make it a more reliable model to work with. And we tried to reduce or improve should I say reduce the risk per unit of reward to improve the risk reward ratio for farmers and make it a thing that was farmer centric. to a point, so if our building blocks, our farmers are likely to have a better outcome growing with us, seemed a pretty solid base on which to build it, and then from there we are expressing what we do with those crops in a variety of different ways that I'm sure we'll get on to. It wasn't that we said we want to start an ingredients business, let's go find some raw ingredients, it was Andy's fundamentally doing a really good thing here and he needs a better route to market than the one that exists today. So how can we take that and scale that for many, many growers?

Matt Eastland:

And that's fascinating. We've obviously looked at regenerative farming a lot, EIT food. It's one of our key priorities because we really can see the need and the benefit of this. But what I'm taking from that is you're saying that a regenerative farming model is actually a much more stable model and a stable system for the farmer and I guess all the stakeholders involved than conventional farming. Is that right?

Ed Lees:

I mean, absolutely, with the huge caveat that there is a transition to get through. That transition should not be underestimated. and we should not as a people in the food system or as a society or whoever expects farmers to bear that entire burden and I don't know when we get on to this within the podcast but it's a shared burden and I think this theme of collaboration is absolutely something that we've got right so far. We haven't said this is just a farmer's group and everyone's got to bow to the farmer's wishes, we absolutely have giving the farmers a better deal and more agency. Again, it's a constant theme, more agency in the supply chain. But equally, we're asking the food manufacturers and the retailers to do their bit as well, and then the consumers equally, because it's a shared problem. So therefore, if everybody is willing to do his or her share, it's a much lighter problem.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, and I love that, Edd. And I totally am bought into that whole idea about that kind of shared problem, shared solution approach. And this is, again, exactly what we're talking about all the time here, you know, we were talking more about kind of like regenerative leadership within EIT food. So it's, it's not a farmer problem. It's not a consumer problem, which tends to be where the debate goes it's a problem that sits across the whole supply chain and therefore it's a solution that needs to be sourced from the whole supply chain with everybody working together and it's brilliant that you've been able

to kind of make that business model work and we will get into this more. Just on the specific regenerative farming practices that you employ. So again, one of the things about regenerative is it's quite an open church, there are different ways of defining it, it's not meant to be too prescriptive. So in terms of the practices that you employ with wild farmed, what specifically, you know, you talk about your standards, I think, what standards are you working towards?

Ed Lees:

I mean you touched on a really important point there which is regenerative is open to interpretation and for some time we'd have been guilty about saying we're more regenerative than that next thing and that's actually unhelpful and I would never want to discourage anybody from doing something that's better than the incumbent but equally it's important that business as usual, but slightly better 10% or 20% or 30% better isn't considered the solution. So there's absolutely a place for transitional products. And I see a lot of things that are being marketed as regenerative today as transitional. And I think that, again, that's the thing we'll keep talking about. And it's a lot of people will play a part on the transition. But you know, what we thought was very important about 18 months to two years ago was making it clear for regenerative not to become meaningless and also not to get mired in the in the world of certification which you know it could be waiting a very long time if ever for that to happen in a way that's broadly acceptable. it was important that we use those same tenets of traceability and agency to say what we mean. So our definition of regenerative or our set of regenerative standards is a 50-page document that anyone can download from our website. But if you don't have time to do that and they put it into chat GPT, what I hope it would say is plant diversity at all times. In nature, there exists a diversity of plants. When you take that away, you take a perfect solution and create a lot of problems. it will say nothing with the word side ever sprayed on our crops, no application of, you know, they use this catch all the pesticides, which I know is a thing worth a term that's well in the vernacular. But let's be clear, it's indiscriminately killing insects and anything else that may possibly live in the soil and fungus and the rest of it. Things that are healthy soil and a diversity of plant when it's fully functioning, I mean, these things are not needed. And so we have the diversity of plants, we have no pesticides. We have ground cover, so the use of cover crops when there's not a growing crop, and then an integration of animals where possible. These are the basic tenets of a wildfarm system.

Matt Eastland:

And am I right in thinking that a lot of this has actually come from a book from the 1940s that Andy was really into? Agricultural Testament, I think I read.

Ed Lees:

Yeah, that's it. There's a story and I don't know how much of it's become urban myth now, but what definitely happened, various versions were that he was looking for, reaching for an Eddith Blyton book for his daughter or something and it was misplaced and I don't know. There's some element of it. What's a fact is the bit I missed out to the opening section was Andy's early experiences farming were very close to total failure. He almost, I don't think he would mind me saying, almost financially bankrupted himself. And he was about to throw the towel in when he happened across this book, whether it was in a library or wherever he came across it. And it was a book written by Albert Howard called An Agricultural Testament. It was one of the early protagonists within the organic movement. And it was exactly that. In nature there exists a diversity of plants and animals at all time, and that's the basis on which we eat and live. In a highly chemical system, One can stand in a field where there's only one thing growing in a fertile field, nothing else except the seed and the spray have been created in the same lab and the only thing that's growing is that one crop, whereas you can walk past a crack in the pavement and many different things will be growing. So the fact that we can, in fertile soil, create conditions where only one thing grows is a hell of a feat of human achievement, but perhaps not one that we should be most proud of.

Matt Eastland:

I hear you. And I've never heard it put like that, actually, that, you know, by doing things in this more conventional way, you're only really growing one thing. Funnily enough, I was actually at a regenerative farm doing some sort of training with a team last week. And I was stunned by the amount of biodiversity in wildlife. I have never seen so many worms in my life in one place. just because the soil is alive and you can really sort of see it and feel it. I probably hear it, I imagine. Yeah, absolutely. You really can. Everything's moving. Everything's on the move all the time. And again, that kind of really brought it home to me how powerful this sort of method is. And talking about that, so biodiversity, soil health, how are you kind of trying to regenerate the soil and why is that so important for the crop that you'll grow, so the wheat that you'll produce?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, that's not just for us. Healthy soil is fed by a diversity of plants. They're different to get technical, not that I am the technical one, but their root exudates support a variety of soil organisms and that's why like above ground diversity and below ground diversity are one and the same. So that healthy soil is what feeds plants. It's photosynthesis. My eight-year-old son could tell you about that. But we don't think about it in that way. And at the same time, Andy was on Sky News at the weekend saying that a healthy soil can soak up vast amounts of water. So when we have wild weather swings, like we've had last year, we had a spring where it was barren, completely dry. It didn't rain for weeks and weeks. And now we've had, in the last two months, it hasn't stopped raining. In a

world where everyone has healthy soils, we're going to be more resilient to these huge weather changes. So it's about long-term resilience as much as making a healthier crop in the short term.

Matt Eastland:

And are you already seeing that on your own farms, that you can see that, you know, when you have extreme weather events, that actually the farms are resilient and they're performing better?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, unquestionably. Those who have, who are further along, because all farms are different, all farmers are different and they will go at different journeys. But those who are further along the journey have been doing it longer or were perhaps more fortunate with the soil quality that they started with. Absolutely. Their farms are storing and filtering vast amounts of water. I mean we are working with water companies now who are helping sponsor some of the activity of our farmers because they've realized that a farm that can soak up huge amounts of water as opposed to running off vast amounts of chemicals into the water system is good for their business.

Matt Eastland:

Is that right? That's amazing. So even water companies are now sitting up and taking note of regenerative.

Ed Lees:

Absolutely. There's a little known fact that there is more pollution in the water in the UK from agricultural runoff than there is from sewage.

Matt Eastland:

Wow, really? Yeah, you can see why it'd be in their interest to work with you, which is great.

Ed Lees:

It's cheaper to not get it in there than it is to get it out.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, absolutely. And you know, all the kind of positives we're talking about regenerative, which is brilliant. But I'd imagine that you've encountered with the farmers you're working with a lot of challenges with regenerative in terms of kind of like scaling this up and making it profitable. So how has wild farmed address some of those challenges and working with your farmers?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, farming is a hard business. It's incredibly volatile. There's so much to know. Farmers are the most innovative people who I've met, and I've worked with people in all sorts of different businesses, and farmers blow my mind still on a weekly basis about how intuitive and innovative and smart and resilient they are. But let's be clear, a farmer has roughly 40 harvests in her career. And so it's a big bet to change what you've been told by the thing you've always known. Also, equally, the average age of a farmer in most countries seems to be 61.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, we heard we've heard this, which is crazy, isn't it? You know, there's not we had, we had Will Young on the show. So he's a sort of farmer who's also been on Love Island. And he was, you know, he's a young guy. And he was saying the same thing. It's like, how do you get more or more young people into this space? It's really, really hard.

Ed Lees:

Yeah, that's a whole other topic for another day about land ownership and the rest of it. And where does natural capital accrue to? But um, How's our journey been? It's like most things. It was difficult at first. It was Andy driving around the country, persuading people that his experiences in France in a different climate, with different farm, were relevant and appropriate to a wetter maritime climate in the UK. And slowly and slowly, the most important bit of Well Farmed, Andy would say, is that he has developed a community where it's absolutely not about Andy anymore. He was the guy that started it, but now we have farmers, we have I think at a last count, 110 farmers, but even when it was 80, there were 1500 years of farming knowledge in our farming community. Many of them technically much better farmers than Andy and vastly experienced. And it's been, that was really the thing that is the thing that I think has been the greatest success of Well Farmed has been bringing together you know a group of people who instinctively felt like there was another way or a different way and it was this isn't Andy preaching to everyone about how to do things this is collective knowledge and something as simple as the WhatsApp group that our growers have is an absolute fountain of knowledge that's been huge support for other members who've come and joined the group and who contribute. I know for a fact we filter for people who want to contribute into that group rather than just trying to dictate. Amazing.

Matt Eastland:

And I guess farmers, they tend to trust each other, right? And word of mouth. So imagine once you've built a community, you can probably start to amplify your message much, much faster through other farmers.

Ed Lees:

Of course. And the farmers are also highly visual people. They know once they've seen how something can work, happy to try a bit and then maybe try a bit more. But back to my anecdote before, if you are a chef, you cook however many steaks of an evening. And if one goes wrong, one goes wrong. If you're a farmer and you take a bet on a harvest and the harvest goes wrong, that's a big bet to go wrong. And we live in a world where I say the margins are way for thin. The supply chain hasn't been working collaboratively. I think there is definitely desire and intent for that to evolve. I hear that from all sorts of different actors within the supply chain. But that isn't the incumbent system that we've been working with for whatever reason. And so convincing growers to do something slightly different or actually no. wildly different. Telling them what, trying to engage them with the idea that what good looks like isn't what they've been told good may have looked like, you know, has been a journey that's, Andy started it, but there's been many, many people have been part of that.

Matt Eastland:

And then on that, so what, If we are to make this transition and we are to really support farmers, and like you say, it must be really difficult to go from doing something you've been doing for hundreds of years passed down through a family to something wildly different, to use your words. What support then does the food system need to provide with farmers? Because like you said at the top of the show, this is not a farmer problem, this is a food system problem. So, you know, from your experience with wild farm, what is it that really makes the difference with farmers? What would move the needle in terms of the food system to support farmers better?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, that's right. I mean, putting my sort of finance hat on, if the risk reward is better for farmers, because the current system might be that you have to spend an awful lot on chemicals to have to hit a yield and then of that yield you need to hit in our example milling spec of wheat without going too technical that's quite a high specification you can spend an awful lot on chemicals to take that risk and if you miss it because like last year there was a very wet July then the drop-off is really quite poor so if you think comes out you might have spent 10 to make or 10 to 12, if you like, a net of 2, whereas if you can spend significantly less because you've reduced your chemical inputs quite significantly, even though you might get a lower yield, the risk reward of doing that is definitely stacked in the favor of the farmer. And again, to answer your question, what needs to happen, every actor in the supply chain, governments have to be sponsoring the right activity. We've seen farmers protesting all across Europe, even in London last night. Yeah, I know, I saw that. Yeah, and I think what's relevant there is that there's been, well, through good intention, some of the UK government schemes have created a nature versus food

dichotomy that does, it's a false dichotomy, it does not need to exist. And while we appreciate we need to put nature first, encouraging more land to come out of production and into nature, while for sure there's some place for that, we encourage to do both in the same place at the same time. And that's what Wildfarmed's about. So to continue answering it, I think government has a role to create good incentives, because I think for a long time, farmers have just been responding to what the both market and government incentives are. I think there needs to be more place for businesses like ours within the supply chain who are willing to pay a premium that they know they can pass on. I already know that many, many huge businesses, the biggest businesses in food have made commitments to source from healing systems or regenerative systems, whatever definition we go by, so that's great. so long as we can provide them with sufficient product that comes, again, that's very rigorously audited, which is a very important part of what we do. And then last of all, explaining to the consumer that they can be part of this. The choices that we make are in food. Most people eat food three times a day. So the choices that we make will make the difference. You do have agency in the system. So going back to the small example when Andy was living in France, the local neighbors could choose to buy from his system and support that. We can just scale that up because we live in the 21st century and most of us live in cities. So there's a lot of technology that can enable showing where your food's come from and how it's been grown. And while we might not spend all our time looking through all of it, the existence of that technology, and I think demanding that companies in the supply chain all sort of adhere to that, will give consumers the opportunity to vote in a way that the very big food businesses will come on board. Definitely.

Matt Eastland:

And I am really pleased that you brought up consumers as well, because I totally agree that I think they have a massive part to play in here and sort of voting with their feet, like you say. And just from like Wild Farms perspective, I mean, how have you gone about engaging with consumers? Because I have to say, I mean, looking at all of the work that you do, your brand is super cool. I think our producer was saying, you know, you make farming look electric and, you know, like farmers are almost like rock stars, which they are, right?

Ed Lees:

Farmers should be rock stars. Andy said that on the podcast last year sometime. Really?

Matt Eastland:

Is that right? Yeah. So has that been the intention in terms of the way that you've positioned the brand? You want this to be really accessible to consumers and to really position farmers in that way?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, it was super deliberate. We set out to be a consumer facing brand. We didn't set out to be an ingredient business. We've been building to this moment since the day we started. Whenever we sell flour, we don't do white label sales. Everyone we sell to will mention it somewhere, even if it's on the website, if it's on a social post, if it's on a menu, however they do it. And the reason to do that is so people do engage with it. Consumers want to feel part of something. We're all looking for agency. Do not underestimate the number of young people who are looking to spend their money in a way to support a system that they want to be part of. And we took cues from all sorts of other businesses. How do you become a lifestyle brand? you know, how do you say, how do you represent a thing that's highly relevant because sustainability for too long was an afterthought and felt like it got in the way of the commercials, it was a bit boring and it didn't need to be a drag. Like what we're doing here is for me the absolute hub of innovation for the next 10 to 20 years. How can we make things more sustainably and engage consumers to want to be part of that, I think is taking the place that convenience has taken for the last 20 years, which has fuelled a huge amount of the development we've seen in tech.

Matt Eastland:

I love that. And I can feel the passion, Edd, as you're talking. And I think I was reading somewhere, you know, we're talking about inspiration and that kind of brands that you look up to. Is it fair to say that brands like Patagonia, which have really embedded sustainability into the brand, have they inspired you to do the same for food and farming as Patagonia has done for outdoor clothing?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, I mean, I think that's when I said at the beginning, there are not many businesses where purpose and profit were so carefully entwined or so deeply entwined in the DNA of it, and Wildfarmed is just one example of it. But let's be clear about this. The opportunity set for a business like Wildfarmed is much bigger than it is to be Patagonia. there's only so many gilets that guys on Wall Street are going to buy. And we all buy food all the time. So whether it's absolutely just wild farmed in its own right, or a collective of businesses such as wild farmed, and whether we're the right group of people to execute it or not, a variety of questions that need answering. But this is a much bigger opportunity than Patagonia alone.

Matt Eastland:

Definitely. No, I really agree. I wish you all the success. I love it. Before we kind of start to look to close, I mean, we're always interested in like success stories. I mean, you said you've got 100 plus farmers now enrolled in this amazing community that you've built. So are there any kind of really standout success stories of

impact that you'd like to highlight, which really shows how this is working?

Ed Lees:

I think we spent a lot of time talking about the farmers and I could tell you many stories and we have an ex Farmers Weekly Farmer of the Year who has this lovely quote where he said I've only got about 10 harvests left in me and I've been on the wrong side of history for the last 25 years or 30 years and I've got a bunch of these stories but what we perhaps haven't talked about enough is what's coming next because we're not just an ingredient business, we were always set out to be a food business. On the 1st of May we're launching our own fully branded Wildfarmed brand into grocery where you'll be able to buy a range of breads and say I voted that way but equally all our partners in the b2b space we started off working with small independents who really had time to listen and resonate with their story and as we've gone through the gears we're working with some of the biggest food businesses in the UK and then talking to, you know, even bigger multinational food businesses. But I think it's worth to call out Marks and Spencer's, who were the first big retailer to take a take a bet on us. I think then, you know, Franco Manco and Ask Pizzeria moved to Wild Farm Flour. And there's an awful lot more of those that are coming down the track. But consumers can engage with it rather than feeling too far away from it. And we've only just started with wheat and there's, you know, there's many other products that are coming down the track.

Matt Eastland:

Now you've got me intrigued. A, I can't wait to see your own branded products in stores, but I can't wait to see what's coming next. Also, just to back up, I don't usually do this, but just to back up what Edd is saying for our listeners, I pretty much exclusively buy my bread from now from Marks and Spencers. Even before I knew WildFarm, I was saying to my girlfriend at the time, it's like, why does this just taste better? you know it's like as good if not better than some of the french bread that we have from you know when we go to france so yeah i'm huge fan massive fan and it's amazing that you know you've had so much success cracking that kind of big retailer piece as well so i really wish you all the success on that and you mentioned um ed about the future so I read an interview with yourself in The Economist, I think it was, where you said that in the coming years, all brands will be regenerative, which really stood out for me. And I was wondering, can you explain what you mean by that? And how is that influencing Wildfarmed's vision for the future of the food system?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, I mean, we were fortunate in that we started ground up and we started off with me and George helping Andy find a route to market for regenerative crops he'd grown because the incumbent system didn't put any value on the way he'd grown it. And so we've grown

from there. There are many existing businesses who are definitely going to stay in business, but are going to have to reverse engineer this. And it's going to take longer for those guys. But let's be clear. As I said before, the tech exists for traceability. And once traceability becomes a common thing that consumers want to engage with in making their food choices, and I think that's coming as a theme very, very quickly, that will naturally force businesses to come from regenerative supply chains. On the other side, crucially, resilience is being tested. This wild weather is here to stay. Big, big businesses, I think it's wonderful that there you see at C-suite, they're making these big statements because they want to do it. They see it as their position within the system to do this. So I think the combination of consumers demanding it because they want to know more about where their foods come from, and it's quite hard to believe claims if you can't really see it in this day and age. People aren't showing you why. I think the combination of very big businesses wanting more resilient supply chains, and I think governments also doing a little bit to help that difficult bit at the beginning, And finally, farmers, the fact that they are protesting all over Europe is a sign that the food system is ripe for a change.

Matt Eastland:

Definitely. And what's your vision for wild farm going forwards? Where would you like to take the brand? What's going to be your role in the food system in the future, do you think, if I'm able to ask?

Ed Lees:

No, no, you are, you are. I think WowFarm, like I said, will become one of a number of businesses that are growing today that will become the household names of tomorrow. I think these businesses are getting built. If you look back at the NASDAQ 25 years ago, those top names were nowhere near the top names. And then the S&P, I think these new things are being built. I think the incumbents will play along as well. But I think we've got an outsider's advantage, should I say, of being able to start from ground up. I see us very soon being a lifestyle brand and the thing that, as with Patagonia, we started off doing it because we were forced to do it that way and I see other businesses doing really good stuff, growing food that is making people healthy, making the planet healthier and that's where I think we're all going to be eating from.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. Amazing. I love it. I love that. Thank you. So, Edd, if people want to find out more about Wild Farmed and what you do, where should they go?

Ed Lees:

Yeah, that's right. I think if you're a big food business or a medium sized food business or a small food business that's looking

to source regenerative ingredients, cereal ingredients, get in touch with us either on Instagram or info at wildfarmed.co.uk. Even if you just find this remotely interesting, or you don't, still check out our Instagram, because I think it's pretty good. And we, like I say, we're one part of a web that's growing, and I'm delighted that there's, you know, there's organizations like you guys around connecting us, because a key theme between businesses of all size is collaboration. It's very, very important that that we collaborate together. It's important that we have traceable audited standards so that it doesn't just, so consumers don't feel duped. I think that's extremely important. I think the supply chain should engage with us or businesses like us. And I think consumers should go and buy our breads off the shelf from May the 1st.

Matt Eastland:

I'd love it. Yeah, I would encourage everybody to do that and really engage with Edd and the guys at Wild Farmed. And like you say, collaboration is absolutely where the magic happens. And that's what we're here for. So thank you for that. And finally, then, Edd, to see us out of the show, if you had one piece of advice for someone who wants to take their first step towards regenerative farming, where do you think they should start?

Ed Lees:

If they're in serials, get in touch with us. But if not, as you say, you had Patrick Holden on here. I mean, the guy is a legend. There's a lot of very supportive networks out there. And these are global networks. In the US, the Madag guys are doing a fantastic job. I think all across Europe, these things are existing. So I would suggest doing something. You will be able to find someone quite quickly. And if not, get in touch with us and we'll point you in the right direction because that's our role in this as thought leaders.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. Thank you very much, Edd, for that. And yeah, sound advice. Join a community and basically get your hands dirty.

Ed Lees:

Do something. Yeah. I say that to everybody. A crucial thing with wildfarm, if you're a farmer, just get started. If you use flour, you're a baker or a restaurant, just do something. You don't have to do all of your You don't have to do all of your farm, you don't have to do all of your products. If you're a consumer, you don't have to only eat wild farm, but if everybody starts doing a little bit, it becomes, you know, like we can really start a movement.

Matt Eastland:

Really wise words. Thank you, Edd. And huge thanks for coming on the show. I have loved every second of this. I've every time I speak to,

you know, amazing people like yourself, I learn a little bit more about the food system, the challenges and, you know, and the amazing solutions that are being driven out there. So, you know, big congratulations to you all. Really wish wild farms the massive success looking out for everything on the first of May. So Yeah, thank you again, Edd, and I really hope that you'll come back on the show at some point and tell us how it's all gone.

Ed Lees:

Yeah, I'd love to. Thanks very much for having me. It's been great talking.

Matt Eastland:

So that was Edd Lees there, everyone from Wild Farmed. What an amazing conversation and what an incredible business model that they're building. But not just a business model, but a business with purpose, which Edd spoke about a lot. I took away a number of things from that conversation. So right at the top of the show, Edd said that farming as he saw it in a traditional sense was one of the worst business models ever imagined. He was saying it's just crazy the way that this works with not never really knowing where your money's coming from. But the really interesting thing for me is that what he was saying was that regenerative farming is actually stabilizing farming as a business model and therefore making it more profitable. So actually you can have a profitable business with purpose. So that was interesting. Obviously, with regenerative, you can't help but to talk about soil health. And Edd was talking about the fact that, you know, just one example, soil can hold vast amounts of water. And even water companies now want to work with wild farm because one thing that soil is doing is it, it traps the water in the soil, and it's stopping like pollution runoff. So it's much easier to do that than actually then try to take the pollution out of the water. So that again, not something I've heard of before. Edd also spoke about supporting farmers a lot. And some of the simple things he's doing with technology, like having his community on WhatsApp, and that is binding people together. And that sense of community, again, he spoke about this a lot, about the collaboration and the fact that they've now built a community which has a life and a purpose of its own, above and beyond their founder, Andy Cato. So it's becoming its own movement. The other thing that Edd pulled out in terms of where things need to change, he mentioned government incentives and that they need to be incentivizing the right things. And he, you know, he particularly said that he thought that the idea of nature versus food is a false dichotomy. And actually, with regenerative farming, you can do both. So there's more work to be done there. And then finally, Edd was particularly passionate when he spoke about consumers and that by consumers making better choices, we can actually vote with our feet. And I guess it was a big shout out that Wildfarmed's own lifestyle products will be going into our shelves on the 1st of May 2024. So as he said, please give us your vote by buying our bread, which I thought was a really nice way to put it. Big thank you to Edd for coming on the show and

talking to us about Wildfarmed and all the amazing work they're doing and I wish them all the success in their venture and I hope to hear from them again coming back on the show to tell us how things have gone. Thank you everybody for listening in. This has been the Food Fight podcast. As ever, 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 EIT Food. And if you haven't already, please hit the follow button so you never miss an episode. Thanks again, everyone. See you next time.