Matt Eastland:
Earlier this year, Regen House, a collaboration between EIT Food and HowGood, transformed London's iconic Ministry of Sound into a hub of radical ideas and regenerative thinking. For just one day, a venue best known for music and nightlife became the stage for immersive workshops, provocative discussions, and powerful storytelling from food system leaders, farmers, innovators, and indigenous voices. As part of London Climate Action Week, the largest citywide climate festival in Europe, Regenhaus created a space where urgent questions met bold solutions. It was a place for deep connection and disruptive dialogue, exploring how our food system both drives and can help to solve the climate crisis, and spotlighting the innovations and practices that might just hold the key to a fairer, healthier and more climate resilient future. Amidst the gathering of radical thinkers and doers, we took the opportunity to ask the leaders, farmers, growers and activists at the heart of these conversations a series of vital questions. What a perfect place to launch into Season 7 of the Food Fight podcast from EIT Food, a show committed to exploring the greatest challenges facing our food system and the innovators dedicated to solving them. I'm your host Matt Eastland and I kickstarted things off by posing one of the biggest questions of the day to our CEO Richard Zaltzman.

Matt Eastland:
We are here in this amazing venue of Ministry of Sound. Hopefully our sound people can get rid of all the amazing hubbub going on in the background, but it is truly incredible. Rich, I'd like to ask you just a few questions, particularly around the fact that we're in London Climate Action Week, so to get your kind of headline thoughts on a few things. So, what's the biggest challenge for the food system in addressing climate change specifically, do you think?

Richard Zaltzman:
Wow, that's a big question, mate, yeah? Opening with a big answer. Look, I think the food system is a very intricate, multi-layered system. So I think about this a lot. What's the difference, say, between transport and built environment or heavy industry and food? And I've got a really simple hypothesis that for many other systems, it's fairly straightforward to address global heating and carbon emissions. So I'm going to ignore, simplify climate change to global heating. massive amounts of renewable energy, electrify everything, and then you've got a few outliers. That's basically what transport is, what the built environment is. But food, first of all, multiple greenhouse gases, multiple parts of the system from primary agriculture, primary production, transport, logistics, retail, packaging. It's such a complex interwoven system that you need to address it in many, many ways. So I think that I love London Climate Action Week, not just London Climate Week. It's New York Climate Week, chit chat, London Climate Action Week, get stuff done. But for the food system, we've really got to think, when you change what's going on on a farm, so when you start to farm regeneratively, reduce

primary inputs, how do you link that to retail? And that is a complex weave. It's not a pathway, it's a weave. And I think we're getting there. We're seeing the right people come together to have those conversations. And you heard from Kerry Foods today, they're thinking about their whole value chain when they look at this. So to me, that's the answer. But it's not easy, but it is the way forward. Think about this as a weave of the whole value chain.

Matt Eastland:
Knitting together these complex systems is one of the key issues Fabio Volkmann from Climate Farmers echoed to us.

Fabio Volkmann:
I work in the agri-food system together with Climate Farmers and the European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture and yeah, kind of promoting a collaborative form for system transformation that is farmer-led and yeah, that's what's driving me, what's getting me out of bed and that's what I'm mostly doing. I think that from my perspective, what I'm experiencing at the moment is the disconnection and disconnection on many different levels. So lack of relationships between people, organizations, and underlying from there I think is the competitiveness that we still have very strongly within the system that we live in. We're a capitalistic driven system.

Matt Eastland:
Andrea Falcone shares a similar perspective, but what sets her apart is the lens she brings as an indigenous knowledge expert.

Andrea Falcone:
Hello, my name is Andrea Falcone. I am Peruvian, living in Switzerland, and I am a consultant on what I call applied indigenous knowledge systems. So I'm a founder and also a co-founder in an NGO. And I work in the intersection between spirituality, but also corporate. I have a background in public consultancy in Peru, and since I moved to Switzerland, I started opening spaces to create, to bring an indigenous view of modern systems into the world. Separating food from plants, from soil, from humans, that's for me the main problem, a fundamental ontological problem, I think. We have put food in a box that is separated to humans. For me that's the biggest challenge, the nomenclature and the definition, the cosmovision around food. From where I come from, food is not food, it's plant, it's part of our bodies, it's currency, it's culture, it's everything.

Matt Eastland:
This growing sense of disconnection from our plates and from the planet pushes us to take a very hard look at the choices that we make every day. It challenges us to reflect on our attitude towards

food, the cultural preferences that shape what we eat, and the consumer habits that play into how our food is sourced.

Tom Hunt:
I've called myself Eco-Chef Tom Hunt because since 2011, everything I do is focused on climate activism, whether I'm writing a recipe or cooking for a crowd. The biggest challenge for addressing our food system in climate change, well, I think it's this addiction to convenience and the lack of holistic thinking around our food system. Often we're like compartmentalizing agriculture and And then thinking of the food chain as like agriculture, supermarkets, consumer, when it's far more complex than that. And the solutions are really truly holistic food systems, which are much far more integrated, shorter food chains, and people coming together like we are here today at REGION HOUSE to discuss these solutions and and actually make them happen. So kind of leading that into action.

Matt Eastland:
Transforming our global food system to serve both people and planet may seem like an impossible challenge. But are the innovations we need to achieve this actually closer than we think?

Matt Eastland:
I'm Simon Partridge. I'm the head of operations at the Basel Centre for Sustainable Protein. It's one of three global initiatives looking to bring about a change in a sustainable food system based at Imperial College London. I think there's a number of different aspects to it. I think waste is a large one, of which I believe engineering biology, microbial foods, cultivated meat and other such alternative protein products can potentially address or help address. Food security is a massive one, very much highlighted from Covid era and I believe that we can make much more localised by chains to make the food system more resilient.

Matt Eastland:
There's broad agreement that our current agri-food system is in urgent need of renewal, not just through fresh ideas but through meaningful actions and binding policy changes. Yet at the centre of this transformation lies a critical factor. funding. Without proper investment, even the most innovative solutions and bold commitments risk remaining out of reach. Access to capital is what enables smallholders to adopt new practices, empowers communities to scale up local initiatives, and drives systemic change across the entire food chain.

Tom Pearson:
My name is Tom Pearson, I'm a regen farmer just north of London here in Cambridgeshire. I've also got a sort of health background as well so I sort of tend to farm always thinking about health and community

health as well. So I guess I think traditionally a lot of the money's gone to other things like energy and vehicles and things like that and I think we're sort of due our pots of money soon but I think the reason why it hasn't come to us early is because it's not a low-lying fruit and it is a complicated thing and everyone's got an opinion because they all eat food and also I mentioned it earlier in the panel the idea that you're not just dealing with a few big companies you're dealing with farmers

Dr Christian Reynolds:
And is all that funding going to the right place? Hi, my name is Dr Christian Reynolds from the Centre for Food Policy at City St George's University of London. The biggest challenge for the food system in addressing climate change at a global scale is probably ensuring equity of impacts at a global scale. And so that means raising everybody from people on less than a dollar a day to the global population and the global north population, having drastic changes and making sure everybody is going to be impacted, but making sure it's a just and equitable transformation. And for me, the magic bullet is increasing those bottom people's income. The amount of money you get from farming as a smallholder farmer globally, to ensure they can be part of a global solution, that will really ripple through the entire economy.

Matt Eastland:
And when funding finally makes its way to the foundational players in the global food system, it can unlock an extraordinary range of solutions that are imagined and driven by the very people who live and work closest to the land. These farmers, growers and indigenous communities bring practical hands-on experience as well as deep-rooted knowledge passed down through the generations. Their insights are not abstract theories, but proven ways of working with ecosystems. And with the right support, they hold the power to transform how we farm, produce and care for our food systems.

Andrea Falcone:
I would say from something that I heard here today is the idea of creating solutions for the food systems that come from the people working with the food. So solutions for farmers that come from farmers. And where I come from, farmers are mostly indigenous people. So their voice and their perspective is important. What we have nowadays is mostly a perspective that comes from buyers. And what excites me a lot is that I see in global stages that now the world is starting to say, no, we need the opinion of the native peoples of the lands where the food comes from.

Matt Eastland:
For livestock farmer Amy Chappell, the path forward is rooted in the wisdom of the past.

Amy Chappell,:
I am someone who wants to go back to the old ways as such, looking at how we can use existing knowledge to transform our landscapes back into something that they used to be many years ago. For us, it's using cattle, pigs, sheep, all our livestock to benefit the environment, to bring back wildlife, to store carbon in our soils. It's something that we're using, something that's already existing to create something that's pretty cool.

Matt Eastland:
Others think the answer lies in the emerging technologies which are helping us to monitor, map, predict and plan for the future.

Mark Kaplan:
I'm Mark Kaplan. I'm Chief Sustainability Officer of Whole Chain. We're a full supply chain traceability system based on global data standards like GS1. We collect primary data through supply chains and also have a consumer transparency application that tells the story of that supply chain. So whole chain of course is, I'm very biased in this one, but whole chain is of course very exciting. Some of the exciting technologies that we interact with I'd say is the evolution of on-farm technologies that provide more insight into things like microbiology in the soil itself, so you can get a better sense of soil nutrients. and also where there's gaps in soil nutrients. So again, more interventions capabilities. We deal with a lot on on-farm tech in aquaculture. So water quality, feed, animal welfare. So all of those types of issues are more readily addressed with the on-farm technologies that we're seeing. We're also using a lot of satellite mapping. To do deforestation free deforestation conversion free assurances and providing more visibility there because some of the legacy solutions like mapping or certifications while there's a place for that and we collaborate with them rather than compete. As a standalone, they don't really solve the need because the digitalization doesn't follow the movement of goods. So they're very susceptible to losing their provenance when they get either transformed in the middle of the supply chain or consolidated with large volumes of other product. so you can't provide the same level of assurance and you don't have the same ability to track back to origin to verify that it is actually deforestation conversion free or equitable or so on and so forth.

Matt Eastland:
Technology is already proving to be a powerful ally in transforming our food systems. From improving soil health and managing water use more efficiently, to tracking land use changes in real time, these tools are helping farmers not only produce more sustainably, but also with greater efficiency. And just as importantly, technology is shining a light on bad practices, holding to account those who try to cut corners at the expense of people and the planet. Fabio, who we heard from earlier, believes that this is only the beginning,

that with the right innovation and adoption, technology can take us even further, unlocking new possibilities for transparency, accountability and resilience across the food chain.

Fabio Volkmann:
I'm very interested in like digitalization and what is happening like within the AI space. So like there we're looking also at the measurements on the ground that you can do now with bioacoustics for example and yeah like very high-tech. So on the other side very interested in like pharma-led solutions and pharma innovation and that's really nice like that we are working together with a pharma They have a broad fork, a very simple broad fork, very rudimentary. These are the things that are very haptical, that excite me. These are the solutions that I see that are getting scaled between different farmers and farmers inspire each other. They are not sold on a global level. I think it's a good combination of innovation and solutions that are out there that I want to push forward and that excite me.

Matt Eastland:
Innovations are easy to get excited about. If made available and adopted on scale, they promise a positive food future. However, whether the answer lies in new technologies or a return to traditional technologies and practices is something which is still up for debate.

Matt Eastland:
So what innovative solutions or new technologies excite you most for a sustainable food future? And I know at EIT Food we do a lot of this.

Richard Zaltzman:
Yeah, we do a lot of it and some of it is back to the future for me. And it's not actually the innovative technologies that are really exciting. Actually, it's re-thinking the way we farm food or the way we eat. And it's actually going back to a system that is somewhat simpler, that does not rely so heavily on primary inputs, nitrogen, phosphorus, et cetera, phosphate. So number one, it's not always about technology, but you have to innovate to get back to something which is a simpler model. I'm just thinking about innovation to get fruit and veg on people's plates. If you want people to process their own food at home, to cook their own food at home, you actually have to innovate. How do you make time for that? How do you make those foods available again? So some of it is the back to the future. On the tech stuff, I'm really excited about the space of biologicals to replace synthetic fertilizers. and also not just as a like for like you know kilo for kilo how do you there's some really interesting stuff just that allows the soil to regenerate or supports the soil to regenerate micro rhizome technology i'm going to put uh new genomic techniques on there because no matter what

whether we like it or not there are techniques which will give us drought-resistant crops, pest-resistant crops, heat-resistant crops, and whether or not regulators like it, those solutions could be life-saving. They will be life-saving or civilization-saving in some parts of the world. So those areas which I think are really interesting, and of course everyone's going to say AI, but when you look at What that can do if already AI visuals looking at a field can help a farmer really understand whether they have to spray or not way before they used to be able to do just by visual inspection.

Matt Eastland:
But if we're rethinking the way that we farm, eat and grow food, it raises a crucial question. Why does it matter to involve people at every level of the food system? Why not just leave it to policymakers and corporations to drive the change?

Andrea Falcone:
I think it is as important as breathing, because I don't know what part went wrong that we separated. We're all connected to that. So I think it's a fundamental uh topic also to create better quality of life for everybody because nobody's life nobody's mental health nobody's health in general can be balanced if there is a gaps that are not there so the separation the people not knowing we're not being involved on how these things that keep keep them alive uh come from and are made uh I think, yeah, I end up most of the time speechless with this because it's so crazy, the separation that we're living nowadays.

Fabio Volkmann:
I think it's inevitable because we need to understand how people work together, what are their different needs, what are the enablers, what are the drivers for these people, but also the challenges that they face. So I think the system that we are living in is part of different systems that are encompassing the food system, but then also the system as society that we have.

Richard Zaltzman:
But beyond that, actually, there's not much that connects humanity. So number one, it's a universal attribute of everybody's lives. So if we ignore some parts of society or we ignore some of the people in this very, very complex web that we work in, we're not going to get it right for everybody.

SPEAKER_03:
I think engagement at every level is really important because everyone is an expert on food. Everyone should have a say in food. And actually, if people aren't engaged, for example, if farmers aren't engaged, they don't want to have things forced upon them. They need to be part of that. They need to buy into the problems,

but also into the solutions. Otherwise, they recoil from that. And it's just going to be another barrier.

Matt Eastland:
There is broad consensus on the importance of engaging people at every level of the food system. The pressing question now is, how can this be achieved in practice? Andrea from the UK Food Systems Centre had this to say.

Andrea Falcone:
Everyone can play a role in pushing levers towards a different outcome of the food system. So I work a lot with restaurants and chefs, and you can start seeing chefs wanting to bring forward different menus, and they do. But if the menus are not being picked up by businesses, or if the people are not coming to eat the food they're creating, they are going to not feel this is worthwhile. So there could be macro systems, solutions which enable that. There could also be macro systems conversations, societal conversations, which start shifting this decision. So this is an example.

Matt Eastland:
Mark Kaplan sees a significant opportunity in strengthening the connections between the various players within the food system. By fostering collaboration, he believes we can create a more resilient and cohesive system based on shared knowledge, coordinated action, and mutual support to help address challenges more effectively and sustainably.

Mark Kaplan:
Because food systems and value chains are by nature partnerships. I mean, yes, there are vertically integrated, holistically owned, but they're fewer and far between relative to the global food system. So the need to have that relationship built into every level of the supply chain is because they're all codependent on one another. And when there's codependencies, If one actor has a desire to achieve a certain goal and the others aren't aligned to that, it will not happen. And so I think more importantly, this is actually one of the most important issues in solving the climate crisis and food systems is the realization that there is a codependency. And just because the bigger end buyer tries to force something downstream, It hasn't worked. It's not really a theory because the signal from the market has been there for years now. And I don't even know how many records have been set on heat and extreme weather and food shortages. So what's been done before doesn't work. So having that more humble, partnership-minded outlook, especially to the primary producers, the farmers, the fishers, and so forth, it'll be, to me, the biggest unlock, and have the end buyers more directly connected to that first mile of supply chain, because that's where I think there's a lot of loss in translation.

Matt Eastland:
At the consumer end of the food system, it is crucial to recognise the many factors that influence and often limit people's ability to make informed choices. Richard Saltzman emphasises that decision-makers frequently overlook the millions of consumers whose options are constrained by a complex web of social, societal and economic pressures.

Richard Zaltzman:
Many, many people today don't have agency in the food they put on their plate. They don't have access to good food. They don't have the money for high-quality food. They can't get to a supermarket. Food is a really pernicious problem. And I do worry we have quite a middle-class view in forums like London Climate Week or New York Climate Week or COP. There's a very middle class view. People, consumers would want to pay more for something that is labeled as sustainable or healthy. And actually, we have to recognize, no, we need to talk to the people who don't make the choices that maybe you and I make when we go and think, I'm going to buy something that's interesting. It's quite expensive, but I'll try it. Millions of people do not have that luxury, and we have to include those voices in these conversations. Otherwise, it becomes a middle-class conversation and someone made a made a quote today he said regenerative food cannot become a middle-class hobby and I thought that was really powerful and neither can our work across the food system become a middle-class hobby and that's why we have to engage everybody. The farmer voice is getting more and more important and I It's hard to bring in because they're really busy people on farm, but it's not just the farmers. It's really thinking about every all strata of society, multicultural voices, multi-country voices, and we'll get a very different set of solutions.

Matt Eastland:
And just on the how, and maybe we can look at the EIT food model in terms of how we get people there, how should we be engaging people at different levels and different areas of the food system?

Richard Zaltzman:
Look, we're a small organization, right? We're a small organization in a very big space in Europe. So we've got to think about who are the catalysts for those conversations. So number one, I don't think we as EIT Food directly can go out and engage several million people. So we've got to think smart. where are the people that actually do engage a very, very broad spectrum of society, schools, hospitals? My experience of going to hospital is it's a very broad demographic and it's very democratic. You receive the same care no matter where you've come from. And I think we need to start thinking, where are the spaces where our ecosystem, our partners, we can steer politicians to, or we can steer policymakers to, where they will hear those voices, as opposed to feeling we have to go and

listen to the, we have to bring those voices in through EIT Food. I'd rather try and catalyze our ecosystem and those who do the projects with us and those who go and test work like Regen to bring the voices in themselves.

Matt Eastland:
As the focus shifts away from individual responsibility, what should the new narrative be? And how can it more effectively guide collective action?

Tom Pearson:
The food system is just a massive beast, isn't it? And you can engage with some of them and then you'll end up with a nice brick wall and then the whole thing falls apart. So I think, and you know, there is a responsibility for everyone from producer through to the person who's eating the food at the end and actually the way streams beyond that. and everyone has to take their fair share and I think there's generally a narrative and it's happened in the climate change world that the narrative has always been a sort of the personal choice and it's your decision and your responsibility and that's incredibly unfair so we have to be careful when we look at the whole food supply chain or food value chain as it should be called you know we're making sure that the big players have their decent fair share of that responsibility as well but everyone has to come along for the ride.

Matt Eastland:
These highlights are just a small glimpse into the rich conversations and powerful ideas shared at the Regen House Hub during London Climate Action Week. Each story and perspective tap directly into the heart of the challenges that food system leaders, farmers and indigenous communities are grappling with every single day, from questions of equity and access to resilience in the face of climate change. But the dialogue doesn't stop here. In next week's episode, we'll shift from identifying the challenges to spotlighting the solutions. We'll dive into some of the most inspiring food-centered climate actions and innovations already taking shape. Practical steps that each of us can take individually and collectively to help build a fairer, healthier and more climate resilient future. That's it for this week. I've been Matt Eastland. Goodbye, everyone. Thanks for listening.