

Swell AI Transcript: The Big Takeaway S5 V2.mp3

Matt Eastland:

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. I'm Matt Eastland. Pleasure to have you with us today for our big takeaway episode as we come to the close of our latest season of the Food Fight podcast. So in our big takeaway shows we look back at the amazing conversations we've had across 15 episodes during season five and we shine a light on the standout moments that have resonated with us and we hope with you our listeners. It's fair to say that we've explored a diverse range of topics on the show, from the roots of farming to the blossoming possibilities of regenerative agriculture. We've also delved into the intricate web of sustainability, uncovering the innovations and entrepreneurs driving positive change. Also, let's not forget the vital discussions we've had about building online communities, connecting people from all corners of the globe in the fight for a better food future. So sit back everyone, grab a healthy and sustainable snack, and join me as we revisit the main messages that have echoed throughout Series 5 of the Food Fight Podcast. There have been many exciting conversations and technology featured in this latest series, like automated pizza robots.

SPEAKER_04:

At Herbivore last year, we had a robot pizza truck, which has also always been sort of a holy grail for the automation industry.

Matt Eastland:

To tasting Kraft chocolate with a flavor expert.

SPEAKER_01:

First thing you do with a piece of chocolate, give it a quick sniff and snap it. That snap is incredibly important because it means it's been properly tempered.

Matt Eastland:

But one of the biggest shocks in the series came to me right at the start when I interviewed ex-Love Islander and TikTok influencer Farmer Will Young in episode 119, after he spoke to me about the shortage of young people choosing farming as a career.

Will Young:

I looked up her statistics. Do you know the average age for a farmer globally? Oh, I do not. Now, 60 years old really is the average age. I know. And that just really shows you even kind of like my parents, like that sort of generation, you know, it's absolutely mind blowing at 60 years old. That is the average age globally in 59 in the UK. That's crazy. I know. It just really does show you and you can't

stress it enough how much of a lack young people and the younger generation are getting into farming.

Matt Eastland:

So as you can tell that I was absolutely shocked by that. I had absolutely no idea that the average age of a farmer globally was 60. And like Will says, it just really underlines the importance of getting younger farmers into the industry. And throughout the episode, Will vividly illustrated the current reality of the UK farming landscape with a lot of authenticity and humanity. And it was a really poignant conversation. So he really refrained from sugarcoating the challenges that farmers encounter, instead offering what was actually a really candid and unfiltered account of life as a farmer. And what struck me most was the stark realization that our younger generations lack sufficient insight into farming to even consider it as a viable career option.

Will Young:

I think colleges and uni is a great way to start. I would love to be in a position or the UK to be in a position where agriculture was actually taught within like GCSEs. It's like a subject you have to take. Something really interesting is obviously my girlfriend's Australian and I've had conversations with her about farming in Australia in comparison to UK and she can't believe it how farming is like, you're a mythical creature, you know, in the UK, it's like, yeah, it's like, Ooh, you know, he's a farmer, you know, and even with like stories or TV shows, farmers are always on their own. And I definitely feel like that within the UK, you know, they're almost not part of society, you know, and it's, really interesting talking to Jessie, my girlfriend in Australia, where everyone wants to be a farmer. You know, it's taught so much in school. It's, you know, praise. Let's get behind the farming community. Let's raise loads of money. Let's help them out and everything like that. In comparison to us, where I just do think we're a few steps behind.

Matt Eastland:

So again, Will there talking about the real importance of getting younger generations into farming and actually the great disparity between different countries in terms of how this is viewed. And the main message he underscored was also about getting farming into school curriculums as well. So really catering to a younger audience, introducing farming to kids at a really young age and giving them the opportunity to understand where the food is coming from. He also spoke a lot on the show about the wide variety of jobs that farming involves. So, you know, we talk about farming, you tend to think about a farmer, but actually it's a huge industry. You have accountants, you have administrators, you have engineers, you know, there is a whole load of jobs and careers available if you want to get into farming. And so Will is there to really kind of advocate for that. But as we moved through the series, similar messages were cropping up again and again, and we realised that Will was not the

only hero pushing for change in this area.

SPEAKER_00:

It's by connecting kids to the seed that they plant and seeing that grow is a miracle for them. Like, you'll see that kids are like, oh my God, oh my God, I just grew a carrot. And like, they're pulling the carrot out and like, they're freaking amazed that this little seed turned into a carrot or a broccoli or a cauliflower, whatever.

Matt Eastland:

So you just heard from Keira Byrne, who's the founder and co-CEO of Green Our Planet, who was also really talking about the importance of involving kids in growing their own food at schools. And this was a really mind-blowing interview. And Keira's story is truly incredible, the journey that she has been on. So she's originally Irish and moved to the States, where she ended up as a film producer doing lots of reality TV shows. But she realized after a while that she really craved a role with purpose. And she was in Las Vegas, which actually is one of the most arid parts of the United States and also the fifth largest school district in the US. And she'd heard from a local head teacher who was looking to set up a school garden but couldn't afford it. So she actually went into the school and made a video of all the kids saying, I want a school garden and things like that, which then was used as a fundraiser. which helped get the school the garden but what this led to was the fact that more and more schools then wanted to have a school garden as well and that was when the penny dropped for her that the real way to make positive change here in the food system was to really support her local community in creating these school gardens. Off the back of that they then created a curriculum with 30 teachers who wrote a STEM nutrition curriculum for the schools And it got to the stage where they created so much food at the schools that the schools then actually had to have farmers markets, which were run by their own fifth graders. And where they've ended up is they now have farmpreneurs, as she called it, at school. And they teach kids how to farm and grow food from their own gardens, which is an amazing story. And they're really seeing that there is a real appetite to teach agriculture in schools. And it's having a huge impact.

SPEAKER_00:

Connecting kids to the planet can change everything from them academically, for their health, for their mental health. It can do so much for kids. And let me tell you, 10 years later where we are with our school district anyway, every single new school that's built now has a school garden built with it. wow really every single school everything in our school district all across vegas and clark county every single school that is now built they build a school garden because you know we have 200 school gardens already built they see how popular the program is. We have moved from teachers hiding the fact that they're bringing their kids outside to their principal, to principals coming to us and saying, I need a school

garden. I see the impact. And so that's a big shift in 10 years in the culture.

Matt Eastland:

What an incredible impact that Kira has had with her program there. And some of the things that we took away from that episode, Kira was very much about focusing on the joy. She really understood the importance of school gardens in bringing joy to kids and getting them to understand where their food comes from. And the evidence shows that education grades improve, kids ambition improves and also their mental health improves. And all of this just from being able to grow your own food. And I think this also really underlines what Will was saying in the previous episode about the importance of getting kids into farming and gardening right from an early age and the impact that that will then have on our food system. So hopefully something that we can learn there and make sure that we do more of in a European context. Another huge theme of this series has been regenerative agriculture. Here's a clip from episode 134 with Ed Lees, co-founder of Wild Farmed, talking about their definition of regenerative agriculture.

SPEAKER_05:

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 you 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 then 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:

Wildfarmed is an organisation run by Andy Cato, who is one half of my favourite group of all time, Groove Armada, and another example of just a truly inspiring and quite accidental story. Andy actually just happened to pick up a book from the 1940s, An Agricultural Testament, which was pretty much a forerunner to regenerative agriculture, and it completely and utterly changed his life and his perspective on food. So much so that he then sold all of the licenses to his music to buy a farm in France, which by his own admission didn't do that well for a while. But little by little, by employing regenerative practices, he's managed to make the farm super productive and make it profitable. And now he's founded Wild

Farmed in the UK and Europe with two other co-founders, Ed being one of them. really, really fascinating story, where wildfarmers really recognize the transformative potential of regenerative farming practices. So they understand that these practices not only contribute to restoring ecosystem biodiversity, but they also hold the key to building resilience and agricultural systems by prioritizing soil health, biodiversity, and holistic land management. Regenerative farming can mitigate climate change, enhance food security and also promote sustainable livelihoods for farmers and communities.

SPEAKER_05:

There's a lot of technology that can enable showing where your food's come from and how it's being 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.

Matt Eastland:

So I really liked Ed's insights on consumers having the opportunity to what he basically was talking about was voting with their feet and actually by choosing better produce and produce which has come from regenerative practices, this actually then connects consumers much closer together with farmers and is potentially like, you know, the kind of model of the future. I also really liked Wildfarm's approach to establishing a farming community. So Ed on the show spoke about quite a simple thing, but very effective, where they had established a WhatsApp channel with farmers just so that they can get real time feedback and interact with the farmers on the community. And he even said at the time that, you know, they've established this community and it's pretty much now living by itself. but it also shows Wildfarm's commitment to receiving direct, real-time feedback from those involved in the production process at the farm level. So super transparent. So success appears to hinge on cultivating a trusting relationship with the community and fostering that open dialogue. And this sentiment was reiterated by Ben Ebrall, the YouTube presenter and founder of Sorted Foods, who shared insights from his extensive YouTube audience of 2.7 million subscribers regarding the importance of trust during episode 128.

SPEAKER_07:

there is a huge responsibility to make sure you're publishing the right stuff, the correct stuff. There isn't misinformation. We do due diligence on everything, but we also know that we have the trust two ways. Our audience trusts us to do that, but we also trust our audience to let us know if we missed the mark. A rainbow cupcake food fight That would do really well on YouTube 10 years ago. The data would tell you that. But that's not what we believe in. And we know, actually, because our foodie audience is so connected to what we believe in, the moment we publish it, they would challenge it.

Why are you wasting food? Why are you doing a food fight? Why are you throwing all these artificial colorings in it when you could use natural colorings or an alternative version? And we know that when we publish it, they would challenge us, because they believe as strongly in our mission as we do, because they're part of this movement. It's not us and them. Sorted is not four of us. It's not 20 of us working from a studio just down the road. Sorted is a global community of people, and we have to do right by them, right for them, and still make sure it works and adds up. Sometimes in this dark and gloomy world and all the food news, you can feel a little bit powerless on your own, but incredibly powerful as a community.

Matt Eastland:

So that was Ben very much talking about the power of community. And I love that clip that you've just heard that the phrase where he says powerless as an individual, powerful as a community, because I think that really sums up what he's trying to do. And in this episode, Ben spoke a lot about the importance of trust in the community, the fact that this takes actually a very long time to build up. that you've got to be clear and transparent with your community and that there are strength in numbers. Ben also spoke about the importance of serving his community. So this isn't just, you know, you're talking at a community, this is very much about interaction. And he even had an amazing example on the show where he had a couple come on his show who were super fans and one of them then proposed to the other. And you know, what an amazing story. So really for Ben, what he was saying was to cultivate a strong, supportive community. You really need that trust. And that requires both time and dedication. And also during season five, we were fortunate to have the new CEO of EIT Food, Richard Zaltzman, join us on episode 129, to talk about his aims for fixing the food system, where he also had some galvanising words around the importance of community.

SPEAKER_04:

I'd like to inspire our community, including the EIT Food folk and our partners and the broader community, to just start to be inspired that we can achieve a much, much more significant change in the world if we work together and collectively to do that. And again, working together you share that load, you share the peaks and the troughs, and they do smooth out to a certain extent. And this isn't something I can slap a concrete example on, because in a way, that brings it back down to a level of tactics. For me, this is a mindset and an ethos that we as a community are way more powerful than any one organization is on its own to affect food systems transformation. Even if I took something simple like our voice in the political arena, If we as EIT Food are trying to bang on the door about a topical issue in Brussels, let's take novel foodstuffs, right? Part of what we're trying to do within our missions is open the door so that we can see novel technologies providing solutions to challenges like diet or novel technologies being able to be

deployed by farmers to reduce emissions on farm, biologicals and new fertilizers. We know there's a policy landscape there which is not necessarily supporting those outcomes as effectively as it might, let's say. There's room for policy to open up and allow those solutions to come through more quickly or create an environment where they can test and fail more quickly. Now we can go knock on that door, but as a community together, if we start to raise our voice on the two or three things that really will make a difference to food systems transformation, collectively and coherently, then I think we'll have a much, much greater chance of having impact in that space.

Matt Eastland:

So I really love this point from Richard, and it's the same point that's being echoed by Ben from Sorted Foods. It's the same point that was from Ed from Wildfarm. This idea of shared collective responsibility and the power of community, which is so important if we're going to really affect and drive change in the food system. Another significant hurdle in our food system is the under-representation of female leaders, an issue that we continually strive to address to ensure accessibility for all. For International Women's Day, we had an enlightening conversation with Dr. Shima Barakat, who is in charge of EIT Foods' We Lead Food campaign, a program designed to get more female leaders into the food system.

SPEAKER_02:

If women are better leaders and women in top roles correlates with more adoption of sustainability practices, it means that for us to deliver a more sustainable food system, a more sustainable and resilient world and planet in general, we need women at the top. And without them, essentially humanity doesn't have a chance. It sounds dramatic, but actually the evidence shows us that that is exactly where we're at. But the pace of getting women at the top is far, far too slow.

Matt Eastland:

So I'm always a bit shocked by the situation that exists around women leaders. I mean, the data always shows that women leaders, when they run startups, the startups are more successful. Generally speaking, people prefer to be led by women leaders because they have a more positive experience. And also the environmental outcomes tend to be better. So it's sometimes a bit sad to have these conversations, but then on the flip side, I always come off the back of them feeling a lot more positive that we are actually moving in the right direction. And after speaking to Tony, the futurist in episode 125, we realised that we're going to need a lot more female leaders to ensure that we have a lot more successful startups in the future.

SPEAKER_03:

I am a techno optimist, not politically and socially, but from a problem solving point of view. I believe there is no problem on the planet that cannot be solved through the proper application of technology. And I believe that ingenuity of the human mind is unbounded, coupled with AI, who knows what's going to happen. We've seen amazing results of the synergy between AI and humans. Yes, there are dangers and downsides like any technology, but I think that we can solve the problems of the planet through technology. And I love all these things. And I think it's just endlessly fascinating opportunities for food technology going into the future. And anyone who's in that space, I think you've got a fantastic future in that. And where it's going to be driven, though, is, as we've seen, the rise of startups. Now, they're the ones who seem to have be able to bring the ideas together with the agility and the dedication to make things happen compared to larger companies. Some of the larger companies are trying very, very hard to be as innovative as they can be, but it's still not nearly as fast and agile as some of these smaller companies. And I think that's where the real opportunities are going to be in the future.

Matt Eastland:

So a really optimistic note there from Tony, the futurist who gave us his hopes for the future of the food system. And in terms of takeaways from the show, So Tony spoke a lot about food sovereignty, which he said is related to food security, but is actually slightly different. This is about making sure there is enough food for your population. And this is something that Tony saw is going to be an increasing challenge that we all need to solve. And his advice for startups was to use technology that makes best use of arable land, as Tony predicts that this is going to be a huge problem for us all going forwards. And then finally, Tony was really advocating for us to listen to Generation Alpha, so the next generation coming up, as really they are going to be the ones who are going to be leading us towards that future. So we need to understand their needs and wants now. It's been really inspiring for me to revisit some of the conversations we've had across Series 5, and thank you to all our guests who've been on the show and also our listeners too for tuning in. So to summarise the main themes that we've seen across Series 5. Producing food sustainably continues to be the way forward. It's what producers and consumers want. We need more diversity and community in the food system, as it opens our thinking and ensures shared responsibility, which will ultimately lead to greater impacts. Trust and transparency will continue to grow in importance, and those companies who ignore that do so at their peril. And techno-optimism is something to be embraced, where the inventiveness of humans and the power of technology will provide us with the solutions we need to truly transform the food system for the better. Right, and here we are folks. It's the end of season five. I can't believe it. But we will be back soon with series six. And in the meantime, please do look back through all of our previous 135 episodes, as there is a wealth of entrepreneurial innovative solutions just waiting to be discovered. So thank you everyone for listening. This has been the Food Fight Podcast. If you'd like to

find out more, head over to the EIT Food website at www.eitfood.eu. And please also 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. Take care of yourselves. See you in season six.