

Matt Eastland:

Welcome to the Food Fight podcast by EIT Food, a series exploring the greatest challenges facing the food system and the innovators committed to solving them. I'm Matt Eastland and it's an absolute pleasure to have you all with us for this big takeaway episode where we bring together the powerful themes we've explored throughout Season 6 into one single show, and what a positive season it's been. So we've heard remarkable stories of resilience, transformation, and of innovation. We've explored the power of soil health, the role of policy in reshaping our food system, and how technology is driving a more sustainable future. From AI-driven personalized nutrition to regenerative farming experiments, we've uncovered how people are taking back control of their health, their land, and their food. And there is so much value to revisit this season, so let's really jump straight into it, starting with healthier lives through better food choices. At the core of this series is one key message. Our food choices matter. And this idea was introduced in our very first episode when I spoke to Dr. Federica Amati, who's the head nutritionist at Zoe, which I believe was episode 136, The Power of Nutrition for Lifelong Health. And in that episode, Federica encourages us all to really think about nutrition the way we think about personal finance. So we're investing in our food choices just like we invest in savings and pensions.

Dr. Federica Amati:

We're quite well versed in thinking about savings and pensions, right? And so you put money in, there's compound interest, and you'll have more money later. But in terms of health, it's like, okay, you can do that, but for health. So every time you make a food choice, and lifestyle choices, not just food, but in this case, I'm talking about nutrition, right? Every time you eat a meal, every time you pull together food, it's an investment in your health account. And essentially, the money you put in has compound interest. So the more choices like that you make, and it's not about perfection, you don't have to always have this beautiful meal, like it's variation, it's about consistency over perfection. So say 80% of the time, you're making choices that are really centered to improve your health, right? Then you put that into your health account and it just builds and builds and builds. And then one day something terrible happens and your health takes a hit, but you've got quite a lot of money saved up, quite a lot of health wealth in your bank. And so it might get hit, but you will have a good point and you carry on. Actually, it's really important, I think, to say that we can't go back and change our foundational years. That's not the point of the book. You can do a lot to improve your health and well-being by changing your diet at any age. So there's beautiful modeling studies that show us that if you change your diet at age 70, you could add six healthy life years to your life. That's a lot. That's like 10% lately, right? So it's not about... There was a study that made the front page of everything recently, which showed that your diet age 46 was the best predictor for dementia and Alzheimer's age 69. That was a modeling study, like the age is kind

of not the point of the study, although everyone was like, oh my God, I'm 48, what should I do?

Matt Eastland:

I just read that headline, I was like, I've got a little bit of time.

Dr. Federica Amati:

Yeah, no, the point of that study was that there's this compound effect of nutrition on health outcomes. So what it was trying to show, I think, and I'm not an author, but this is how I interpreted it, is that your dietary habits aged 46, are going to have an impact on how your brain is going to function in your late 60s. But that also means that like what you were eating five years before or what you eat five years after that age point is still important. It's a compound effect. So every time we make a food choice, we want it to be smart because a smart food choice is an investment in our own health.

Matt Eastland:

I really, really loved this episode and it was a great way to launch the season. I guess for me, I mean, I'm a massive food geek, obviously, but I'm also a bit of a finance geek as well. So this really, really spoke to me. I love this concept of kind of investing into your health account. And like Federica said there, just as financial investments grow with compound interest, those small consistent changes in diet and lifestyle really accumulate into long-term health benefits, which you can call on if you need to. Hopefully you never do, but you can do. And the other thing which I really like, which is super positive, is that even if you haven't made the best choices in the past, it's really never too late to start investing in that kind of health wealth as we discussed then. And then finally, and once again, that kind of message around You don't have to be perfect with this. And I think that's often the problem is that, you know, we're kind of seeking perfection with our health, but you don't need to be perfect. You just need to always err on the side of better choices. And the more better choices you make, you know, the better off you're going to be in the future. And I just think that was a really lovely message that Federica delivered to us all. So the real takeaway for us all here is that every smart food choice counts. And the final thing as well, as we come into the second clip that we're going to share with you, is that another critical part of what Federico was talking about was the lost skill of cooking, which is something which is very, very close to my own heart.

Dr. Federica Amati:

Eating a whole food diet, a diet that's really rich and nutritious foods is really important. And I stress this because often for teens, the only meal they'll have with their families is probably

dinner. So it's like one meal opportunity a day and then weekends to pack as much punch as possible. where we know that children in the UK, you know, up to 72% of their daily calorie intake is ultra processed foods now. So they're one of the populations that have the highest. Yeah, it's really high. What can you do at home to make sure that at least when they're home and they're eating at home, they're getting the maximum benefit from the diet that you're offering that's on the table. Get them involved in cooking. Like cooking is a life skill that is not, it's a life skill. It's not like you're not born knowing how to cook, right? And we overlook this as a skill that actually needs some teaching.

Matt Eastland:

I really couldn't agree more with what Frederic is talking about here. Like I said, cooking for me is such an important skill and I think it's something that we are losing as a society and it is so very, very important. We need to teach our children and generations that, you know, now and in the future, the importance of cooking and then pass that on. I mean, the reasons for that are so many, but I guess the main one is that the more that you cook, the better we then connect with our food and where it comes from. And time and time again on the show, we've spoken about the fact that we're losing that connection with food, which is so important. And so really, as parents or the parents in society can really empower children, but not just parents, but also teachers as well, by offering them healthy choices, giving them that choice over their food preferences. and hopefully guiding them towards more nutritious habits. That shocking statistic there about 72% of teenagers in the UK are eating mainly ultra processed food is shocking but is reversible if we can teach our kids to cook. This season, we took these ideas beyond the podcast, bringing the conversation to Rome for EIT Food's flagship event, Next Bite. One of the standout discussions explored the potential of AI in personalized nutrition, a rapidly growing area which combines food, technology, and health. And here's a section from a session led by Mercedes Grober, who's the Senior Innovation Program Manager at EIT Food, where she interviewed Rick Schneiders from Siemens and Mariette Abrahams from Kiena about AI's role in nutrition.

Rick Schneiders:

Today, not everyone can afford to go to a human nutrition expert, so it can be a little bit like, you think it's something like a luxury service. So, do you think that AI and technology can be part of the solution to make this personalized nutrition through technology more affordable, inclusive, and accessible to everyone?

Mercedes Groba:

I think definitely AI is going to disrupt many, many business models and lives of everybody, right? So I think with personalized nutrition in general, a lot is now advising, right? We advise what somebody could eat or should eat. But in the end, if you have AI, of

course, the power of AI is that you can analyze really large datasets. So with all the data, you can, of course, create an optimized measure of a certain group. I was really triggered about the group. Well, who is the group? Is the group only the one with an Apple Watch? Because that's maybe not even the group that you want to target. So this is a real interesting point, because if you go one step further, what is actually the next step of personalized nutrition is that you're going to adapt our food, that you make, for example, more food groups, that you have personalized food subgroups. And if you want to create it, you, of course, want to create it for everyone, not only for a certain group that has wearing an Apple Watch. And here comes, of course, the crucial point is that if you want to create that, you need to have a lot of data points. So I think it definitely will change. It's already changing everybody's lives, right? But AI will make it more affordable, will make it more efficient, but we're definitely not there yet. But it definitely will have a big impact on our whole food supply chain and food system.

Mariëtte Abrahams:

I'll just add to that because I think at this point the USA is doing quite a good job in terms of the food as medicine movement and the reason why it's so effective is that they've identified managing chronic disease is a huge issue and food and lifestyle has a big role to play in that. But what they got together was the regulators, the government has put up 2.5 billion for startups to create solutions, the retailers are on board, the insurers are reinsuring, the regulators are now reimbursing medical nutritional therapy, so it's not just in-stage kidney disease and diabetes, and so they can access nutrition experts and be reimbursed. If you are on food assistance, you know where to get your food stamps. The retailers are reimbursing that, they're accepting the vouchers. So you can see that it's accessing a much wider group, but it actually requires everybody to come together. Whereas in Europe, people have to pay out of pocket to see a nutritionist or a dietician. So there are already barriers there. The more healthier foods, as we know, is more expensive. And so there are so many barriers to just making healthy living a lot easier. If in Europe especially, there could be probably more locally, not thinking completely widely abroad, but European-wide, but there needs to be a better coordination to really address the issues of why nutrition is becoming, or lack of good nutrition is becoming such a huge issue and has these knock-on effects on really preventable chronic diseases.

Matt Eastland:

So how could we have an episode summarizing a whole of the season without talking about AI? And here we are. But what a positive message, actually, that's been spoken about here. So AI really has the power to make personalized health solutions more affordable and inclusive, but it's only as good as the data it's trained on, which is what Rick Schneiders was talking about. And Mariette also spoke very positively about the real change requiring collaboration. So

governments, retailers, insurers and innovators must work together and indeed are working together in this space, which is really good news. And then finally, technology alone isn't just the solution. We need collective action. And Mariette really emphasised that true progress comes from local communities working together to make healthier living more accessible. And I can't wait to hear about more developments in this space at our 2025 NextBite event which is going to be in Brussels this year. And a big heads up, the webpage for that is now live, so if you go to the EIT Food website, forward slash NextBite 2025, you can find all the details there. So see you all on the 15th to 16th of October, please sign up now. As always, sustainability has been a huge topic throughout this season, but one conversation that truly resonated has been around soil health. So soil is the foundation of our food system, and its decline poses one of the greatest challenges that we're all facing today. At the beginning of 2025 we recorded our popular Food Trends episode where we spoke to futurist Ed Bergen from FutureBridge and Michelin star chef and founder Estefania Simon-Sasiek about the key trends set to take center stage in 2025.

Estefania Simon-Sasyk:

But there is another trajectory happening, which is the biodiversity loss and degradation of our natural ecosystem. So the stat goes something like by 2050, 90% of our natural ecosystems will be degraded. And although I love food tech and food innovation, we need to get real and understand that people still eat from the soil. and we are not going to bypass anytime soon the soil and I don't think that's a desirable outcome to begin with. So I'm really excited about this big push towards regeneration because we literally desperately need it. So I think that has to be top on the agenda of anyone working in food and beyond. The emphasis on soil is really, really exciting to me, and how all these different fields that work in food together, from farmers to policymakers to chefs to innovators, industry leaders, coming together and acknowledging, as Ed was very well saying, and I totally agree, that sustainability is not a value proposition. It means nothing, same like quality or healthy, and actually starting to nail down what are the messages to actually enact an agenda that is not ideological or politicized, but just common sense, actual, every person's in this planet problems. Building on that, I'm really excited about Minta's last report about sustainability and consumer behavior, because we started to see what they call sustainable behaviors. So actually, some tangible segmentation of how different consumers are valorizing and constructing sustainability when they go into their marketplace. to choose products and services. So we're looking at different really exciting behaviors, such as emphasis on packaging, for example. That's a big one in the EU, and hopefully, you know, a trend that will go globally. At least in Africa, we've seen for so many years the ban on single-use plastic bags. But then there are other interesting behaviors, some of them, for example, derived from the Ukraine-Russia war, such as cooking with less energy. So recipe books that call for boiling something and letting it steep for half an hour, you know, bypassing the energy-intensive cooking methods

that we've been looking at. to cutting meat and dairy, of course, a big one, to many, many more secondhand marketplaces we're seeing booming. So I'm excited about this idea of getting more precise in our words on sustainability and shifting from sustaining from a baseline that has been just randomly chosen, so pre-industrial, to actually thinking on how can we proactively make land ecosystems, the soil,

Matt Eastland:

So I guess some anxiety but also real excitement there from Estefania in that clip. You know, she was really talking about this really scary statistic about biodiversity loss and soil degradation happening at such an alarming rate. So that's the kind of the headline challenge. But she's also very keen, and I've heard this a lot on other episodes from other guests, about moving beyond sustainability as this buzzword. You know, it really needs to be an actionable thing and more defined. And Estefania gives some good examples there, like moving from single-use plastic, making our food less energy intensive, all of those things, which actually starts to put meat on the bones, shall we say, of what sustainability should be. And we also need to stop thinking about sustainability as a baseline. We have to go beyond that and focus on actively restoring our ecosystems. And this is where what we're talking about here is going beyond sustainability to regeneration. And regeneration is what we've heard a lot on the show, but it's replacing almost sustainability with generation because it goes so much further. And Estefania highlighted, while food tech and innovation are exciting, and I'm a big fan of all of those, we can't lose sight of the fundamental truth that everything comes from the soil. And these ideas were central to my conversation with Barrister-turned-farmer and author Sarah Langford and regenerative farming pioneer Patrick Holden in episode 147. If you've eaten doughnuts your whole life,

Sarah Langford:

And then someone gives you, I don't know, a quinoa salad and says, right now you can run a marathon. Surprisingly enough, you'll struggle. And so you take one field that's been farmed incredibly intensely on the kind of stony Cotswolds brash, and like an addict, wean it off, everything cold turkey.

Matt Eastland:

I've never heard it referred to like that before.

Sarah Langford:

That's what you're doing.

Matt Eastland:

You're going cold turkey. The soil is going cold turkey.

Sarah Langford:

I mean, for, you know, for wild farms, you are allowed to use a bit of artificial fertilizer, although you have to test it to make sure that the plant actually needs it first. But in terms of pesticides, you're out. So any disease, insects, anything like that, you cannot use any insecticide, fungicide, herbicide. So this farm has been completely, this soil is basically sort of growing matter. It's not soil, it's hydroponics. You've just been adding what you need to it. And it's got to be able to come alive again. And growing one year of wheat in it and saying, well, that's failed, shows you really how essential is to think of this farming system exactly as Patrick said, as a rotation, as a long book rather than one chapter where everything bleeds into each other, they're all interwoven and you cannot experiment with this and think I'm just going to try that and well that didn't work so I'm just going to duck out now. completely re-evaluating it and as you said earlier, it is all down to the soil. If your soil's dead, you're not going to be able to grow anything in it that's going to thrive unless you add all the potions that it's been used to. Give it three years though, especially if you put a load of grass and cows on it, and it will be a totally, totally different story because you're giving it a chance to become alive again and then you will be able to plant something in it and watch what it's supposed to do.

Matt Eastland:

So I really love this episode in general, but I also really love what Sarah said there. So I'll reread the quote. So if you've eaten doughnuts your whole life and you suddenly switched to quinoa salad, you won't be running a marathon overnight. And she's totally right. And soil is exactly the same. So if you've intensively farmed a plot of land and then stripped it down of all its nutrients, it's just not going to recover instantly. That's not how it works. So regeneration is a longer term commitment. It's not a quick fix. As Sarah said, this is about reading the book, not just reading a chapter. But actually, if you give it a few years and let the land do its thing, it will be producing what it's meant to produce without all of the stuff added on top of it. And Sarah and Patrick really highlighted one of the most significant shifts in farming today, which is openness about failure in the clip coming up now.

Sarah Langford:

One of the fascinating things I think about regenerative farming is that it's all about failure. It's all about telling people what you did wrong rather than what you did right so that they don't have to make the same mistake. I can't express how extraordinary that is in farming because you would never tell people what you cocked out, not really. So much so that I was talking to someone the other day and they said when they got back from their year out in Australia, maybe to 40 years ago, they tried to find the contractor in their part of the world that was the most successful. And they went to all the farms that they were working at and asked the landowners, how are

you doing this? And they're like, well, we can't tell you because we signed a non-disclosure agreement. So the contractor had physically stopped or legally stopped the landowners from even talking about how their farm was farmed. That is radically different now. So you will go to Groundswell or you will be in these spaces or farmer cluster groups, which I think are very powerful, which are just a collection of neighbors coming together basically to learn from each other. where you're saying, I got this completely wrong. I really wouldn't try that. Or I did that and maybe I would have tried it differently the next way around. So this openness about failure, which removes the ego from it, the competitiveness from it, and it makes it a very kind of collaborate, galvanizing movement. which is also really fun to be involved in, especially if you've watched, as some of my friends have, watched your dad on a tractor for the last 30 years and thought, no way am I doing that. No way. And now they are going, this is such a different job.

Patrick Holden:

Well, I'm an old hippie, so I'm going to quote Bob Dylan. There's no success like failure, and failure is no success at all. And I think vulnerability in the face of failure is very interesting. I know Jeremy Clarkson not well, but I met him at a party the other night, as you do. We got talking about Andy Cato's wild-farmed wheat failure because there wasn't enough fertility in it. And I said, you know what you ought to do? You need a rotation with at least three years of grass because that will sort it. And he said, I know that's what we're going to do. And he said, you know, a lot of people have been critical of Plantz's farm because they think it's all made up. And he said, it's absolutely not made up. I really don't know what I'm doing. I'm learning by my mistakes. And he said, interestingly enough, the biggest critic I have is Caleb, because he basically, doesn't want me to go reach it. And I thought, how great is that? Because, you know, he is an amazing communicator, and I think a lot of people have learned a lot about farming, including my own boys, actually, who've grown up on a farm, from watching his programs. And I think he's in quite a good place, because he's just showing it how it is. I mean, obviously, it's a bit enhanced, but I do think the program is essentially honest. And I think a hell of a lot of farmers are at exactly Jeremy Clarkson's position. They're sort of moving in a regen direction, they're still using roundup, they're trying to introduce a crop rotation, they're not quite sure what it should look like, but they're certainly watching him and seeing what he does and who's going to win, you know, Jeremy versus Caleb.

Matt Eastland:

So what a weirdly positive thing there from Sarah and Patrick about farming is very much fundamentally about failure. That's the whole point of it. And previously, you weren't even allowed to talk about it. You didn't talk about it. You weren't meant to talk about it. And actually now what Sarah and Patrick are seeing, which is great, is that communities are openly encouraging discussions about what works and what doesn't, and then sharing from that and learning from

that, which is super positive. And the other thing which is really interesting there is Sarah talks about stripping the ego from farming and regenerative farming particularly. Because what that does is that allows for more collaboration, more experimentation and therefore more progress. What I also really liked about that was Sarah spoke about removing ego from this whole farming and regenerative farming process. Because if you can do that, it allows for much greater collaboration, much greater experimentation, and ultimately much greater progress, which of course is what we're all looking for. To further support farmers in their transition, we also recently spoke with Sonia Piattosi from EIT Food South about their exciting new project, LILA4 Soils. This initiative brings farmers, researchers, industry leaders and policy makers together to create Living Labs, which is a collaborative space where farmers take the lead in shaping the future of agriculture.

Sonia Pietosi:

We want to bring the entire ecosystem together. So what a Living Lab does is really to bring together all the concerned parties, starting from farmers, researchers, industry and the public sector as well, so private and public sector together, so that innovation is as relevant as possible and as effective as possible. So you really bring different knowledge sets at the table. And particularly, I think it's very important when you are innovating and researching to bring the user at the center. At the end of the day, you want to create a solution for a problem, not just a nice new product or a nice innovation. And in our case, of course, we are dealing with agriculture, so the user will be the farmer. The farmer there is much closer to the soil, is much closer to the growing process of a crop, of a plant. and they will know better what kind of problems they will face and they are facing on their farms. So everything we do within a living lab has to be really informed by the user, informed by the farmer. They will be the one guiding what we are doing and at the same time, of course, they need support. Each one of these parties are experts in their own fields, so each one will add something and they will be supported by the others.

Matt Eastland:

Isn't that great? So here you have a project where farmers are leading everything, but they're being fully supported by all the experts in the field that they need. And that's something that I've really loved about season six, is that that same messaging keeps cropping up. So it all comes back to the soil, but it's also about working together. From biodiversity loss to food security, nearly every major environmental challenge comes back to the soil. And whether that's through regenerative practices, knowledge sharing, or innovation-driven collaboration, the future of our food system depends on how we care for the land beneath our feet. And if there's one thing to take away from this season, it's this. Healthy soil means a healthy planet, and a truly sustainable future for us all. One of the most eye-opening conversations from this season that I've had was the extent to which our food system is dependent on fossil

fuels. And in this clip coming up, Anna Lappe, who's the executive director of the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, that's episode 148, describes to us all the journey of a very humble potato chip.

Anna Lappe:

So you badge in your potato chip, you've got your bag of chips, you've bought it at the store, you probably aren't thinking twice about this story. So how does this intersect with that food energy nexus? Well, the potatoes that you find in those potato chip bags, unless they're marketed as organic, they were grown with heavy amounts of synthetic fertilizer and pesticides. You mentioned at the top of the show, most synthetic fertilizer is It's all very energy intensive. Most of it is produced with natural gas. There are still some synthetic fertilizer manufacturing facilities powered by coal, so even dirtier. And pesticides themselves are fossil fuel based. So synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, the kind of bedrock, linchpins of industrial agriculture themselves really need to be seen as part of the fossil fuel tree, another branch of that tree. And then there's the energy used on those fields, so there's the energy used for irrigation, there's the energy used for farm machinery. Yes, there's a push to try to electrify transportation and machinery, but most farm machinery is still powered by diesel fuel. Then there's energy used to collect those potatoes. There's the energy used to process those potatoes, to ship them first to where they're processed, then to process them. And then, of course, there's packaging, packaging them into those plastic bags. And as you mentioned, you know, plastic is basically fossil fuels in another form. There's energy used to ship to distribution centers. There's energy used to put them on our shelves. And then they eventually end up mostly in landfill. Landfill itself is another part of the climate story in that many emissions, methane emissions come from landfills. So that is my attempt, trying to give you a little bit of a glimpse of the story, but that's not even the full story, but I hope it helps to paint a little bit of the picture because I think when you get on an airplane or you get in a car, many of us have that sense of, yeah, we're using fuels right now. You open up a bag of chips, you might have second thoughts about how healthy it is for you, but you probably aren't thinking about this connection to climate.

Matt Eastland:

So since that episode I've never looked at a bag of potato chips or as we call them crisps in the UK in the same way ever again and like Anna said you always tend to think about the health aspect but you never think about how energy intensive the humble potato chip actually is. And she does a really great job in this episode of detailing from start to finish all those energy intensive parts of the system, which are there to bring the potato chip to us as consumers in that packaging. And it's quite shocking, actually, like I say, you'll never look at the potato chip in the same way ever again, but a useful, really, really useful way of illustrating the point. Anna also went on to say in that episode, a statistic which

shocked me and has stayed with me actually, so nearly 50% of pesticides used on US produce are applied purely for aesthetic reasons. Just let that sink in, 50% of pesticides used. And yes, of course, we're talking about the US here, so it's very specific, but this also means that this is happening elsewhere around the globe as well. which is really, really shocking, and that figure needs to come down. But despite the challenges, there are pathways forward. And Anna coined probably now my favourite phrase from season six when she spoke about being a possible-ist, so someone who sees what could be possible even in the face of adversity. And here's what she had to say about that.

Anna Lappe:

One thing that I learned 25 years ago when we worked on that book together with my mother, was people would ask us after that journey whether we were optimistic or pessimistic. And I came to realize that either optimism or pessimism implies a certain hubris, because it implies that you know what's going to happen. It implies you either think it's going to be really bad or it's going to be really good. But it presumes that you know the future. whether you're an optimist or a pessimist. And what we like to call ourselves, we're possible-ists.

Matt Eastland:

I like that, that's good.

Anna Lappe:

In the sense that we really have no idea what's possible. So, you know, let me give you an example from that journey. So 25 years ago, we arrive in Kenya to meet with a woman named Wangari Maathai, who is the leader of a social movement called the Green Belt Movement. It's led by women. You know, most people in the movement were women. And it was a tree planting movement to basically prevent desertification in Kenya. It was also about reclamation of traditional foods, of this real food diet, of growing food to feed communities, not food for export, not eating ultra processed packaged food. And the time we met Wangari, met women in the movement, it was incredible to see the network on the ground. But they were up against such political opposition. Agricultural experts that she was working with that were teaching community folks how to grow food organically were being threatened with arrest. They were under incredible political threat. They had just lost their biggest donor. It was a European donor agency. It just pulled out their funding. My mom and I left that visit thinking, wow, Wangari Maathai is one of the most amazing women we've ever met. We became really close with her family. And we said to ourselves, hopefully, the Green Belt Movement will exist for a couple more months. But we don't know. Flash forward a couple of years later, there was regime change. Wangari Maathai won her seat in Parliament. Flash forward a few more years, Wangari was driving down a Kenyan road with one of our friends in the car and her phone rings. And it was the phone call to say that she'd been awarded the

Nobel Peace Prize.

Matt Eastland:
That's amazing.

Anna Lappe:
And so my mother and I, when we think about Wangari and think about that story, we think, how can you exist in the world and not be a possible list? So when I think about what we're up against, which is very depressing, you know, we're soaring past our Paris Climate Accord agreement limits of warming. We're soaring past, you know, threats of biodiversity loss. We're definitely careening in a bad direction at the same time. At the same time, we are seeing incredible solutions on the ground all around the world. Solutions that again, going back to what I kind of a theme, it's like, we know that actually it's better for our bodies, better for the planet, better for the climate, better for all of us to be eating fossil fuel free food. And we know there are pathways to get there. So I like to retain a sense of possibility, even though most of the indicators around us are certainly pretty grim out there.

Matt Eastland:
And the thing that really comes from this conversation is that overall, despite the challenges, the solutions exist. You know, we know their better health, the planet and the climate to move towards fossil fuel free food, but we just need to adopt them. But how do we scale these solutions and bring them into the mainstream? So right now, major retailers control most of what reaches our plates, and that can restrict access to better alternatives. But one promising innovation we heard about this season was from Ubi, Out of Our Own Backyards, a platform founded by Pete Russell that helps smallholder farmers sell directly to consumers. In this episode, episode 140, Pete explains how a decentralised system could create a fairer, fresher and more sustainable food supply.

Pete Russell:
there is now a way for you to be able to get your food in a far more appropriate way, in a way that's fairer for everyone involved in the supply and delivery of that food, in a way that's fresher, more nutritional, in a way that builds regional and local economies. in a way that avoids and doesn't require all the packaging and the silly merchandising and all of that, but in a way that's as convenient or even possibly more convenient and that the price is as good or even better. That awareness is probably the thing. I think most people, if they were aware that you can have this tomato which was picked when it was green and it was bred in order to be able to survive a supply chain, which yes, it's a tomato and yeah, you can taste tomato a bit. A bit. Versus this tomato, which was picked when it was meant to be picked, when it was dropped off the vine and when you just sprinkle a little bit of salt on it, it just blows your

taste buds out of the water. The good tomato is going to get delivered to your door at a better price. Most people will go, I'll go for that. I would think that's an easy decision. It's an easy, but they don't know. They don't know that it's an option, but if people do know about it and are aware of it, and they're looking for their local farm or their local food hub, I think that will be the biggest driver. That'll mean that more farms will start up, more local small scale farms will start up, more local small scale artisan craft bakers and cheesemakers will actually be able to start. The ones that are already there will actually start to really flourish and they won't be spending all their time trying to get their product onto a shelf at Sainsbury's or Tesco's and giving all these free samples and then taking ridiculously low prices and then end up getting told, oh, thanks, but it didn't really work and see you later. They're actually able to deal direct and they get to get good margins and they get to represent themselves. Like we've got at the moment, like we started four years ago, just over four years ago, there was nothing on Ubi in the UK. Now there's over a hundred farms and food hubs that are buying in from over a thousand different producers. And there's over 13,000 households that are getting deliveries every week. There's 10 million pounds worth of sales is happening on the platform. So it's, it's driving real value to all of these producers. It's very early, but if you throw a dose of awareness onto that and create more demand and there's more demand for it, then these guys are going to flourish and knew more of these artisan food producers and so forth. And we'll, we'll have a space, a way to get into business and make a decent living.

Matt Eastland:

So Pete is a real example of a disruptor. And I was fascinated by his platform, which he's invested, I think it was over a decade of his life in this platform to take it to where it is. So he's gone from starting from scratch to now having over 100 farms and food hubs now participating in the UK. There's millions of sales going directly to producers, so cutting out the middle man or middle people. And it's clear that alternative models therefore can really work. So amazing, amazing job that Pete is doing there. But what Pete was saying is that the challenge of making all of this mainstream is it really comes down to, I think he said, a dose of awareness. That is what drives the change. And it's that theme of awareness which continued on our conversation with Andrew Bovenick, who's the Global Head of Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems at UNDP, who underscored a critical issue in our conversation with him around changing the food system. And that's in episode 155, Policy, Power and Conscious Leadership. Take a listen.

Andrew Bovarnick:

I think it's so important for us to collectively reflect on what has been working and what hasn't been working, and what triggers change and what doesn't. And I think there has been too much focus on technical solutions and interventions that aren't being adopted. You know, so many reports, so much analysis, so much training, yet are

they really being translated and converted into the action we want to see to make food systems fit for purpose? And I think for me, of course, the answer is no. After two decades of seeing hundreds of millions of dollars of technical assistance and interventions being implemented on the ground, I don't think we're having the changes we want to see. Malnutrition rates are skyrocketing, climate change is continuing. So we do need to do things differently. I'm a firm believer we need to reflect and radically change the way we work, and I think it's exactly that. We need to look beyond the interventions themselves and better understand how decisions are made by the decision makers that are playing an important role here at the country level, at the global level. And that means really unpacking their interests, their agendas and their values. And this comes down to mindsets as well, which I think we'll get into a bit later. But yes, we really need to start digging deeper into the real invisible reasons why interventions that we're all trying so hard to put on the ground are not landing and not taking off the way we continually hope they will.

Matt Eastland:

So that was a very unique episode with Andrew there. And I guess quite humbling as well, because, you know, we often talk about the technical solution side of things on the show, but actually what Andrew spoke about was a lot more the kind of the deeper human behavioral mindset changes which are needed. Then in order to make the technical solutions work, you need to make sure that people's mindsets have been changed enough to then really free up the possibilities that come from those technical solutions. And that is a very, very difficult thing to control and something that Andrew is obviously dedicating his life to unpicking. And ultimately transforming the food system requires collective action. But as Andrew then points out, collaboration is much easier said than done.

Andrew Bovarnick:

I am a firm believer that we do need collective action if we want to try to understand and work with systems and systems change. And in the food system, when we think about collective action, that is not only the government ministries that I talked about earlier, but it is, of course, the farmers themselves. It's the corporations buying the products, it's the supermarkets selling the products, it's all the middlemen, it's the input providers, it's the governments and local governments who are responsible for land use plans and for all of these other areas. So the challenges of trying to bring all of these different stakeholders together with different agendas, different concerns, different starting points, and to try to build trust and understanding between these stakeholders so that they can actually collaborate together. I think there are huge challenges there. And from my observations, it is an area that I think is continually underestimated. There has been, in the last decade, round tables set up, platforms set up, convening set up where stakeholders are brought together, with this assumption that once they're together, magic will happen. And I think there is so much

more there to build capacity of the stakeholders so that they can find a way to collaborate more collectively, to embrace those systems change. I think that's another really, really interesting and important area for us collectively to be exploring, how we help people work better together.

Matt Eastland:

Andrew's really hit on the nail of something that we at EIT Food have known for some time, which is that in order to have collective action, you really need to be able to bring people together and get them to talk to each other in a way where everybody understands, where everyone feels heard, where everyone feels respected, and where everybody has a voice. And that is a really, really difficult thing to do and something that we at EIT Food champion on a daily basis. So I really thank Andrew for bringing that to us in that episode, because it's such an important point. Nothing happens without collaboration, nothing happens without trust between people. So as we close this season of the Food Fight podcast, one thing is really crystal clear, that food system change is hard, But it's totally possible and is happening everywhere. And it's being driven forward by those people, those organizations, those communities who are truly embracing that collaboration and that collaborative spirit. And the journey isn't easy. But as Anna Lappe reminded us, being a possibleist means recognizing that solutions do exist despite the hardships. And we can make them a reality when we stay committed. So can I just say a huge thank you to everybody who has contributed to this season, and all the innovators, all the entrepreneurs, and all the guests out there who took the time to join us. Some amazing conversations. And of course, thank you all for listening. We're gonna be back for season seven very soon, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on what you want to hear. So if you'd like to email me directly, then please email me at podcast at eitfood.eu with any ideas and inspirations you have we listen to them all. And why not go back to revisit Season 6? Throughout the season we've also spoken about Emotional AI, which will track our facial expressions and suggest relevant food purchases. Amazing initiatives like Girls Go Circular, a program empowering young women with STEM skills, preparing them for their future careers. lab-grown tuna and salmon, satellites in space monitoring crops, technology that's tracking down chocolate diseases, and many amazing 15-minute story documentaries covering a huge variety of innovations right across the food system. And just my final plug here, if you'd just sign up for our 2025 Next Byte event which is happening in Brussels on the 15th to 16th of October, please visit our webpage eitfood.eu forward slash nextbyte2025. 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 by the hashtag EIT Food Fight on our LinkedIn channel at EIT Food. And please subscribe so you never miss an episode and see you soon for season seven. Bye, everybody.