**EIT Food Fight Podcast - S3 E1B - Vegshelf V3.mp3**

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:00:06] Welcome to this bonus episode of The Food Fight podcast from EIT Food.

**Matt Eastland** [00:00:10] In these episodes, we want to shine a light on new projects and agri-food start ups and hear about their efforts to fight for a better food future. This week, we're handing over to Baiba Soika to tell us about Vegshelf, a start-up making plant-based food accessible to everyone everywhere.

**Baiba Soika** [00:00:35] Hi, my name is Baiba Soika, co-founder and CEO of Vegshelf, B2B marketplace for plant-based food products. And we're part of EIT Food Seed Bed alumni and they're fighting for the future of food to see more diversity of products.

[00:00:54] At Vegshelf we are building a digital B2B marketplace for emerging food products, and we're starting with plant-based foods. It's a web application, but with two groups of users from one side we have suppliers which are plant-based food brands across all categories to starting from a bit vegan cheese, the meat alternatives and the pantry items like sauces and condiments. And then from other side, these are European independent stores. Those could be online, offline subscription boxes and so on. And our goal is to really for these independent stores to help them not only discover all the latest food brands and products on the market, but also to directly order them. And then from the supplier side, from the brands perspective, we want to ease their journey into the market and access those retail channels in a more simplified way.

[00:01:59] Vegshelf actually starts from our own personal experience, so I eat plant-based, my business partner and co-founder, he also it's plant-based. And, you know, whenever we would do grocery shopping or eating in restaurants or visit our coffee shops, we would always been quite disappointed with the assortment and always this question like why there is so few products and availability of these products that pop up. And my background is in international trade and B2B sales and marketing and kind of utilising that experience and background. There must be a better way how to bring these two sides together and essentially make these products more accessible. Yeah, so it kind of starts from the personal experience and the kind of personal journey. But then also there are many of people facing, you know, the same issue, especially now. And everybody talks like our diets should be more healthy for a human body, for our health, for planet, for animals right? But when you look at in reality what's happening in the stores and restaurants, that agenda is not supported. And that's where we step in to really enable these products to be there so that they are in the stores and restaurants.

[00:03:15] Our vision for Vegshelf is to be the go-to place for these independent stores across Europe where they instead of, you know, going to trade fairs, which happened once or two years, instead of browsing endlessly internet right? To find what are the innovative products in the market, instead of doing all these manual inefficient activities, we want to be that go-to place for independent stores across Europe where they can find the next big thing in food, in food CPG products. So the largest database of emerging food brands across all categories, including dry, frozen, chilled products. So that's our vision.

[00:04:05] So being part of EIT Food Seedbed Accelerator Programme in 2019, and it was actually very, very important part of our journey because during that programme we managed to talk with many, many users, so many potential users, investors. So I think in total we did like 300 plus user interviews. So during this acceleration programme, we put emphasis on on really getting to know better our users so understanding better their businesses, how they operate with other challenges, how they organise, you know, their operations from the big picture down to really small, tiny details. So it was very, very useful.

[00:04:54] When we discuss the kind of future of food within Vegshelf, we really believe that there will be no distinction between plant-based, animal-based and the reason for that is really because already now majority, huge majority of products that are launched in the market are already plant-based. And that, of course, makes us super happy because that becomes slowly as a default, that if you are launching something new, it must be plant-based, it must be vegan. So but in addition to that, I also think more sustainable packaging, reduced food waste and why I think it'll be like that because you can see already many companies innovating in those areas. Also, from the regulation point of view, there is a pressure. So I think the future of food is pretty bright. We just need to, you know, roll up our sleeves and work towards that.

**Lukxmi Balathasan** [00:05:53] Thanks for listening to this bonus episode of The Food Fight podcast

**Matt Eastland** [00:05:57] to find out more and to learn how you can get involved in the fight for a better future, head over to eitfood.eu/podcast and join the conversation via #EITFoodFight on our Twitter channel @EITFood. For more information on Vegshelf, please head over to vegshelf.com.