REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE SUMMIT EUROPE

BUILDING A RESILIENT FUTURE:

EIT Food's Vision for Systemic Change

with Richard Zaltzman, Chief Executive Officer, **EIT Food**

eit Food

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ABOUT EIT FOOD

EIT Food is the world's largest and most dynamic food innovation community. They accelerate innovation to build a future-fit food system that produces healthy and sustainable food for all.

Supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union, they invest in projects, organisations and individuals to unlock innovation potential in businesses and universities, and create and scale agrifood startups to bring new technologies and products to market.

RICHARD ZALTZMAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
EIT FOOD

RESILIENCE & RISK:

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE BIGGEST VULNERABILITIES IN EUROPE'S FOOD SYSTEM TODAY, AND HOW ARE THOSE SHAPING THE INNOVATION AGENDA AT EIT FOOD?

"EUROPE'S FOOD SYSTEM IS FACING SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES. GEOPOLITICAL VOLATILITY, CLIMATE DISRUPTION AND SOCIAL INSTABILITY, PLACING SUPPLY CHAINS UNDER IMMENSE STRESS. HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE RISK MANAGEMENT

These interconnected crises have the potential to disrupt global food supply chains, leading to shortages, price increases, and food insecurity - placing vulnerable populations at greater risk. Shocks in one region can have widespread repercussions across entire value chains.

The complexity and interconnection of these challenges demand a systems approach to food security - one that actively involves stakeholders across the agrifood chain. This is at the core of EIT Food's work - convening actors across diverse geographies and supply chains to co-create solutions, accelerate innovation across the sector and help startups bring new technologies and products to market.

Transforming the food system is not only about bringing innovation to market - it also means rethinking how those markets function - moving beyond price signals and supply chains to reimagine the physical, logistical, and digital infrastructure that enables them. EIT Food is exploring how these market foundations can be reshaped to better support resilience and regeneration.

HOW DO WE SHIFT FROM TALKING ABOUT RESILIENCE TO EMBEDDING IT MEANINGFULLY ACROSS SUPPLY CHAINS ESPECIALLY WHEN SHORT-TERM PRESSURES DOMINATE DECISION-MAKING?

Embedding resilience means moving beyond surface-level commitments to proactive risk management - integrated into core business strategies and viewed as a pathway to long-term profitability, not just regulatory compliance.

A pivotal way we are actioning this shift is through EIT Food's Regenerative Innovation Portfolio, a collaborative platform seeking to unlock new partnerships across the food and agriculture value chain. By supporting cross-value chain solutions, focusing on removing barriers to the adoption of regenerative agriculture while also rethinking the market infrastructure we are demonstrating scalable pathways to transformation. This is the key to enabling viable, long-term business models for farmers—and every actor across the system, and to enhancing the resilience of our food supply chains.

FROM YOUR VANTAGE POINT, ARE COMPANIES TRULY INTERNALISING THE LONG-TERM RISKS OF INACTION OR IS THAT STILL A BARRIER TO MEANINGFUL CHANGE?

Many companies are beginning to recognise the long-term risks of inaction—but short-term thinking still dominates boardrooms. Years of warnings have done little to shift decision-making toward resilience. What's more, competition laws currently prevent companies from conducting collaborative risk assessment.

Prioritising food security over competition is a vital shift that is needed to achieve resilient food systems in the long term.

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FINANCING THE TRANSITION

MOBILISING FINANCE FOR REGENERATIVE AND RESILIENT AGRICULTURE IS A RECURRING CHALLENGE. WHAT PROMISING APPROACHES OR PARTNERSHIPS HAVE CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION RECENTLY?

At EIT Food, I'm excited by the potential of our Regenerative Innovation Portfolio. Without a clear, convincing demonstration of how regenerative practices can offer economic benefits and improve their business models, farmers are unlikely to adopt them on a broad scale - and the Portfolio ensures that farmers are at the heart of co-creating the innovations. It also takes what we call a 'landscape approach', working across priority regions of Europe where multiple stakeholders have mutual interests and complimentary sourcing needs, to foster greater collaboration across sectors and value chains.

I ALSO SEE HUGE POTENTIAL IN INITIATIVES LIKE THE ANDHRA PRADESH COMMUNITY MANAGED NATURAL FARMING INITIATIVE – A FARMER-CENTRIC PROGRAMME AIMING TO BOOST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATURAL FARMING PRACTICES.

The government-led initiative is combining training and social programmes with a focus on innovation, to support the uptake of organic and regenerative principles across six million hectares of farmland.

More broadly, financing the transition requires moving "beyond blended" discussions to embrace tiered financing approaches - combining patient, local, public, and outcome-linked financing that also evolves over time. But it is not only a question of funding farmers; it also means enabling the infrastructure that makes regenerative models viable to enable the new the value chains. At EIT Food, we are examining how we can support these systemic solutions through our Regenerative Innovation Portfolio and broader innovation agenda.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON STUMBLING BLOCKS YOU SEE WHEN IT COMES TO CONNECTING IMPACTFUL STARTUPS OR FARMERS WITH SERIOUS CAPITAL?

Startups and farmers are both tackling urgent, systemic challenges in the food system—but their support and investment needs are very different. Front-end innovation, such as agritech and biotech, requires capital to reach the market. Meanwhile, farmers need financing, tools, and support infrastructure to adopt these innovations. Too often, these distinct needs are treated interchangeably, leading to persistent gaps in funding and uptake.

Many investors still priorise short-term returns or proven scalability, which can exclude high-impact but early-stage or locally focused innovations. Yet, impactful startups and forward-thinking farmers are often deeply embedded in their local ecosystems, and may lack access to investor networks, mentorship, or platforms needed to articulate their value proposition in investor-ready terms - particularly those from underrepresented regions or backgrounds - a challenge that is even more pronounced for those from regions outside traditional innovation hubs.

There is also a critical gap in investment and support for midstream 'market' infrastructure, shared logistics, traceability systems, and small-scale processing, that is essential to unlocking regenerative market flows and enabling supply to meet demand, as well as unlocking capital for both startups and farmers.

Transforming the food system requires more than capital; it demands a shift in mindset - embracing the long-term value of regenerative agriculture, protein diversification, circular systems, and digital innovation, and rethinking how value is created and shared through the markets and infrastructure. At EIT Food, we see our role as a bridge - de-risking innovation for investors to embrace more systematic solutions, while empowering startups and farmers with the credibility and support needed to thrive. Aligning incentives and fostering shared understanding across this ecosystem will help direct capital to where it is needed most and is most transformative.

HOW CAN WE BETTER COMMUNICATE THE VALUE OF NATURE-POSITIVE PRACTICES TO INVESTORS WHO ARE USED TO TRADITIONAL RETURNS AND METRICS?

Communicating the value of regenerative agricultural practices involves demonstrating long-term benefits - like risk reduction, supply chain stability, alignment with regulatory frameworks and financing mechanisms. By quantifying these advantages - through data and metrics - we can unlock ecosystem value across biodiversity, water, and soil health, not just as an investment narrative but as outcome-based models. While carbon served as an initial entry point, the priority now is building the MRV tools, infrastructure, and capital flows needed to support a broader range of regenerative outcomes.

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INNOVATION, DATA AND SCALING IMPACT

WITH HUNDREDS OF STARTUPS IN YOUR ECOSYSTEM, WHAT PATTERNS ARE EMERGING IN THE KINDS OF SOLUTIONS THAT ARE GENUINELY MOVING THE NEEDLE ON FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION?

The most impactful solutions are systemic, scalable, deeply collaborative and designed to address multiple challenges - such as waste, soil health and nutrition simultaneously across the value chain - not just as isolated problems. Regenerative agriculture is a prime example: delivering benefits such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity, soil health and farmer livelihoods, all while producing food.

Solutions that integrate technology with accessibility are also standing out. From AI-enabled supply chain transparency to climate-smart precision tools for smallholder farmers the most effective solutions connect with real-world systems, like procurement, data, and finance that support real-world regenerative practice

It is not just about the tech—it is about ensuring advanced tools are usable, affordable at scale and beneficial to all. Genuine impact comes from solutions that embed equity and inclusivity. Whether by supporting women-led agribusinesses, empowering youth, or embracing the expertise of smallholders, the future of food must work for everyone.

DATA IS OFTEN SEEN AS BOTH A BARRIER AND A BREAKTHROUGH. WHAT'S NEEDED TO TURN THE FLOOD OF AVAILABLE DATA INTO ACTION THAT MATTERS ON THE GROUND?

We need to address the assumptions around data availability, as well as its credibility and usability. Data holds incredible potential to transform the food system, but only if it delivers trusted, actionable insights where they matter: with farmers, producers, consumers and investors. The issue is not the lack of data, but that much of it remains fragmented – locked in silos, owned by different actors, or not standardised – making it difficult to generate meaningful insights across the value chain. Farmers, for example, are often expected to input data without receiving clear, tangible benefits in return. That dynamic must shift.

"FIRSTLY, WE NEED TO SEE MORE FARMER AND USER-CENTRIC DESIGN. TOOLS AND PLATFORMS MUST BE BUILT WITH, AND FOR, THE PEOPLE USING THEM, AND MUST SUPPORT REAL-WORLD DECISION-MAKING OR PROFITABILITY AT THE FARM OR SME LEVEL. ADOPTION WILL STALL OTHERWISE – NO MATTER HOW ADVANCED THE TECH IS.

Trust is also fundamental. We need clear, fair models for ownership, privacy, and value-sharing, so that data providers – especially farmers – feel empowered rather than exploited. Data must feed into infrastructure, certification, and procurement systems that enable access to viable markets and transition support, and that can inform more adaptive financing and investment models.

Finally, no single actor can unlock the full potential of data alone. Progress depends on cross-sector collaboration to pool data, align incentives, and co-create solutions. When accessible, equitable, and actionable data is tied to the right frameworks and finance mechanisms, it becomes a significant lever for systemic change across markets, finance, and production systems.

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SYSTEMS CHANGE AND THE PATH AHEAD

EIT WORKS AT THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE, POLICY, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP. WHAT KIND OF CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION IS STILL MISSING OR NOT WORKING WELL ENOUGH TO DRIVE TRANSFORMATION AT SCALE?

In our work at EIT Food, we see every day how powerful cross-sector collaboration can be - and also where the gaps still lie.

One major gap is the disconnect between policy design and innovation. Too often, policies are developed without fully understanding the pace, needs, or nature of innovation, leaving innovators - especially startups and researchers - with unclear, outdated, misaligned frameworks. We need better feedback loops where science and entrepreneurship inform smarter regulation, and where policy de-risks and scales innovation.

Another gap is closer collaboration between corporates and early-stage innovators. The bold sustainability targets many corporates are setting require open, long-term partnerships with startups and researchers - that moves beyond transactional procurement and shares risk. Collaboration around market design and procurement, investment and financing systems is also essential to supporting regenerative models and inclusive system change.

Critically, the gap in cross-sector dialogue with farmers and citizens must be addressed by bringing stakeholders as change agents from the start of innovation or policy design, rather than at the end. Their expertise is essential to ensuring that solutions are inclusive, and grounded in real world conditions.

LOOKING AHEAD FIVE TO TEN YEARS, WHAT'S YOUR VISION FOR A FOOD SYSTEM THAT GENUINELY BALANCES PRODUCTIVITY, RESILIENCE, AND NATURE? AND WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO GET THERE?

Our vision is of a future food system that produces healthy, affordable food for all, remaining with planetary boundaries and creates value for farmers, businesses, and communities - integrating and balancing productivity, resilience, and nature.

I am optimistic regenerative practices can become the norm, not the niche. We can support farmers as stewards of biodiversity and carbon sinks, with tools, data, and incentives that make sustainable choices economically viable.

This envisioned future will take bold, science-informed policy that rewards public goods and redirects subsidies towards sustainability and innovation. We also need innovative and transitional finance to enable farmers, startups, and SMEs to adapt without bearing all the risk.

Financing models that support farmers, SMEs, and midstream actors throughout the transition, along with investment in the infrastructure that enables regenerative practices - from procurement and logistics to traceability and data systems.

This must be matched by financing models that support farmers, SMEs, and midstream actors throughout the transition, along with investment in the market infrastructure to enable regenerative practices: from procurement and logistics to data systems and certification.

We must continue to educate and build trust across the food chain so that everyone from farmers to consumers can navigate change with skills confidence. Above all, we need collaborative leadership - the kind that breaks silos, centers equity, and puts long-term impact above short-term gain.

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MERCEDES GROBA
HEAD OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE
EIT FOOD

RICHARD ZALTZMAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
EIT FOOD

WANT TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION?

From the urgent need to **embed resilience in supply chains**, to the **financing barriers that prevent farmers and startups from scaling regenerative solutions**. EIT Foods' insights on shifting beyond surface-level sustainability commitments and unlocking systemic investment reflect the themes driving this year's **Regenerative Agriculture Summit**.

Join the EIT Food team in Amsterdam as CEO, Richard Zaltzman leads a discussion around Market Transformation: The Power to Scale Regenerative Transition.

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