

Matt Eastland:

Welcome back to the Food Fight podcast exploring the greatest challenges in our food system and the innovators dedicated to solving them. Last time on the show we explored how the food system sits at the very heart of the climate crisis and the challenges we face in transforming it into one that is fair, resilient and net zero. In this episode, we shift from problem to possibility. At REGEN House, alongside difficult truths, we also heard stories of action, from farmers reimagining their land, to innovators reshaping supply chains, to policymakers and corporations setting ambitious goals. So today we're asking, what does it actually take to build a climate-positive food future? What changes can we make as individuals and what systemic shifts are needed from governments and businesses to truly move the needle? I'm your host Matt Eastland and in part two of this special mini-series from London Climate Action Week we dive into the practical steps, bold commitments and inspiring actions already underway and explore how each of us has a role to play in shaping the future of food. The challenges we face in addressing the climate crisis can often seem overwhelming, and as eco-chef Tom Hunt discovered, can lead to burnout. However, there is always hope out there if you know where to look.

Tom Hunt:

Recently I've been going through a state of climate apathy and despair because I've been working kind of heavily within this sector for the last 15 years or longer. and so I'm taking a back seat for a minute trying to kind of reconnect with nature to find my own hope and it's slowly coming back through that process, but also through attending events such as this, where like-minded people are able to come together and realize that change is happening. Really every stage of the food system, whether it's on small farms or through bigger food corporations, which are starting to adopt these more regenerative principles, although it's obviously not fast enough.

Matt Eastland:

Tom certainly wasn't alone. Finding inspiration from passionate changemakers filled livestock farmer Amy Chappell and indigenous knowledge systems expert Andrea Falcone with hope.

Amy Chappell:

Coming to events like this, seeing the passion that people have and talking to other farmers or other producers and seeing all of the different amazing innovative things they're doing. Yeah, really inspiring talking to other people.

Andrea Falcone:

Hope. being today in Region House and seeing how open spaces that normally were considered too corporate or too for-profit are now seeing more and more how important it is to have a fresh, global,

trans-cultural perspective on food and to see how food is becoming a key player in offices of tech companies and of governments. So that makes me super, super hopeful.

Matt Eastland:

As we explored in last week's episode, the power of engaging people at every level of the food system should not be underestimated. Real change doesn't just come from top-down policies or corporate pledges. It emerges when farmers, fishers, producers, retailers and consumers are all given a voice in shaping the system. Mark Kaplan, Chief Sustainability Officer at WholeChain, a blockchain-based traceability platform, echoed Andrea's optimism, highlighting how the industry is finally beginning to recognise the importance of these voices. Too often they've been pushed to the margins, yet they hold some of the most practical knowledge, lived experience and innovative ideas for fixing our broken food systems.

Mark Kaplan:

I'm seeing more and more primary producers in these major political conferences. I think there's a heightened realization that this is where the so-called rubber meets the road. Without more farmers and fishers, How are we going to feed the world? If you look at what's the average age of the farmers these days, over 60 years old, I don't really see a lot of people going to university. I can't wait to be a sugar beet farmer. it isn't there. And so I think that I'm so optimistic about the future because I've seen more and more acknowledgement of this need to cultivate a future of agricultural professionals and aquaculture and fisheries professionals.

Matt Eastland:

This engagement with those under-heard voices at the foundation of the food system is giving Fabio Volkmann from the European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture hope for the greater adoption of bottom-up innovations.

Fabio Volkmann:

I think like the kind of work that we also do as the part of European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture and giving the platform for farmers to drive change and to be in the driving seat of innovation and there what we do mostly is policy related work so on a European but also national level and I see there's a lot of motivation for farmers then to continue with the work that they're doing but also motivation for then upper layer decision makers to integrate the ideas and solutions that come from the ground up. So I think these like from the ground up development that is happening at the moment is really exciting and like I think this gives me hope. I think development also more than on the tech side like nutrient density, nutrient diversity and the technology improvement that we are now facing is for me a key in order to transport information to consumers and to make regenerative agriculture or a form of

regenerating lands the norm in the mainstream society. And I think this is also what is exciting me and giving me hope if we can reach consumers and my sister, my mother, with this information, which is now still within the bubble that I'm navigating in, then I think we can actually create this movement of regeneration that we need in society.

Matt Eastland:

Mark added that investment represents another crucial piece of the puzzle. With the right funding in place, the transformative changes needed across the food system become far more achievable, enabling innovative solutions to move from concept to practice and giving stakeholders the resources to implement meaningful, lasting impact.

Mark Kaplan:

The increasing investment into ag tech and ag tech, blue tech, supply chain tech, so like the investment levels are starting to increase and then governments are starting to take more notice on the need to increase data standardization for visibility into the supply chains. So like this convergence of awareness is starting to become Yeah, it's starting to raise my optimism, actually. And the consumer demand is going to be there, right? So consumers are more vocal than ever about demanding that the food that they put into their bodies is actually nutritious, actually aligned to their ethos. And then my hope for the future is that there's more acknowledgement of why sustainability has been misrepresented as more expensive. And so hopefully in the next wave of realization more driven by marketing, that the cost of fancy packaging and social media influencers does affect the cost of goods and maybe reallocating budget from meta to farmers might actually help provide some equilibrium into cost of goods.

Matt Eastland:

Finance has always been one of the major friction points at climate conferences, so it's reassuring to hear that the tide is turning to shift in the favour of climate-forward policies. The importance of the food system in addressing global climate change is also shifting into the limelight in these discussions, which is something EIT Food's own CEO Richard Zaltzman picked up on.

Richard Zaltzman:

I do think also this is a, the agenda has risen and risen and risen. So COP, COP, Egypt, Sharm el Sheikh, it was kind of there. Dubai was a food cop, you know, so and now and it stayed there in Baku. London Climate Week suddenly feels strongly food and agriculture focused. So the global agenda recognizes food is a key topic. Politically, you know, we're getting something useful, but possibly for the wrong reasons. I suppose the hijacking of the farm agenda to focus on food. So we see stuff like certain nations in the EU coming down hard on cultivated meat which is 0.000% of anything hitting the

market on behalf of the potential impact to farmers. It's a very bogus argument but it brings attention to the food sector and it gives us an opportunity to bring a counterbalancing point. So nature bounces back, It affects everybody and it is rising up the political agenda and the attention of the world in good ways and bad ways, but that gives us agency to work there.

Matt Eastland:

With a sense of hope filling the walls of the Regen House Hub at London Climate Action Week, we asked people if they could change one thing about the way we grow, buy or eat food, what would it be? For Amy Chappell, the answer is on each of our doorsteps.

Amy Chappell:

I would make it a more localized food system. Localized with whole foods rather than processed food. So, again, going to your local farm. I know that's not always possible in the city, but there's still a lot of farms surrounding cities which can be supplying and we can still go and see those farms. So, yeah.

Matt Eastland:

Dr Christian Reynolds from the Centre for Food Policy at the University of London agrees, adding that he would like to see farmers receiving a bigger slice of the pie when it comes to the price of produce.

Dr Christian Reynolds:

If I could change one thing about how we buy, sell or eat food, it would be making sure farmers get more of the value from a purchase. So say with carrots, farmers in the UK only get one to two pence of every pound spent on a carrot. If we could double that to four pence, if we could make it 15 pence out of the one pound, that would be an amazing change both for rural economies, for farmers, and enable them to do all of the things we're asking for farmers to do. And if you think about that in a Global South perspective, that's a doubling of income, that's a transformational amount of money going into Global South farming smallholder farmers. So it's not just saying Global North, it's everybody just increasing the amount of money being given to farmers through the value chain.

Dr Christian Reynolds:

I think food has so much to offer beyond the thing you just see in front of you. And that could be things very much directly connected with that food in front of you, like taste and nutrition. but actually there are huge wider benefits to health, huge wider benefits to food that we really just need to start understanding. Now that can be things like I just said, nutrition and whatever, but you can go as far as, you know, food can have a major impact on local economies if it's done well, food can have a major impact on

helping young people develop a positive, healthy relationship with food for the rest of their life. You know, if a farmer happens to engage well with school food and farming education, for instance. So, you know, we can really sort of be incredibly imaginative and figure out how we can sort of max out on all of the value you can get from food. And obviously that requires good metrics and transparency behind that, but really engaging with the whole wider benefits of food is a really important part of the puzzle, I think.

Matt Eastland:

That was regen farmer and medical doctor Tom Pearson emphasising the importance of forging a deeper, more meaningful connection with our food. An idea that Richard Zaltzman also believes is essential if we are to truly reconnect with the choices we make and the systems that sustain us.

Richard Zaltzman:

I'm going to start with, I think, how we eat it. And this varies enormously across the world. And we're here in the UK, I'm British, you're British. I don't think our eating habits are very healthy. So, you know, how many meals do we eat standing up in a week? how many meals take us less than half an hour or even less than 20 minutes per day and what example are we setting our children even the language we're going to grab lunch i mean how many times do you say i'm going to grab a sandwich and actually if we stop and think about it grabbing a sandwich is not a good it's not a good thing For many reasons, you can unpack that for half an hour in and of itself. Whereas, you know, you go to other countries in Europe, and I'm not going to call out because that risks stereotyping, but there is a much healthier food culture. There is a much more family element to it. Dinner is dinner. It's a family and connecting time. Lunch is not grab lunch. It's let's have lunch and sit down and also talk and connect with fundamentally eat better food in a better way for your body. So there's no is that innovation? I think, again, it's a little bit back to the future. Why have we got ourselves in a situation where working an extra 20 minutes is more important than having the extra energy to do a great job in 20 minutes less time in the afternoon or having the nutrition that your brain is really switched on to do a fantastic job in three hours and have a long afternoon of doing something completely different? So that, I think, is an area I would love people to look at. I don't think it's necessarily our space as ERT Food, I just think it's an interesting conversation.

Matt Eastland:

But how can we encourage this greater connection with our plates? Andrea from the UK Food Systems Centre has an idea.

Andrea Falcone:

I would get everyone to do at least one week of growing activity a

year as long as they are capable and I probably would support people who may struggle with physical capability to get involved on some level as well because the moment we see what is involved in the growing of food I think we start A. connecting back to nature and B. we are also realizing how much work and thinking is involved in this.

Matt Eastland:

And then comes the question of what happens to the food which doesn't make it to the supermarket shelves, our plates or our stomachs.

Tom Hunt:

My activism began with food waste and a food waste initiative that I created called the Forgotten Feast where I took a tonne of food and saved it by cooking for 200 people, creating basically a restaurant on Southwark Bridge and we then donated all of the money we made to a food waste redistribution charity that saved another 20,000 meals and that moment changed my life and it really Empowered me at that point. It dissolved my climate apathy, you know 12 15 years ago and and and really helped me realize that even as individuals we can make a difference and all that we need to do is To start with is start to save a little bit of food waste at home. And if we're a business or a corporation, I always like to say that our impact is multiplied exponentially by the number of mouths that we feed. So any small changes we can make, personally, it's our duty and responsibility to make them. And it's not about like the bigger kind of question of what can we do? It's more like, what can I do and how can I help? Because actually, you know, when it comes down to it, it's not about everyone trying to achieve zero waste or a few people trying to achieve zero waste. It's about everyone trying to do their own little bit.

Matt Eastland:

Transforming the agri-food system requires change on a systemic, global scale. And much of that responsibility ultimately rests with those in positions of power. governments, corporations and policy makers. Yet placing the burden solely at the top can leave many of us feeling powerless or disconnected from the possibility of making a difference. The reality, however, is that individual choices still matter. To explore this further, we asked people what single climate action they would encourage others to take, small but meaningful steps that collectively can help drive broader change.

Fabio Volkmann:

Overarchingly, it would be kind of self-reliance, self-leadership within that. So that, of course, responsibility lies within bigger system players, but also we as individuals can do a change and can enable change. And I think this is also what I would, this would be my call to action, that don't give up and continue and also continue

believing in yourself. And there, one key leverage there is visit farmers. Go and visit farmers, get in touch with the producers around you, get to know the people, get to know the land. And I think this is, if you want to change something, start with that. It's a small step. And I think from that, a ripple effect will be created that will change you and your surroundings.

Dr Christian Reynolds:

It's hard for lots of people to make a change within climate action. And I think for a lot of them, maybe food isn't necessarily even something they considered could do that. I think they think about buying their electricity from somewhere or maybe thinking about taking an electric bus or buying an electric car. But actually, just the message that food has a huge impact, and the ag food industry has a huge impact on climate, and there is a, you know, I would hope soon a day where consumers can see things on packets that will tell them that and they will make those choices.

Andrea Falcone:

One climate action? To be mindful of the food that they buy. I believe that's the easiest. And to go, from my perspective, vegan is the easiest also.

Tom Hunt:

Well, I mean, beyond saving our food waste, which I think is the most accessible thing that we can all do, I think the next important thing to do is, well, I guess I could build on the kind of idea of saving waste. I coined a food philosophy called root to fruit eating which is to convey this idea of practicing complete consumption and eating the whole ingredient from its root to its leaf and fruit including the stem skin leaves and everything in between so Do that start to think more holistically about your food eat for pleasure eat whole foods and eat the best food you can I would say in terms of the the food change and I would say that

Amy Chappell:

It would be good if people could think more about where their food's coming from. And also, if you have the opportunity to grow some of your own food, even if it's just a lettuce in your windowsill, that is going to help you understand where your food's coming from. And also, if everyone grows a little lettuce in their windowsill, think of all of that carbon that would have been used to transport the lettuce to you. That hasn't had to happen. So small changes make big impacts if it's done by a lot of people.

Matt Eastland:

Building a stronger connection to the food on our plates, developing an appreciation for the journey from farm to fork and recognising the power of supporting local producers are all vital pieces of the

puzzle in creating a more sustainable food system. But the question remains, where does this shift truly begin?

Matt Eastland:

Teaching children how to grow and cook their own food from as early as they possibly can, because I think that connects people to their food. And all these things about food waste suddenly start going away, in my mind. Anyway, that's just my view. And then for the people listening, what is one climate action you would encourage people who are listening to this to take? What would you like them to do?

Richard Zaltzman:

With regards to their food.

Matt Eastland:

With regards to their food, which might then take one step towards reducing the burden on the climate.

Richard Zaltzman:

Well, I mean, there are so many things you can do with your overall lifestyle. I think with regard to food, I mean, Try something new. So I have to experiment on my kids and I get a varied response when we change meals. But just learning to try something new, trying a vegetarian dish that you've not prepared or bought before, it's really simple steps. Because a lot of this is, again, it's a change in habits, in expectations, almost in tradition. I in a new tradition start when someone tries something new and I always find the Christmas food conversation really fascinating and in the UK the Christmas plate has this kind of halcyon coca-cola type Christmas image of turkey and roast potatoes and and actually you talk to other countries and it evolves very rapidly as has done actually our Christmas plate in the UK and you know if you have vegetarian members of the family the Christmas plate is already very very different and that starts with try something new so that's the simplest thing is just try it and if it doesn't work it doesn't work but at least go and try something new

Matt Eastland:

It's also true innovation, right? Try something new. Absolutely.

Matt Eastland:

And finally, Dr Christian Reynolds rounded off the day with a savvy tip which we can all do right now.

Dr Christian Reynolds:

The easiest but sneakiest thing you can do is check your fridge is

below five degrees centigrade. so there's a website called chill the fridge out and it gives you instructions for any model of fridge to actually reduce your temperature below five degrees c that'll keep all of your food fresher for longer in the fridge which means your cheese your dairies maybe even your animal products if you're that way inclined will stay fresher for one or two days more. The modeling that I've done has shown that even with a little bit more extra energy you're spending on a cooler fridge, that's totally paid out even with just say your cheese and milk waste that you don't have because you're keeping it fresher for half a day, one day more in terms of the potential. So chill the fridge out, keep your fridges below five degrees C. That is the easiest way for people to do a sneaky thing that doesn't change your big lifestyle but is a really impactful change on food loss and waste.

Matt Eastland:

That brings us to the end of our coverage from the Regen House Hub at this year's London Climate Action Week. A space alive with inspiring ideas, lively debate and passionate changemakers all working to reshape the future of food. A huge thank you to everyone who joined us and shared their insights. And don't forget, there's plenty more to come, so stay tuned for the rest of Season 7 of the Food Fight Podcast, with new episodes dropping every Wednesday. I've been Matt Eastland, and now I'm off to check my fridge.