

Get ready to ROCK THE BOAT



The world needs to chart a course towards more sustainable food systems and our industry is in a great position to drive positive change, says **Sebastian Emig**

THE time has come for the food and beverage industry to reflect deeply about what it wants the future to look like. It's clear that we need a drastic change in our food systems. Charting a future path now is essential so we can remodel how we grow, harvest, produce, sell and consume food.

Some claim that the current situation requires a change so dramatic that previous food systems cannot provide a useful model for the future and the recent United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), held during the UN General Assembly in New York on 23 September 2021, has set the stage for a global transformation of our food systems.

Called the 'People's Summit', the vision of the UNFSS is to 'launch bold new actions, solutions and strategies to deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each of which relies on healthier, more sustainable and more equitable food systems'. It seeks to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food as a step towards building a just and resilient society where no one is left behind. Ensuring sustainable food systems means ensuring that we can provide affordable and sustainable food to all people while respecting social needs and planetary resources and limits.

Over the past 18 months, representatives from governments, civil society, businesses and development agencies have participated in the preparations for the meeting, reflecting on solutions that can transform the choices we all make about food.

The European Union has taken a lot of interest in the Summit. This was to be expected since it chimes so well with the EU's own ambitions in the European Green Deal. These include becoming the first climate neutral region in the world by 2050. In addition, the related Farm to Fork Strategy seeks to position the EU as a global leader in food

sustainability. As a result, the Council of the EU adopted a position on the EU's priorities for the Summit, in which it stipulates its determination to 'lead by example in taking forward the post-Summit transformation process, together with all relevant stakeholders.'

The outcomes of the Summit will have far-reaching implications for food business operators across Europe. The European Commission has already announced that it will draft a proposal for an EU legislative framework on Sustainable Food Systems by the end of 2023. This will certainly take into consideration the Summit's outcomes. Furthermore, the Commission has already announced its intention to strengthen the agri-food sustainability chapter in all future trade negotiations.

Beyond this, any results and conclusions of the Summit will provide a reference point for future global conferences, such as the Nutrition for Growth Summit in Tokyo or COP26 in Glasgow. It will be a compass that influences the future political direction of initiatives to transform international food systems.

Another outcome of the Summit is the emergence of new multi-stakeholder Coalitions of Action, where the private sector is ramping up its activity in the form of the Private Sector Pledge for Zero Hunger. The Pledge amplifies the role the private sector can play by aligning the operations and investments of different businesses in well-defined science-based actions across countries and regions where hunger presents the biggest challenge. The objective is to end hunger and nourish the future by 2030.

The Pledge also encourages companies to invest in at least one of the 10 high-impact intervention areas identified by the Ceres2030 research project and in at least one of the countries or regions identified as a priority. It requires companies ►

to comply with host state laws and regulations and commit to internationally accepted principles. Participating companies will also have to name the partners they work with in order to meet Pledge criteria.

MAKING SNACKING MORE SUSTAINABLE

The UNFSS presents a great opportunity to set the scene for what ESA members are doing in terms of preserving nature's resources. In recent years we have seen how member companies have embraced sustainability targets and the actions required to meet them. These companies have successfully integrated their sustainability initiatives into their business strategy because they believe that sustainability and business growth must go hand in hand. That is increasingly what customers, consumers and other stakeholders expect from our sector, and what the planet requires us to do.

But we can't achieve our targets by working alone. Systemic change is needed to fix the sustainability issues across the entire food supply network.

We need innovations and new business models, as well as changes in how people live and consume if we hope to meet our goals. We need to modify our own ideas to work in synch with others in the food value chain. We also need to keep looking for new collaborations with other stakeholders at every step and on every level.

As an industry, savoury snacks producers sit in the middle of the food value chain, which puts us in a prime position to influence supply chains in both directions. For example, by working with farmers and incentivising them to do better, our sector can improve

the production and supply of raw materials. Meanwhile, at the other end of the value chain, we can inspire consumers to make more sustainable choices at the supermarket.

This is a genuine responsibility and I am happy and proud to see our members rise to the challenge.

WHERE TO AFTER UNFSS?

Transforming food systems to end hunger and malnutrition, ensuring safe and sustainable food for all, supporting sustainable consumption shifts, reducing carbon emissions, generating decent and dignified livelihoods and building resilience to future shocks all sounds great. However, will these aspirations really result in bold, novel and transformational commitments from governments, civil society and businesses that can genuinely improve the lives of people today and tomorrow?

I truly believe so. After all, if past food choices have brought us to where we are today, future food choices can get us to where we want to be. But this will only be the case if we are bold, systemic and address all outcomes simultaneously and with the utmost urgency.

Sometimes the future might seem uncertain, but projections do not write the future. It is up to us to do so by making the right food choices. Together we can create a future where food systems are a big part of the solution.

REMINISCING AND THE NEW YEAR

Looking back at 2021, I must say that as a sector and as an organisation we faced some serious challenges.

At ESA, the secretariat faced the unfortunate situation of postponing our flagship SNACKEX event to July 2022. We were very happy to receive full support for this decision from all our exhibitors. Our host, Messe Hamburg, also showed great goodwill. This has helped us to come through this difficult time in good shape and we are confident that SNACKEX 2022 will be the biggest and best show ever. In fact, we are nearly sold out already!

The ESA team has now established a hybrid working environment, similar to our working groups and Board meetings. We have continued to maintain contact with political decision makers throughout the pandemic and we have continued to advocate successfully for our members and defend their interests.

I would like to thank all my colleagues and our members for your commitment, professionalism, solidarity and hard work - it is truly appreciated.

We can now look forward to 2022 with confidence, determination and good spirits. On behalf of the entire ESA team, I wish you and your families all the very best for the festive season and for a happy and prosperous New Year. ●



Director General Sebastian Emig*

*in his capacity as permanent representative of PrimeConsulting BXLBCN SL



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