



Excerpts from an interview with **Andy Zynga** | Chief Executive Officer, EIT Food

1. What is the future of AgTech by 2050?

By 2050 there will be almost 10 billion people living on this planet – 2 billion more than in 2019. To meet demand, food production will need to increase by 60%. To put this in perspective, we'd need an additional 600 million hectares of agricultural land – equivalent to an area almost twice the size of India. What's more, food production already accounts for over a quarter (26%) of greenhouse gas emissions and 70% of global freshwater withdrawals, so we urgently need to find innovative solutions to overcome these twin challenges.

Technology and other innovations will be some of the greatest aids to feed the world sustainably in 2050. Artificial intelligence, robotics, advances in crop breeding, new research into extreme climate farming, food science for clean meat, and vertical farming are just a few of the solutions already beginning to build a better agrifood system. And many of those technologies need to be enabled by an affordable rural wireless system. Today, more than ever, we need to nurture our greatest entrepreneurial minds and equip and empower them to develop solutions to the future challenges we face as a society

2. What steps need to be taken to encourage future generations in agriculture business? If not, what are the drawbacks?

Only a spirit of entrepreneurship and a culture of innovation will allow Europe to enact the transformation we need, to create a food system fit for a future that is healthy, sustainable and meets the needs of our growing population.

Entrepreneurs play a critical role in transforming our food system by developing and scaling the solutions required for radical change. However, turning a brilliant idea into a successful business is not an easy process. We support agrifood entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey, from understanding their market potential and matching them with investors, to rolling out their solutions and products.

What's more, a wide spectrum of educational institutions need to prepare the future generation to be able to operate agricultural technologies effectively, and to become innovative enough to foster the creation of more entrepreneurs and businesses in this space.

Lastly, professional education will help to spread knowledge faster, for example through programs such as EIT Foods Focus on Farmers, whereby Farmers are teaching other farmers techniques in resilient farming. Last year, we engaged over 1,000 farmers as ambassadors.

3. What are the greatest benefits and risks of embracing advanced technologies on urban and suburban farming?

Urban and suburban farming is a growing trend within the agrifood system. The solution seeks to reduce the environmental footprint of food and offer city dwellers access to local, fresh and healthy ingredients. In early 2020, Europe's biggest urban farm, Nature Urbaine, opened on the rooftops of Paris. The farm, which is the size of two football pitches, is able to produce 1,000kg of over 35 varieties of fruits and vegetables every day and is already supplying a number of local customers.

However, the advanced technologies to facilitate this, such as vertical farming, also face challenges. As the population increases, cities are densifying, and urban and suburban land is becoming more and more valuable. Regulations, land value and cultural opposition can mean that these technologies are often rejected.

For these technologies to become part of everyday life in urban spaces, we need to first better understand what they are and the value they bring. We play our part by bringing together the relevant stakeholders at events such as our upcoming Future of Food conference to discuss how policy, innovation and investment can support the growth of these technologies.

Concerning the urban farming community, there is a risk of insufficient talent being available that is savvy in technology adoption, and understanding of agriculture at the same time. And for systems like robotics, new business models are needed that are looking at use of technology as a service. The benefit would be an increase in both efficiency and effectiveness in farming and a pertinent and less negative climate impact.

1. Supporting European farmers to transition to regenerative agriculture: EIT Food offers farmers in Southern and Eastern Europe a comprehensive training programme that helps them learn and apply the principles of regenerative agriculture on their land.

2. Helping the public see the benefits for their health and planet of regenerative agriculture: for farmers to adopt regenerative agriculture, it is essential that European consumers understand and appreciate what they are doing and how it benefits the environment and our health. Through powerful storytelling, we explain the connection between healthy soils, healthy plants, healthy people and a healthy planet.

3. Working with agrifood companies to transition their supply to regenerative agriculture: the full potential of regenerative agriculture will be achieved when agrifood companies change their food sourcing strategies. EIT Food is working closely with its partners and other agrifood business to help train producers in their supply networks and design procurement strategies that encourage the adoption of regenerative farming practices.

5. Agriculture is a demanding work and one of the male-dominated industries. In your opinion, how can we achieve gender equality and increase women partaking in leadership roles?

Research has shown that gender-balanced teams deliver higher performance and are more likely to employ sustainable practices. If we are committed to creating a more sustainable food system, we need to embrace equality in everything we do.

EIT Food has identified gender inclusivity as a strategic priority meaning all its projects have to consider how to address equality issues in its funding proposals. EIT Food's Changemakers programme supports entrepreneurs currently underrepresented in the agrifood startup space. The programme has a current focus on women innovators, providing support to enable them to launch their ideas, identify role models and mentors and connect with the agrifood community. Programmes such as WE Lead and Hungry Shepreneurs are also helping to support women by creating a network of women leaders who wish to drive change, innovation and sustainability within the food sector.