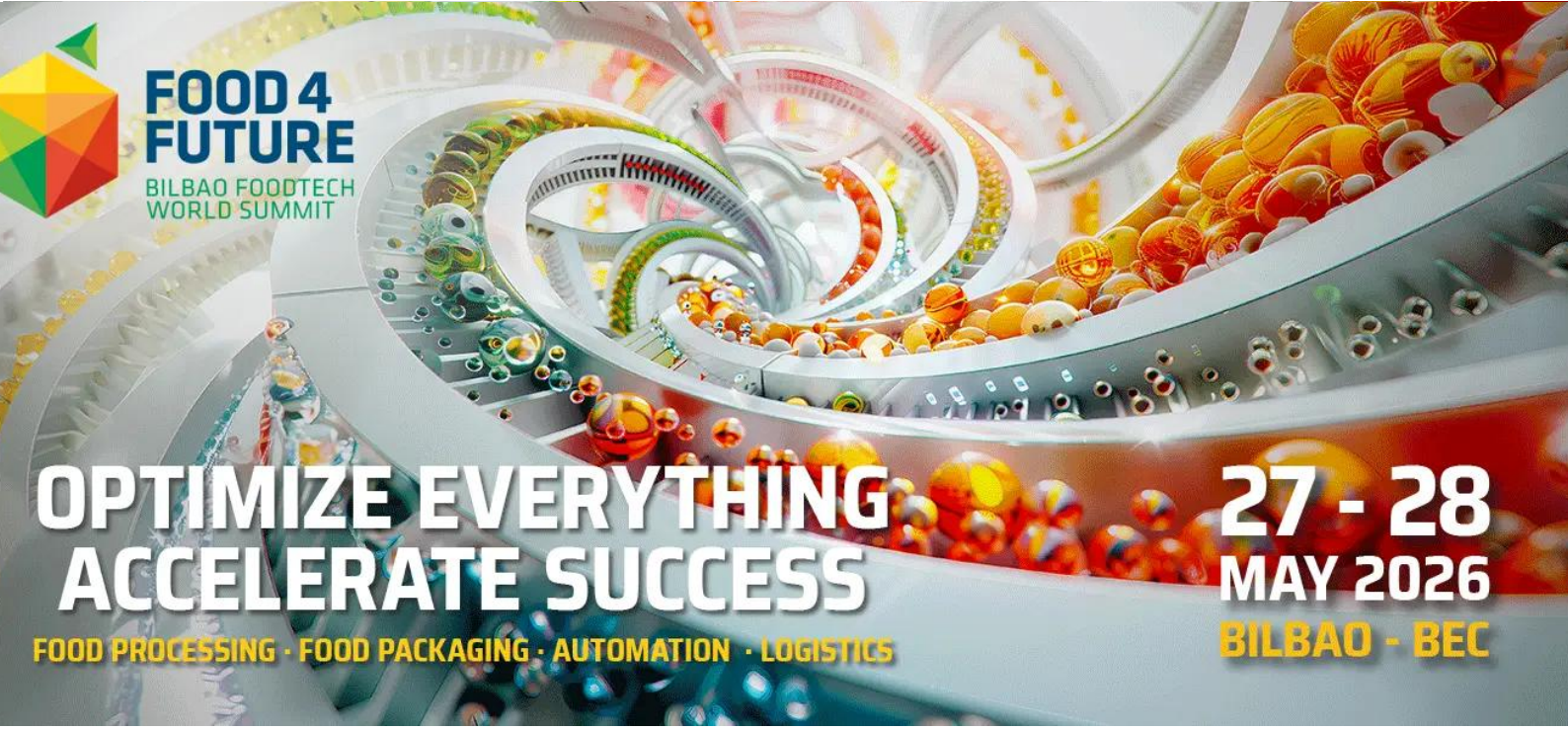

DOSSIER

Food 4 Future 2026

Executive Summary

Food 4 Future 2026 confirms that the food industry is not merely undergoing a period of change, but rather a process of structural reconfiguration, in which competitive advantage no longer depends on innovating more, but on executing better, making decisions earlier, and translating complexity into market value.

The conference's main conclusions can be summarised in the following key points:

1. The challenge is turning innovation into business

Competitive advantage does not lie in having ideas, but in industrialising them.

- Innovation has become a challenge of execution, scaling and governance.
- Most initiatives fail due to a lack of ownership, internal alignment and effective decision-making mechanisms.

2. Data is competitive infrastructure

Without a data architecture, AI cannot scale.

- The sector possesses vast amounts of data but still has limited capacity to exploit it effectively.
- The real differentiator is not the adoption of AI itself, but data governance, interoperability and data quality.

3. Consumers are no longer predictable (and that changes everything)

The advantage no longer lies in anticipating behaviour, but in adapting to it in real time.

- Consumer behaviour no longer follows stable patterns; it is fragmented, contextual and dynamic.
- Long-term innovation is becoming less important than continuous adaptability.

4. Health only works when it translates into tangible benefits

The value lies not in scientific evidence itself, but in the ability to translate that evidence into purchasing decisions.

- Consumers do not buy "health"; they buy tangible outcomes.

- There remains a significant gap between available science and perceived value.

5. Sustainability only competes when it generates economic value

Being sustainable is no longer enough; companies must be able to monetise sustainability or translate it into perceived value.

- Sustainability has evolved from a reputational asset into a business decision-making criterion.
- However, the value generated is not always captured by the market.

6. Convenience has become the great silent driver

Those who win on convenience win on penetration.

- Beyond visible trends such as health and sustainability, the real transformation in consumption revolves around saving time and ease of use.
- It is driving change across entire categories, including seafood and ready-to-eat/drink products.

7. Protein diversification remains an unresolved necessity

Innovation in alternative proteins no longer competes on technology, but on market viability.

- There is broad consensus on the need to diversify protein sources.
- The challenge lies not in production, but in consumer acceptance, regulation and industrial viability.

8. One of the industry's greatest challenges is translating complexity into simple propositions

Innovation alone is not enough; it must also be understandable and accessible.

- Many innovations, such as biotechnology and precision nutrition, are difficult to explain and integrate into consumers' everyday lives.
- This limits adoption, even when the value proposition is strong.

9. Competitiveness is shifting towards the operating model

Competitive advantage is becoming less visible and increasingly structural.

- Differentiation is driven less by products and more by decision-making speed, technological integration and operational efficiency.
- Innovation is moving from the laboratory to the entire value chain.

10. The ecosystem matters more than the company

Competition is no longer between companies, but between ecosystems.

- No organisation can innovate alone in a highly complex environment.
- Value is generated through networks.

The food industry is entering a phase in which execution takes precedence over exploration, simplicity over complexity, and adaptability over long-term planning.

The companies that will lead this transition will be those capable of turning innovation into decisions, data into advantage, and complexity into clear propositions for consumers.

1. Food4Future 2026

The sixth edition of Food 4 Future – Expo FoodTech took place on 27–28 May 2026 and brought together more than 7,000 professionals from the food, beverage and foodtech sectors against a backdrop of significant geopolitical, economic, technological and social challenges facing the industry.

Under the theme **"Optimize Everything, Accelerate Success"**, the event showcased technological, scientific and business advances contributing to the development of a more sustainable, healthier and resilient food system.

The event further strengthened the reputation of the Basque Country as a benchmark for food innovation. The Basque Government's Department of Food, Rural Development and Agriculture described food innovation as a "strategic issue for the country", highlighting its commitment to consolidating a competitive, collaborative and locally rooted food model. In this context, Food 4 Future reinforced its strategic role in aligning public and private efforts to drive food-related research, development and innovation.

Once again, the event attracted a strong presence of CEOs from leading food and beverage companies. The congress featured more than 300 experts and an exhibition area with 261 stands, where technology providers and industrial companies showcased over 400 innovations for the food sector.

Italy participated as the guest country, with major Italian companies such as Barilla, Amadori and Loacker sharing insights into the Italian agrifood innovation model.

Key figures from Food 4 Future 2026

- More than **7,000 professionals** from the agrifood sector attended.
- **261 exhibiting companies** representing national and international organisations.
- More than **300 expert speakers** participated in over **170 conference sessions**.
- **200 agrifoodtech start-ups** presented disruptive solutions.
- Estimated economic impact of **€20 million**.

2. FoodTech Ecosystem: Open Innovation, Scaling and Industrial Collaboration

The 2026 edition of Food 4 Future confirmed the growing maturity of the FoodTech ecosystem, increasingly focused on delivering tangible impact, with open innovation and corporate venturing becoming strategic tools for achieving scalable industrial outcomes.

A new feature in 2026 was the first **Open Innovation & Corporate Venturing Summit**, co-organised with accelerator Eatable Adventures. The event aimed to connect food companies with start-ups capable of solving industrial challenges. Discussions revealed common patterns, structural tensions and emerging signals that define the current state of the ecosystem.

Food 4 Future 2026 also highlighted the strong presence of the agrifood start-up ecosystem, with nearly 200 agrifoodtech start-ups from around the world presenting innovations in areas including:

- **Circular economy:** upcycling, by-product valorisation and sustainable business models.
- **Artificial Intelligence and digitalisation:** industrial AI and data analytics solutions to optimise processes, quality and logistics across the food chain.
- **Food safety and shelf life:** technologies to detect pathogens, improve traceability and extend product preservation.
- **Smart and sustainable agriculture:** agri-tech solutions enabling more efficient and sustainable farming systems.

One of the most recurring messages was the evolution of open innovation from exploratory approaches towards models clearly focused on solving real business challenges, accelerating solution adoption and avoiding projects disconnected from core business priorities.

Alejandro Arranz, Head of Corporate Ventures and New Technologies at Mahou, emphasised the importance of working with traditional business KPIs, integrating innovation into the company's standard operating framework and avoiding the perception of innovation as a parallel activity.

Laurette De Franco, Head of Open Innovation at Barilla, stressed the importance of structuring collaboration with start-ups through short cycles, as exemplified by the company's Good Food Makers programme, where clearly defined challenges are addressed through proof-of-concept projects delivered within weeks.

Alessandro Schena, Open Innovation Manager at Loacker, highlighted that innovation should not become an “isolated experiment”, but should instead be integrated into a clearly defined portfolio of challenges and pain points, prioritising internal alignment before seeking external solutions.

As guest country, Italy brought attention to a familiar tension within the sector: the apparent dichotomy between tradition and innovation. However, experiences shared by Italian family-owned businesses demonstrated that both approaches can reinforce one another. Speakers stressed the importance of making innovation understandable to consumers without breaking the connection between traditional heritage and technological advancement.

Laurette De Franco (Barilla) and Manuel Sirgiovanni, General Manager of Martino Rossi, agreed that innovation is not only about creating new products but also about recovering, adapting and scaling solutions that had previously been overlooked, integrating technology, sustainability and new ingredients without undermining brand identity.

It was also highlighted that family-owned companies, thanks to their long-term perspective, are often more willing to accept higher levels of risk, facilitating the adoption of more ambitious innovation models.

Building structured innovation engines

Sessions focused on corporate innovation demonstrated that leading companies are moving beyond isolated initiatives towards the creation of structured innovation engines, combining internal innovation, open innovation and corporate venturing.

Unai Sardón, Head of Open Innovation and Corporate Entrepreneurship at Eroski, explained that open innovation serves as a mechanism for addressing short-term business challenges but must be aligned with a clear long-term strategy defining where and how the company intends to compete and grow. In Eroski’s case, this approach is complemented by corporate entrepreneurship programmes and collaboration with start-ups and technology centres.

The main challenge identified across discussions was industrial scaling.

Several speakers noted that many pilots and proof-of-concept projects fail to progress due to a lack of internal alignment, insufficient resources or difficulties in identifying key partners, both internal (such as internal champions capable of driving adoption within the organisation) and external (external champions responsible for validating market fit).

Guillermo Blázquez, Managing Director Spain & Portugal at Bühler Group, highlighted the need to “bring the laboratory to the production line”, incorporating industrialisation, regulatory and cost considerations from the earliest stages of development.

Representatives from Swanlaab Venture Factory stressed the value of experts in regulation, market development and industrialisation as strategic partners for scaling innovation.

The start-up perspective

From the start-up perspective, the message was clear: collaboration with large companies requires focus, time and relationships built on mutual trust.

Pablo García, CEO and Co-founder of Fibtray, pointed out that collaboration processes often take longer than a start-up’s own roadmap due to the organisational complexity of large corporations and the involvement of multiple departments. In this context, listening carefully and deeply understanding the company’s challenge becomes a critical success factor.

Josune Ayo, Co-founder and CEO of Genbioma, suggested that early-stage start-ups can benefit from first collaborating with smaller companies, allowing them to receive rapid feedback before entering into partnerships with major corporations. This approach facilitates both technological and market maturity.

Ander Mendez, Co-founder and CEO of Ositos, emphasised the importance of local partnerships for internationalisation, noting that success depends not only on whom companies sell to, but also on whom they grow with.

Governance, ownership and regulatory innovation

Another key issue discussed was innovation governance and ownership within organisations.

Speakers consistently argued that the challenge is no longer identifying start-ups or launching pilots, but rather establishing clear governance structures, defined ownership and agile decision-making mechanisms capable of transforming pilots into scalable business solutions.

In this context, attention was also drawn to new institutional infrastructures designed to accelerate innovation, such as the **AgrifoodTech Sandbox**.

These initiatives enable companies to test technological solutions in controlled environments, generate evidence and advance developments subject to complex regulatory requirements.

This reflects a shift in perspective whereby regulation is increasingly viewed not as a barrier, but as a tool for learning, validation and innovation acceleration.

Finally, the forum highlighted the role of Food 4 Future as a platform connecting innovation ecosystems beyond its function as an event.

Particular emphasis was placed on building bridges between local ecosystems and global markets, with collaborations between Japan and Spain/the Basque Country serving as a notable example.

This approach demonstrates that future competitiveness will largely depend on the ability to connect talent, knowledge and industrial capabilities across territories, creating more open innovation dynamics with international impact.

FoodTech Innovation Awards

As part of Food 4 Future 2026, the **FoodTech Innovation Awards 2026** recognised the most cutting-edge solutions from more than 200 submissions across categories including Digitalisation, Sustainability, Healthy Food, Automation and Robotics, Packaging, Most Innovative Start-up and Spanish Start-up with the Greatest International Potential.

Laminar – Most Innovative Digitalisation Solution

AI-based sensor technology that optimises water consumption in food factories in real time through internal pipeline monitoring.

Uraphex – Best Sustainability Project

Patented **PHEX** technology based on advanced oxidation processes, capable of disinfecting and reusing industrial water without chemical additives, ensuring food safety while preserving the sensory properties of products.

Noiet Foods – Best Healthy Food Project

Noiferm, a protein ingredient that replaces synthetic preservatives using oat and rice by-products generated from plant-based beverage production.

Proton Europe – Best Automation and Robotics Solution

A disruptive technology that synchronises freezing processes with controlled electromagnetic fields, improving process control and enabling efficient industrial-scale deployment.

Bioplastics4Health – Most Disruptive Packaging Solution

Industrial-scale production of PHBV, a compostable bio-based polymer that will support a new generation of packaging solutions for the circular economy.

The Consumer.ai – Most Innovative Start-up

A cloud-based AI SaaS platform capable of validating new products, packaging concepts and claims within minutes, accelerating innovation in the food industry.

Sporalys – Spanish Start-up with the Greatest International Potential

A modular solid-state fermentation platform designed as scalable industrial infrastructure for food production.

3. Food 4 Future Summit 2026: Conference Highlights

Beyond the innovation ecosystem itself, Food 4 Future 2026 provided a comprehensive overview of the tensions, trends and opportunities that will shape the competitiveness of the food industry in the years ahead.

Food has become a strategic asset in an increasingly complex geopolitical and economic landscape, characterised by inflationary pressures, trade tensions, energy challenges and climate-related disruptions. At the same time, technology continues to act as a cross-cutting enabler capable of addressing these challenges at industrial scale.

Against this backdrop, Food 4 Future brought together more than 300 international experts to analyse the major trends affecting the sector and explore how current challenges can be transformed into opportunities through innovation, efficiency, diversification, partnerships and data.

The conference programme was structured around four global megatrends that are shaping competitiveness, resilience and sustainable development.

The geopolitical dimension of food

International tensions, health crises and climate-related disruptions have demonstrated that securing food supply is now a matter of national priority.

This requires stronger public-private collaboration, greater diversification and new approaches to food security and food sovereignty.

Production costs and supply chain resilience

The global increase in the cost of raw materials, energy and logistics continues to put pressure on margins, making efficiency across the entire value chain a critical priority.

Faced with ongoing volatility, the industry is exploring technological solutions that improve productivity, flexibility and security of supply while mitigating uncertainty.

Consumer transformation

Changes in consumer habits are forcing food companies to continually rethink their value propositions.

Meeting the expectations of increasingly demanding consumers requires more than product innovation; it also requires alignment with emerging consumer values.

Technological innovation and adoption

The sector's competitiveness increasingly depends on the adoption of new technologies.

Artificial intelligence and process automation have become essential tools for scaling production, anticipating demand, guaranteeing quality and creating value while reshaping business models.

In addition to these cross-cutting themes, the programme included specialised sessions dedicated to industrial sectors such as meat, fisheries, beverages, dairy, fruit and vegetables, and ingredients, as well as professional profiles covering executive leadership, production, technology, R&D and logistics.

Alongside the major industry debates, the conference also addressed emerging issues such as talent attraction and diversity in the food sector.

Senior executives from Eroski, Frit Ravich, General Mills and Kellanova discussed the persistent gender gap in leadership positions and shared strategies for creating more balanced and competitive organisations, highlighting gender equality as a driver of innovation, resilience and sustainable growth.

The strong presence of senior executives from leading companies once again demonstrated that transformational innovation remains a priority at board level.

Notable speakers included:

Óscar Vicente *CEO* — **Angulas Aguinaga**

- Cristóbal Valdés *CEO* — **Deoleo**
- Néstor Nava *General Manager* — **Grupo Gallo**
- Javier Roza *Managing Director* — **Mantequerías Arias – Grupo Savencia**
- Clara Hernández *Environmental & Climate Change Director* — **Sigma Europe / Campofrío**
- Coral Carrasco *R&D and Sustainability Corporate Coordinator* — **Vall Companys Group**
- Laurette De Franco, Head of Open Innovation — **Barilla**

- Marta González-Mesones — General Manager, **Unilever España**
- Jordi Llach — CEO, **Nestlé Iberia**
- Antonella Sottero — General Manager, **Ferrero Ibérica**
- François Lacombe — General Manager, **Danone Iberia**
- Susana Entero — General Manager, **Kellanova**
- Judith Viader — CEO, **Frit Ravich**
- Jorge Escudero — CEO, **Grupo Nueva Pescanova**
- Antoni Folguera — Off-Trade Business Unit Director, **Damm**
- Alejandro Arranz — Head of Corporate Ventures & New Technologies, **Mahou**
- Alejandro González — Director Innovación, I+D, **Calidad Pascual**
- Ainara Llona — Head of Innovation, **Grupo Eroski**
- Elena Martínez — CEO **Martínez Somalo**
- César Valencoso Managing Partner – **Vectis Advisors**
- Guillermo Mena Innovation Manager— **Fruselva Global**
- Fernando Moraga General Manager — **PepsiCo Iberia**
- Hirotaka Tanaka Founder and CEO – **UnlocX & Co.Japan**
- Javier Ruiz de Galarreta Founder & CEO – **Araex**
- Luis Calvo R&D Manager – **Incarlopsa**

Megatrends: Drivers of Change

Geopolitics was a recurring theme throughout Food 4 Future 2026.

Wars, tariffs, trade restrictions and climate-related crises directly affect access to raw materials and price stability.

In a world where stability can no longer be taken for granted, companies are operating under a combination of geopolitical tensions, regulatory pressure and accelerating technological disruption.

Against this backdrop, resilience, productivity, diversification and adaptive leadership are emerging as the new sources of competitive advantage.

As food increasingly becomes a strategic issue, Europe must address its food system with the same level of priority as energy, defence and technology, reducing external dependencies while strengthening domestic production capacity, diversifying sourcing strategies and building more stable supply relationships.

This challenge is compounded by growing regulatory pressure, which many see as one of the key factors affecting the competitiveness of the European food system.

Achieving effective regulation without undermining Europe's productive base will be one of the major challenges of the coming years.

"We are trying to balance sustainability, food safety and affordability in an increasingly demanding regulatory environment."

Clara Hernández (Sigma Europe / Campofrío)

In her view, Europe's greatest risks stem from regulatory speed, complexity and asymmetries compared with third countries.

The consequences are clear: increased administrative burdens, higher costs and the risk of losing industrial competitiveness if regulation is not aligned with market realities.

As a result, many large organisations are adopting far more agile decision-making models, reducing hierarchical structures and increasing their capacity to respond rapidly in uncertain environments.

Marta González-Mesones (Unilever) described a radical shift in the management of large organisations, operating almost in a state of "permanent crisis mode".

Consumers change more quickly, raw material availability is less predictable, and technology creates new possibilities at unprecedented speed.

This reality reinforces the need for flexible organisations capable of absorbing disruption without passing the full impact on to consumers.

"We have moved from planning innovation five years ahead to making decisions almost month by month. Consumers, supply chains and technology are constantly changing, and organisations must be capable of adapting in real time."

Marta González-Mesones, Unilever Spain

Protein diversification: a strategic challenge for Europe

Protein diversification once again emerged as a key strategic theme.

From the perspective of marine foods, Leire Arantzamendi (AZTI) and Diego Lois (Stolt Sea Farm) agreed that aquaculture, seafood and algae can play a crucial role in food security and system resilience.

However, these sectors continue to face significant vulnerabilities, including dependence on imported raw materials, regulatory complexity and cultural barriers to consumption.

Angulas Aguinaga linked this challenge to a major long-term demographic trend: an ageing European population increasingly concerned about health and wellbeing.

"Marine protein represents a major opportunity for Europe, but it will only become truly relevant if we solve the convenience challenge."

Óscar Vicente, Angulas Aguinaga

Consumers: more complex, more dynamic and less predictable

If there was one underlying theme across virtually every discussion at Food 4 Future 2026, it was the continuous evolution of consumer behaviour.

Consumers no longer follow stable patterns or align with long-term innovation roadmaps.

Companies increasingly recognise that consumer preferences change rapidly and in fragmented ways depending on context, requiring closer market engagement, near real-time data and far more dynamic decision-making.

"We live in a liquid modernity where consumers want many different things at the same time. Our challenge as leaders is to simplify internal complexity so that we can respond quickly to the outside world."

Antonella Sottero, Ferrero Ibérica

The conference highlighted consumer data as a critical competitive asset—but only when insights are converted into decisions.

The challenge is no longer obtaining more data, but interpreting it correctly and transforming it into business action.

José Ramón Castro (Siemens) emphasised the role of technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital twins in enabling production flexibility, offer personalisation and demand forecasting, helping companies respond to changing consumer needs while reducing time-to-market.

César Valencoso (Vectis Advisors) identified several profound long-term shifts that the industry can no longer ignore:

The over-55 consumer remains underserved

From a consumer goods perspective, people aged 55 and over represent the most important demographic segment.

They are the largest group, the fastest growing and the one with the highest concentration of income and wealth.

Yet they remain significantly underserved in terms of innovative value propositions.

Convenience as a transformative force

Fewer shared meals at home, the disappearance of traditional meal structures, earlier dinners consisting of a single dish and the emergence of new consumption occasions are reshaping consumption patterns.

The underlying logic has shifted from: "I help you" to "I give you time."

Retail and competitive pressure

Modern retail continues to grow at the expense of traditional channels.

Retailers exert increasing control over categories and compete primarily on price, while brands are forced to compete on value.

Health is everywhere—but remains a weak purchasing driver

Consumers respond to concrete, understandable and relevant benefits.

The concept of health has evolved from: "avoiding what is bad" to "what this product does for me."

At the same time, more preventive, holistic and proactive views of health are gaining traction.

Valencoso also highlighted the persistent gap between what consumers say and what they actually do.

Although concern about health is widespread, it is rarely the primary purchase driver and, in many cases, its influence appears to be declining.

"The industry still does not fully understand how health truly influences consumer behaviour."

César Valencoso, Vectis Advisors

"Consumers want to live longer and better, and they expect food to play an active role in that journey, supported by science."

François Lacombe, Danone Iberia

Case Studies: Successful Examples of Consumer-Led Innovation

Changes in consumer habits and preferences are prompting companies to respond with propositions that reinterpret existing categories rather than create entirely new ones, leveraging new consumption occasions, convenience and enhanced user experiences.

1. NOLO (No and Low Alcohol) Beverages: Adapting to New Conscious Consumption Drivers *(Araex Spanish Fine Wines)*

What consumer shift has been identified?

- Consumers are increasingly aware of the impact of alcohol on their wellbeing and everyday lives.
- Growing demand for options that allow participation in social occasions without alcohol consumption.
- Changes in consumption occasions, with more daytime consumption.

Business response

Launch of a 0.0% sparkling wine, which has been very well received, including in international markets such as Russia.

The concept has subsequently been extended to alcohol-free white and red wines.

2. Alcohol-Free Beer as a Growth Driver for the Category *(DAMM)*

What behavioural change has been identified?

- Lower brand loyalty and higher expectations regarding experience and lifestyle fit.
- Alcohol-free beers already account for approximately 14% of total consumption.

- Alcohol-free consumption is becoming a normal part of everyday life.

Business response

Continued development of alcohol-free beer offerings, transforming what was once a secondary product into a significant contributor within the company's portfolio.

3. Nestea Red Fruits: Attracting New Consumer Segments and Revitalising a Category *(DAMM Nestea)*

What consumer shift has been identified?

- Younger consumers show less affinity with traditional categories.
- Demand for more playful, differentiated and experience-driven products.

Business response

Launch of Nestea Red Fruits in Spain, a product unavailable in other markets.

Within just three months, it revitalised a stagnant category and attracted younger consumers, including underage audiences.

4. QR Labelling That Extends Product Value into the Consumption Experience *(Araex Spanish Fine Wines)*

What consumer shift has been identified?

- Consumers increasingly seek experiences and emotional connections, not just products.
- Greater interest in origin stories and the context surrounding consumption moments.

Business response

Incorporation of QR codes that extend the consumer experience beyond product consumption itself.

Examples include personalised playlists linked to specific consumption occasions and content explaining what is happening in the vineyard.

5. Convenience in Seafood: Ready-to-Eat Octopus and Mussels *(Aguinamar)*

What consumer shift has been identified?

- Declining habit of cooking fish, particularly among younger generations.
- Strong growth in demand for convenience products.

Business response

Development of seafood products such as cooked octopus and ready-to-eat mussels, making seafood easier to incorporate into everyday routines.

Smart Digitalisation and Enabling Technologies

The food industry is moving from a defensive approach to technology adoption ("if we don't do it, we'll fall behind") towards a model where technology is integrated into competitive strategy with a clear purpose and value proposition.

Food 4 Future 2026 provided numerous examples demonstrating that artificial intelligence, data-driven systems, digitalisation and automation are already solving real industrial problems and delivering measurable improvements in productivity, flexibility and time-to-market.

Speakers repeatedly emphasised that competitive advantage will not come from access to technology itself, but from organisations' ability to select the right use cases, develop talent and govern data effectively.

One recurring theme was that disruption is not only technological but also organisational and cultural, highlighting the need for more flexible leadership capable of making decisions under uncertainty, combining data with experience and mobilising teams effectively.

"Digital maturity is progressing, but very unevenly. One of the main bottlenecks remains capabilities and talent".

Hannah Valerio, IMANcorp Foundation

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work

Considerable attention was devoted to the impact of AI on employment.

The prevailing view was not one of replacing people, but rather reorganising roles, creating new capabilities and reshaping ways of working.

Sara de Pablos (Greater) suggested that AI could transform up to 40% of jobs and argued that future competitive advantage will come from combining artificial intelligence with human expertise.

The Rise of the Smart Factory

The evolution towards the smart factory was another major topic of discussion.

Digital twins and the Internet of Things (IoT) are becoming the backbone of an emerging industrial model capable of delivering more flexible manufacturing facilities and automated operational decision-making.

These simulation technologies allow companies to anticipate and optimise complex systems, accelerating learning while reducing risk.

System integration and scalability emerged as key priorities, with discussions focusing on how to orchestrate different technologies within real operating environments while maximising return on technological investment.

Data as a Strategic Asset

Data was repeatedly described as the sector's most critical asset.

While companies generate enormous amounts of data, many still lack the capabilities needed to exploit it effectively.

Key challenges include:

- Data interoperability.
- Data governance.
- The creation of secure data-sharing mechanisms and data spaces.
- Converting data into business value.

A particularly emerging theme was the idea of treating human know-how as a valuable form of data.

The knowledge accumulated by employees should increasingly be captured, standardised and incorporated into companies' digital systems.

Cybersecurity: The Next Major Challenge

Cybersecurity received significant attention because of its role in safeguarding operational integrity within highly connected environments and shared-data ecosystems.

As digitalisation accelerates, cybersecurity is increasingly viewed as the next major challenge following AI adoption and automation.

Artificial Intelligence Moves Beyond the Pilot Phase

Artificial intelligence once again featured prominently throughout Food 4 Future 2026.

The event showcased numerous industrial applications, including:

- Predictive maintenance.
- Production line optimisation.
- Logistics optimisation.
- Demand forecasting.

These examples demonstrated the transition from experimentation and pilot projects to large-scale deployment across the food and beverage industry.

Quantum Computing: An Emerging Disruption with Medium-Term Potential

Although still at an exploratory and pre-industrial stage and not considered an immediate adoption technology, quantum computing emerged once again as one of the most potentially disruptive technologies for the food industry over the medium and long term.

Quantum technologies could fundamentally redefine how the industry addresses highly complex optimisation and simulation challenges in industrial processes, logistics networks and advanced food research.

The message from the conference was clear:

Companies do not need to "do quantum computing" today.

However, they do need to understand its potential, identify future application opportunities and begin building capabilities through collaboration with external partners to avoid being left behind when the technology matures.

Representatives from Tecnalia and Hijos de Rivera explained that quantum computing should be understood as a fundamentally different paradigm capable of tackling problems that are currently intractable due to their complexity or computational cost.

Its value will only emerge when connected to real industrial challenges and real company data where it can deliver advantages beyond what can currently be achieved through High-Performance Computing (HPC) or conventional AI.

Industrial Application Case Studies

1. PepsiCo – Digital Twins Transforming Industrial Decision-Making

Creation of a digital twin of a manufacturing plant capable of simulating, testing and optimising processes before implementation in the physical environment.

Challenges identified

- Highly variable and complex industrial operations.
- Need to improve productivity and efficiency without operational risk.
- Limitations in testing changes directly on production lines.

Technologies applied

- Digital twins.
- Plant virtualisation.
- Artificial intelligence for simulation and optimisation.

Impact

- Improved productivity.
- Greater operational efficiency.
- Reduced risk in industrial decision-making.

2. BonArea – Robotics and AI Addressing a Critical Workforce Challenge

Implementation of a robotic system capable of identifying products through machine vision, automatically adapting grip mechanisms and carrying out autonomous picking operations.

Challenges identified

- Cold-storage facilities with high rates of sick leave due to extreme working conditions.
- Logistical and efficiency challenges in picking operations.

Technologies applied

- Robotics.
- Machine vision.
- Artificial intelligence.
- Intelligent pick-and-place systems.

Impact

- Reduced labour-related issues.
- Improved logistics efficiency.
- Automation of critical tasks in challenging environments.

3. Pascual – Automation and Data as the Foundation for Scaling AI

Integration of production data and industrial systems to create a robust data foundation supporting artificial intelligence and advanced analytics for process optimisation.

Challenges identified

- Large volumes of underutilised industrial data.
- Disconnected systems limiting AI deployment.
- Need to improve efficiency and process control.

Technologies applied

- Industrial automation.
- Machine connectivity.
- MES and PLM systems.
- AI based on operational data.

Impact

- Improved operational decision-making.
- Greater efficiency and process control.
- Strong foundation for scaling AI across the organisation.

4. Hijos de Rivera – AI and Quantum Computing to Anticipate Taste Perception

Integration of artificial intelligence and quantum simulation into R&D processes to accelerate the development of functional beverages, incorporating taste perception and other sensory attributes from the earliest stages of development.

Challenges identified

- High complexity in selecting bioactive molecules.
- Difficulty predicting sensory acceptance based solely on experimental testing.
- Limitations of traditional computational methods for complex molecular optimisation problems.

Technologies applied

- Artificial intelligence.
- Molecular modelling and simulation.
- Hybrid classical and quantum computing solutions.
- Quantum-inspired optimisation techniques.

Impact

- Greater precision in selecting functional ingredients.
- Reduced experimental effort.
- Integration of taste as a key R&D criterion.
- Competitive advantage in food innovation.

Transition Towards Sustainable and Circular Models

Food 4 Future 2026 highlighted a turning point: sustainability is no longer approached as a matter of narrative or compliance, but is becoming fully integrated into business models.

The focus is shifting towards measurable impact, influencing investment decisions, product design and industrial operations. Sustainability is increasingly recognised as a strategic pillar that will shape the future competitiveness and resilience of the food system.

"Sustainability only creates impact when it is embedded in business decisions. It cannot function as an additional layer; it must form part of a company's DNA, linked to energy efficiency, circularity and operational resilience."

Nina Bergmann, Siemens Iberia

Regulation as a Competitive Accelerator

European regulation emerged as a structural factor creating an increasingly visible divide between companies that use regulation as a strategic lever and those that react defensively.

For some organisations, regulation helps prioritise initiatives, justify investments and accelerate decision-making.

For others, it is perceived mainly as a source of cost and complexity.

The conclusion was clear:

Those companies capable of anticipating regulatory developments are increasingly using regulation as a source of competitive advantage.

Regenerative Economy: The Next Frontier

Another topic gaining prominence was regenerative economy models.

Although still relatively niche, these approaches point towards the next frontier of competitiveness: generating positive net impact through ecosystem restoration and the preservation of local culture and territories.

"Regenerative food systems represent a paradigm shift: moving from minimising impact to creating systems in which consumption itself generates environmental, economic and cultural value over the long term."

Hirotaka Tanaka, UnlocX / SKS Japan

The Sustainability Value Gap

Although companies continue to make progress in sustainability and circularity, one unresolved challenge remains:

The value created through sustainability is not always recognised by the market.

Consumers often fail to understand or appreciate the efforts made by companies.

As a result, although consumers frequently claim they are willing to pay more for sustainable products, actual purchasing behaviour often fails to reflect those intentions.

The challenge is therefore no longer simply to be sustainable, but to communicate sustainability in a simple way that is connected to clear consumer benefits.

The opportunity lies in transforming sustainability into:

- A brand asset.
- A source of differentiation.
- A driver of customer loyalty.

Circular Economy as a Business Strategy

The circular economy was one of the central themes of Food 4 Future 2026.

Increasingly, circularity is moving beyond waste reduction and becoming a driver of operational and economic value.

Industrial systems are being designed to:

- Reduce structural costs.
- Mitigate raw material volatility.
- Reduce regulatory exposure.
- Create new revenue streams.

A significant shift is underway. Circular economy is no longer viewed solely as waste reduction. Instead, it is becoming a generator of entirely new business opportunities:

- By-products transformed into ingredients.
- Waste converted into higher-value inputs.
- Energy and biomass treated as strategic assets.

Companies mastering this approach are achieving:

- Diversified revenue streams.
- Reduced dependence on volatile markets.
- Value creation from resources that were previously regarded as waste.

The Sustainability Value Gap

Although companies continue to make progress in sustainability and circularity, one unresolved challenge remains:

The value created through sustainability is not always recognised by the market.

Consumers often fail to understand or appreciate the efforts made by companies.

As a result, although consumers frequently claim they are willing to pay more for sustainable products, actual purchasing behaviour often fails to reflect those intentions.

The challenge is therefore no longer simply to be sustainable, but to communicate sustainability in a simple way that is connected to clear consumer benefits.

The opportunity lies in transforming sustainability into:

- A brand asset.
- A source of differentiation.
- A driver of customer loyalty.

Circular Economy as a Business Strategy

The circular economy was one of the central themes of Food 4 Future 2026.

Increasingly, circularity is moving beyond waste reduction and becoming a driver of operational and economic value.

Industrial systems are being designed to:

- Reduce structural costs.
- Mitigate raw material volatility.
- Reduce regulatory exposure.
- Create new revenue streams.

A significant shift is underway.

Circular economy is no longer viewed solely as waste reduction.

Instead, it is becoming a generator of entirely new business opportunities:

- By-products transformed into ingredients.
- Waste converted into higher-value inputs.
- Energy and biomass treated as strategic assets.

Companies mastering this approach are achieving:

- Diversified revenue streams.
- Reduced dependence on volatile markets.
- Value creation from resources that were previously regarded as waste.

"The circular economy is fundamentally about competitiveness. Reducing environmental footprint, valorising by-products and improving resource efficiency are now essential for companies wishing to continue operating and growing within the sector."

Coral Carrasco, Vall Companys Group

"By-product valorisation is already an industrial reality. Reusing water or valorising by-products such as okara not only reduces environmental impact; it also improves efficiency and creates new value opportunities that resonate with consumer expectations."

Aida García, Masergrup (Fruselva / Bermuts Miró)

Circular Economy Case Studies

1. Masergrup (Fruselva / Vermuts Miró) – Industrial-Scale By-product Valorisation

Integration of circularity into industrial operations through resource reuse and by-product valorisation, linking operational efficiency with new product value creation.

Challenges identified

- Generation of process waste.
- High consumption of water and raw materials.
- Need to implement circularity beyond pilot projects.

Technology / approach applied

- Reuse of water in industrial processes.
- Valorisation of okara as a functional ingredient.
- Redesign of production processes using circular principles.

Impact

- Reduced waste and resource consumption.
- Creation of high-value ingredients.
- Successful implementation of circular economy principles at industrial scale.

2. Vall Companys Group – Circularity to Reduce the Footprint of Animal Protein

A comprehensive circular economy strategy integrated across the entire value chain to reduce the environmental impact of meat production and respond to increasing regulatory and market pressures.

Challenges identified

- High environmental footprint associated with meat production.
- Increasing regulatory requirements.
- Need to transform the entire value chain rather than isolated processes.

Technology / approach applied

- Circular biomass management.
- Reduced water consumption.
- By-product valorisation.
- Use of deforestation-free raw materials.

Impact

- Reduced environmental footprint.
- Increased resilience of the production model.
- Alignment with sustainability requirements from both markets and regulators.

3. UnlocX / SKS Japan – From Circularity to Regeneration

Evolution from circular economy principles towards regenerative models in which production and consumption actively contribute to ecosystem restoration.

Challenges identified

- Degradation of natural ecosystems.
- Waste of biological resources.
- Need for new value creation models.

Technology / approach applied

- Upcycling of fermentation by-products.

- Use of algae and regenerative aquaculture.
- Business models based on marine ecosystem restoration.

Impact

- Creation of new high-value ingredients and products.
- Reduced waste.
- Transition from circular economy models to regenerative systems.

4. PepsiCo – Circularity and Industrial Decarbonisation

Integration of sustainability and circular economy principles into industrial operations and packaging systems to reduce environmental impact and advance towards net-zero production models.

Challenges identified

- High environmental footprint of the beverage industry.
- Need to reduce emissions and plastic waste.
- Regulatory pressure and rising consumer expectations.

Technology / approach applied

- Net-zero production facilities.
- 100% rPET packaging.
- Operational efficiency programmes.
- A 360-degree sustainability approach.

Impact

- Significant emissions reductions.
- Progress towards packaging circularity.
- Strong positioning as a leader in industrial sustainability.

Health and Wellbeing: Drivers of Food System Transformation

Health and wellbeing continue to establish themselves as major drivers of growth within the food system.

However, two strategic dimensions remain essential for future development:

- Scientific and technological progress.
- Real consumer adoption in everyday purchasing decisions.

Health is no longer an aspirational concept.

Instead, it is becoming a functional, measurable and highly specific attribute.

Broad "healthy" positioning is losing relevance in favour of more targeted propositions, such as:

- Protein for mobility.
- Postbiotics for digestive health.
- Ingredients supporting cognitive health.
- Solutions for women's health.
- Healthy ageing products.

Health is becoming fragmented into specific need states and increasingly integrated into everyday consumption occasions.

The challenge is no longer adding health claims.

It is designing products that fit naturally into consumers' daily routines while delivering tangible benefits without requiring major behavioural changes.

"The future of wellbeing-focused food will be preventive and embedded in everyday life. Health should not be experienced as a sacrifice, but as something integrated into daily enjoyment."

Hirotaka Tanaka, UnlocX / SKS Japan

Regulation and Scientific Evidence

Regulation and scientific evidence are major factors shaping health-related innovation.

The gap between available scientific evidence and what can legally be communicated is slowing innovation and forcing companies to seek new ways of communicating value without relying on explicit health claims.

Future competitive advantage will depend on:

- Scientific credibility.
- Benefit-driven storytelling.
- Brand trust.

Precision Nutrition: From Science to Perceived Value

Precision nutrition continues to advance rapidly.

However, scientific complexity remains the primary barrier to large-scale adoption.

For precision nutrition to scale successfully, progress is required in:

- Simplification.
- Credibility.
- User experience.

The challenge is no longer technological.

It is translating scientific knowledge into perceived value.

This is where health, food and technology converge.

Artificial intelligence, wearables and data-driven systems are emerging as key enablers for:

- Personalised nutrition.
- Impact validation.
- Consumer engagement.

Ultimately, science and technology will need to become largely invisible to consumers, focusing instead on delivering clear and understandable benefits.

"Consumers buy clear benefits such as having more energy or sleeping better. If we cannot simplify the science, precision nutrition will never scale."

Tánit Esnal, Lipiwell

"We have scientific evidence, but not always the claim. The challenge is how to communicate that value to consumers within the regulatory framework."

Guillermo Mena, Fruselva Global

Taste Remains Non-Negotiable

One conclusion was unanimous among participants:

No health proposition succeeds if it compromises taste, enjoyment or sensory experience.

Repeat purchases depend far more on pleasure than on functional benefits, even in health-oriented categories.

One of the industry's greatest innovation challenges is therefore balancing:

- Health.
- Taste.
- Convenience.
- Affordability.

"Reformulation is no longer about simply making products healthier. It is about finding the right balance between health, taste, scalability and

price. If one of those elements fails, the innovation will not reach the market."

Cristina Sánchez, Grupo Gallo

Silver Economy: Ageing and New Opportunities for Innovation

Population ageing is emerging as one of the most significant drivers of transformation within the food system, shaping a new consumer profile characterised by specific needs and strong purchasing power.

Developing solutions for this segment requires moving beyond the traditional concept of "products for older people" and instead creating propositions that combine health, enjoyment and convenience in everyday, non-stigmatising formats.

Innovation is increasingly focused on functional foods that help improve quality of life by addressing issues such as:

- Mobility.
- Cognitive health.
- Digestive wellbeing.
- Healthy ageing.

The conference also highlighted the growing role of data-driven personalisation and technology in adapting products and services to individual needs.

Equally important is the development of accessible solutions that fit naturally into consumers' lifestyles without requiring major behavioural changes.

Case Studies: Health and Nutrition Solutions

1. Lipiwell – Simplified Precision Nutrition

Application of artificial intelligence to transform biomarkers and complex nutritional science into clear and understandable recommendations for consumers.

Challenges identified

- Complexity of personalised nutrition.
- Gap between scientific evidence and user experience.

Technology / approach applied

- AI applied to biomarker analysis.
- Precision nutrition methodologies.
- Communication of clear benefits (energy, sleep quality, wellbeing) supported by robust scientific evidence.

Impact

- Democratisation of personalised nutrition.
- Improved user experience.
- Increased adoption beyond early-adopter niches.

2. Grupo Gallo – Healthy Reformulation at Scale

Integration of health criteria into everyday food categories through reformulation without compromising taste, affordability or industrial scalability.

Challenges identified

- Offering healthier products without losing consumer acceptance.
- Maintaining competitiveness in mass-market categories.

Technology / approach applied

- Nutritional reformulation.
- Ingredient innovation.
- AI-assisted sensory prediction and formulation optimisation.

Impact

Launch of products such as **Pasta +Protein** (17 g of protein per serving), demonstrating that health-focused innovation can successfully reach mainstream consumers.

3. Fruselva Global – Child Health and Early Prevention

Application of scientific evidence and clinical research to address child health through prevention, with a focus on microbiota development and immune health.

Challenges identified

- Childhood obesity and early health problems.
- Need for intervention during the earliest stages of life.
- Development of a healthy microbiota.

Technology / approach applied

- Clinical studies.
- Development of functional foods for children.
- Research into microbiota, immunity and postbiotics (GOT Baby project).

Impact

Contribution to early-life health prevention and stronger links between science, industry and public health.

Sector-by-Sector Analysis of the Food System

The transformation currently taking place within the food system manifests itself differently across each segment, creating sector-specific dynamics that reflect adaptation to new competitiveness drivers.

Foodservice: Competing Through Experience

Foodservice is moving away from competing primarily on price and product, towards competing on experience, customer traffic and perceived value.

The sector is undergoing a structural transformation driven by increasingly fragmented consumers whose expectations vary according to demographic profile and consumption occasion.

This reality is forcing operators to develop more flexible, personalised and experience-oriented propositions.

"Foodservice competitiveness no longer lies solely in selling products, but in its ability to generate traffic, loyalty and repeat visits through experience."

Fernando Moraga, PepsiCo Iberia

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence are playing a key role in this transformation.

Technologies such as:

- Conversational ordering.
- Advanced analytics.
- Computer vision applied to commercial execution.

are helping companies optimise processes and free up operational time.

That time can then be redirected towards higher-value activities such as:

- Enhancing customer experience.
- Providing advice and support.
- Building stronger brands.

This reinforces the importance of human interaction as a differentiating factor.

"Automation and digitalisation should be used to free up operational time, allowing teams to focus on creating experiences, creativity and customer relationships."

Peio Cruz, Unilever Food Solutions

The sector is also witnessing new collaboration models driven by channel integration (foodservice, retail and delivery) and increasing data sharing between manufacturers, distributors and operators.

Ingredients: The Hidden Engine of Food Innovation

The ingredients industry is becoming one of the most important—though often least visible—drivers of food innovation.

Innovation is increasingly moving upstream within the value chain.

Technologies such as:

- Biotechnology.
- Fermentation.
- Microbiome research.

are enabling the development of ingredients with specific functionalities capable of addressing growing demands for health, sustainability and reformulation.

The ingredients sector operates under an increasingly scientific and B2B-oriented model in which value creation depends not only on innovation but also on the ability to translate scientific advances into viable industrial solutions.

Ingredients are therefore becoming essential enablers of the food system, supporting:

- Healthier reformulation.
- Sensory enhancement.
- Functional optimisation.

However, one of the key challenges remains the ability to bring these highly complex innovations to market in ways that are understandable, scalable and aligned with consumer expectations.

In this environment, competitive advantage will depend not only on technological innovation but also on the ability to integrate advances into broader value chains and collaborate effectively with manufacturers.

"Ingredient innovation is becoming a critical factor for healthy reformulation and industrial-scale implementation, positioning ingredient developers as key enablers of the food system".

Marta Castaño, Hausmann Aromatic

Fast-Moving Consumer Goods: Navigating Structural Change

Food 4 Future 2026 demonstrated that consumer goods categories are operating within an unstable balance of simultaneous structural changes:

- Price pressure driven by inflation and private-label growth.
- Spending polarisation.
- Declining brand loyalty.
- Increasing regulatory requirements.
- More complex consumer expectations.

Growth is no longer driven simply by volume.

Companies must increasingly justify the value of every proposition in a market characterised by lower loyalty and greater scrutiny.

The conference also highlighted a decline in "pure" innovation in favour of:

- Line extensions.
- New formats.
- Reinterpretations of existing categories.

Convenience has become a basic requirement for competitiveness, while health is reshaping entire categories.

Beverages: Health and Wellbeing Reshape Consumption

The beverage sector offers one of the clearest examples of this transformation.

Health and wellbeing are redefining consumption patterns, particularly in alcoholic beverages.

Consumers are becoming:

- More selective.

- More demanding.
- More health-conscious.
- Less loyal to brands.
- More interested in novelty and experimentation.

Demand is increasing for:

- Low- and no-alcohol products.
- Functional beverages.
- Products aligned with healthier lifestyles.
- Consumption occasions that increasingly occur during daytime hours.

At the same time, there is growing interest in functional beverages offering specific benefits such as:

- Immune support.
- Digestive health.
- Energy enhancement.
- Mental wellbeing.

However, the sector faces the challenge of avoiding "functional fatigue", caused by an overabundance of poorly differentiated products.

This makes it increasingly important to:

- Simplify communication.
- Support benefits with evidence.
- Maintain the balance between functionality, taste and experience.

DAMM highlighted how alcohol-free beers, which already account for around 14% of consumption, are revitalising the category through their alignment with health, lifestyle and emerging consumption occasions.

Araex, meanwhile, showcased innovations in alcohol-free sparkling wines and wines designed to preserve wine's cultural relevance while adapting to changing consumer preferences.

"The challenge is not that consumers reject the product; it is understanding when and under what expectations they want to consume it. We are not only innovating in products, but also in occasions, formats and experiences."

Javier Ruiz de Galarreta – Araex

"Alcohol-free beers have not cannibalised consumption. They have generated growth because they respond to a genuine consumer need."

Antoni Folguera – DAMM

The Meat Sector: Innovation, Reputation and the Future of Protein

At Food 4 Future 2026, the meat sector shared how it is responding to a significant reputational challenge.

According to industry representatives, the issue is not declining demand, but rather the confusion and polarisation surrounding public discourse on meat and meat products.

The sector finds itself at a pivotal moment where regulatory pressure, social perceptions and environmental expectations coexist alongside relatively stable demand.

Innovation within the meat industry is both visible and invisible.

Traditional products and formats coexist with major advances in:

- Digitalisation.
- Data-driven management.
- Robotics in farming and processing facilities.
- Animal welfare monitoring.
- Operational efficiency.

At the same time, the so-called "protein wars" are increasingly giving way to a more pragmatic vision based on hybrid diets supported by science and transparent labelling.

"Tradition and innovation must go hand in hand. There needs to be a connection with what came before, but we must also evolve and use R&D&I to reproduce the very best of tradition"

Elena Martínez, Martínez Somalo

"Innovation begins at the primary production stage. Without animal welfare and data, there can be no future competitiveness."

Luis Calvo, Incarlopsa

"Every product should have a clear identity. Confusing labelling does not help either consumers or the sector." (referring to plant-based alternatives)

Giuseppe Aloisio, ANICE

Blue Foods: Strategic Opportunities for Sustainable Food Systems

Blue foods emerged as a strategic pillar in the transition towards more sustainable food systems.

The conference highlighted the role of aquaculture and marine proteins as key solutions for strengthening food security and diversifying Europe's protein sources.

Particular attention was given to algae as a sustainable and functional ingredient with applications extending beyond food into other industrial sectors.

Speakers also highlighted the contribution of marine resources to lower-impact production systems.

However, several barriers continue to limit growth:

- Consumer acceptance.
- Regulatory complexity.
- Competitiveness challenges.
- Market development constraints.

The development of blue foods will require a combination of:

- Technological innovation.
- By-product valorisation.
- Biorefinery approaches.
- New aquaculture production models.

Equally important will be adapting products to consumer expectations by making them:

- More accessible.
- More convenient.
- Better aligned with contemporary consumption habits.

Ultimately, the future of blue foods will depend on their ability to combine sustainability, industrial viability and consumer relevance.

4. ExpoFoodTech

The exhibition area featured 261 stands where technology providers and industrial companies showcased more than 400 innovations for the food sector.

The innovations on display covered a wide range of areas.

Industrial Digitalisation and Automation

The exhibition featured numerous advances in:

- Industrial robotics.
- Machine vision systems.
- Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVs).
- Process automation technologies.

These solutions are designed to improve productivity by:

- Optimising production lines.
- Improving logistics.
- Strengthening quality control.

They also help address shortages of specialised technical profiles.

One key message from exhibitors was that automation is no longer the exclusive domain of large corporations.

It has become an accessible necessity for medium-sized companies seeking greater operational flexibility in increasingly demanding markets.

Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics

Artificial intelligence and data analytics were among the dominant themes of this edition.

Visitors were able to explore practical industrial applications including:

- Production line optimisation.
- Predictive maintenance.
- Inventory management.

- Demand forecasting.
- Accelerated product development.

The maturity of these solutions demonstrated that the food industry has moved beyond technological experimentation and entered a phase of implementation and large-scale deployment.

Sustainability and Circular Economy

Circularity was a cross-cutting theme throughout the exhibition.

A large number of solutions focused on:

- Waste reduction.
- By-product valorisation.
- Sustainable packaging design.

Speakers repeatedly highlighted that sustainability is increasingly becoming a profitability factor.

It is no longer driven solely by compliance requirements or reputational considerations.

Instead, it contributes directly to:

- Cost savings.
- Operational resilience.
- Long-term competitiveness.

Many of the innovations presented combined sustainability and digitalisation, including systems designed to monitor energy consumption and reduce food waste within production facilities.

Food Quality and Safety

Innovations in food quality and safety also featured prominently.

Areas of focus included:

- Traceability technologies.
- Contaminant detection systems.

- Automated quality control.
- Shelf-life extension solutions.

These developments reinforce the critical role of trust and safety in consumer purchasing decisions.

Other notable innovations included:

- Sustainable materials.
- Biodegradable packaging.
- Active coatings.
- Agricultural logistics drones.
- Digital twins for processing plants.

In the field of healthy and functional foods, innovations ranged from algae-based snacks to advanced plant-based alternatives.

5. Food 4 Future 2027

Food 4 Future 2026 confirmed the evolution of many of the trends already identified in previous editions, but with one important distinction:

The transformation of the food industry has entered a phase of maturity.

The focus is increasingly shifting away from exploration and towards execution, activating concrete levers in areas such as:

- Digitalisation.
- Sustainability.
- Portfolio reformulation.
- Innovation management.

Smart digitalisation and data intelligence have become the major cross-cutting enablers of transformation, increasingly integrated into operations, supply chains and consumer engagement.

At the same time, sustainability is evolving into an operational requirement, directly influencing decisions relating to:

- Product reformulation.
- Sourcing strategies.
- Production models.

Innovation itself is becoming more structured and impact-oriented, increasingly focused on accelerating time-to-market and strengthening competitiveness in an increasingly demanding business environment.

Throughout all these developments, consumers continue to set the pace of change.

However, they are becoming:

- Better informed.
- More critical.
- More polarised in their expectations.

Looking Ahead to Food 4 Future 2027

Several themes are expected to dominate future discussions:

- Technology adoption and deployment.
- The real economic value of sustainability.
- Redefinition of protein sources.
- Balancing health, convenience and affordability.
- Building trust and meeting expectations in highly uncertain environments.

In this context, Food 4 Future is consolidating its role not only as a meeting point for the industry, but also as a strategic validation platform where the sector tests and evaluates responses to major global challenges.

More than ever, the event has become an essential gathering for organisations seeking not merely to adapt to change, but to actively lead it.

See you at

FOOD 4 FUTURE - EXPO FOODTECH 2027

26-27 MAY 2027 Bilbao-BEC

*Food 4 Future, organised by **NEBEXT** and **AZTI**, is supported by the **Bilbao City Council**, the **Provincial Council of Bizkaia**, the **Basque Government**, the **European Union (NextGenerationEU)**, the **Spanish Government's Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan**, and **ICEX Spain Trade and Investment**.*

The event is also backed by strategic partners including: EIT Food, ILSI Europe, Food for Life Spain, Eatable Adventures, Hazi, AME (Multi-sector Association of Food and Beverage Companies), ANFABRA (Spanish Soft Drinks Association), ANICE (Spanish National Meat Industry Association), Basque Trade & Investment (SPRI Group), BRTA, Cerveceros de España, FATE (Food & Agri Tech Europe), FEDEPESCA, Fenil (Spanish Dairy Industry Federation), FEV (Spanish Wine Federation), FIAB, the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and FWS Spain FoodTech Nation.