



**Session Five:** Circular Economy for Food

**Date:** 26/03/25

**Coach:** Emma Chow, Future Food Movement

### Action items

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#### Watch again

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#### Overview

The Circular Economy for Food masterclass, led by Emma Chow, provided an insightful look into how circular economy principles can be applied within the food industry. The session covered how current food systems operate in a highly linear fashion, characterised by a take-make-waste approach, and how transitioning to a circular model could significantly reduce waste and improve sustainability. By reimagining food design and production processes, businesses can not only reduce environmental impact but also build resilient, sustainable food systems that emulate natural ecosystems.

#### Key Takeaways

##### 1. Understanding the Circular Economy

- The current linear model (take-make-waste) is unsustainable and depletes finite resources.
- Circular economy focuses on eliminating waste, circulating materials at their highest value, and regenerating natural systems.
- Food systems can benefit from applying circular principles to reduce waste and enhance resource efficiency.

##### 2. Designing for Circularity in Food

- Food design is a critical aspect of transitioning to circular food systems.
- Designing products to minimise waste from the outset and maximise the value of by-products is essential.
- Leveraging circular design can reduce emissions, increase farmer profitability, and enhance biodiversity.

##### 3. Practical Examples of Circular Economy in Food

- Using upcycled ingredients like coffee cherry flour and cacao pod pulp to reduce waste.
- Employing reusable and refillable packaging models, such as milk vending machines with glass bottle reuse.
- Innovating biodegradable and compostable packaging solutions, like seaweed-based sachets and compostable tea bags.

##### 4. Challenges and Considerations

- Balancing sustainability with economic viability remains a challenge.
- Certification complexities in regenerative agriculture can be a barrier to adoption.
- Incremental improvements are valuable, but long-term strategic shifts are essential.



## 5. Inspiration and Innovation

- Companies like Patagonia Provisions are pioneering the use of perennial grains, such as Kernza, to enhance sustainability.
- Collaborative projects between industries, like using agricultural residues for building materials, are emerging as promising solutions.
- Educational initiatives and transparent communication are vital to promoting circular economy principles in the food sector.

### Examples of Circular Economy in Food

- **Upcycled Ingredients:** Coffee cherry flour and cacao pod pulp as value-added products.
- **Biodegradable Packaging:** Notpla's seaweed sachets and PG Tips' compostable tea bags.
- **Reuse Models:** Milk vending machines using glass bottles to encourage return and reuse.
- **Product Redesign:** Patagonia's Kernza pasta made from perennial grains.
- **Inter-Industry Collaboration:** Car parts made from agricultural residues, as seen in McDonald's and Ford's partnership.

### Questions and Responses

- How can we ensure regenerative agriculture is economically viable?
  - **Emma Chow's Response:** Integrating regenerative practices as part of a long-term strategy is key, as short-term investments often yield long-term benefits. Collaboration among producers and buyers can also help.
- What are the challenges in shifting to reusable packaging?
  - **Response:** The key challenge is consumer behaviour and the cost of transitioning existing systems to accommodate reuse.
- How do we address the issue of standardisation in reusable packaging?
  - **Response:** Harmonising packaging standards across regions can improve reuse efficiency and reduce logistical barriers.
- How to support a mindset shift with colleagues?
  - **Response:** Needs to be a cultural transformation, moving beyond simply reducing harm (like cutting emissions) and instead adopting an aspirational mindset focused on generating positive impacts. Circular thinking should be woven into the company's core vision - rather than tunnel vision on specific metrics (like carbon footprint), think about the broader ecosystem and long-term outcomes. Use storytelling to inspire teams and make the concept of circularity more relatable and tangible. Encourage small, consistent improvements rather than holding out for perfect solutions. Use natural ecosystems as a metaphor to demonstrate how interconnected and regenerative systems work. Promote cross-functional collaborations to explore innovative circular solutions.

### Further Reading

- [Cities and Circular Economy for Food](#) - A comprehensive report on urban food system transformation.
- [The Big Food Redesign](#) - A detailed exploration of redesigning food products for circularity.
- [Upstream Innovation Guide](#) - Strategies for reducing packaging waste and promoting material reuse.
- Circulytics can help measure progress and identify opportunities for improvement when transitioning to a circular economy. The [Circulytics methodology and resources](#) will remain available for reference: as a priority, Ellen MacArthur Foundation encourage organisations to disclose their circular economy performance as outlined in the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS 5), for their company's global scope. To support this, we have published a two-way [mapping of the ESRS Drafts and Circulytics indicators](#) which shows strong alignment with many Circulytics indicators.



### **Lightbulb Moments and Insights**

- Transitioning from linear to circular food systems requires a mindset shift, not just practical adjustments.
- Incremental improvements, while valuable, must be integrated into a larger strategic vision for true impact.
- Educating consumers and stakeholders on circular practices helps build demand and foster industry-wide change.

### **Catch up on FFM Circular Economy Content in the Portal**

Log in to access:

- [Why and How can we Scale a Regenerative Food System?](#)
- [No Nature, No Food: A Crisis we can't Ignore](#)

### **Next Session:**

HSD Food Design, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 10 – 12:00 with Lucy Wager. [Meet Lucy here.](#)