Future-Proofing Food Systems

Climate Risk, Operational Resilience & Business Continuity Across Food & Beverage

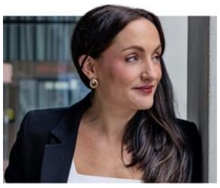
In partnership with mitie | PLAN ZERO & CLIMATE X

On a sweltering June afternoon, Kate Cawley opened the evening at The Shard with a question she asked the room to hold all night: where does your climate risk actually live?

For too long, the answer has been the supply chain. But as Kate framed it, the risk has been quietly moving closer to home, into the buildings, systems and infrastructure that keep food businesses running every single day. What followed was one of the most practical, energised conversations Future Food Movement has hosted. Speakers from across climate science, facility management, regulatory strategy and food system leadership didn't just agree on the scale of the challenge; they arrived with real tools, real case studies and real conviction that organisations which act now will be the ones that thrive.

> We have to stop reading climate risk as a list and start reading it as a system. A flood isn't a flooding line in a risk register. It's a closed road, a stranded delivery, a missed order, a customer who shops elsewhere, all from one event.
>
> **Kate Cawley**
> Founder and Managing Director,
> Future Food Movement

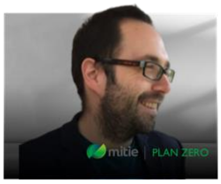
The panel:



Kate Cawley
Founder,
Future Food Movement

Helen Ireland
Strategy & Transformation Director,
Future Food Movement

Will Clare
Decarbonisation Lead,
Future Food Movement



David Dowson
Net Zero Manager,
Mitie

Grace Thomson
Head of Strategic Alliances
and Partnerships, Climate X

Heena Minocha
ESG Reporting Lead,
Mitie

7 Key Takeaways for FFM Members:

1. The risk has moved closer to home
2. Climate risk is now a commercial and operational issue, not a sustainability one
3. Asset-level data is where the real decisions get made
4. The "so what" is as important as the data itself
5. Decarbonisation and resilience are the same conversation
6. Resilience has to be tied to finance, remuneration and capability
7. Never waste a crisis

Learn more >>

Key Takeaway 1

The risk has moved closer to home

Hazards don't take turns. When one system buckles, everything connected to it follows.

Helen Ireland grounded the conversation in a moment everyone in the room recognised. On 26th May, as temperatures hit 35 degrees, fridges failed in Tesco, Sainsbury's and M&S stores across the country. Those managers weren't dealing with a future sustainability risk. They were dealing with an operational consequence, right now, on a Tuesday that behaved like the tropics. And the failure didn't stop at the fridge. The same heat spiked demand across the grid and slowed the rail lines that deliveries depend on. One event, several systems, all buckling together.

Helen called this compound risk, and it is what makes physical climate exposure fundamentally different from the supply chain risks the sector has spent years modelling. With El Nino now developing and expected to strengthen through winter, upstream and downstream pressures are set to squeeze simultaneously, from the same source. For the many organisations in the room that supply other businesses, the implication is direct: your resilience is your customer's supply security.

Key Takeaway 2

Climate risk is now a commercial and operational issue, not a sustainability one

The question boards are increasingly being asked is not "do you report on this?" but "what are you doing about it?"

The shift happening across regulation, investment and board expectation is clear: climate risk can no longer live in a sustainability team spreadsheet. Whether it's refrigeration systems failing during heatwaves, logistics routes cut off by flooding or supply disruptions cascading up the chain, the financial consequences are tangible and growing. As Heena Minocha put it, organisations are now expected not just to disclose climate risk, but to demonstrate how they are actively reducing their exposure. Insurers are already separating businesses that have invested in resilience from those that have not, with premiums jumping at renewal and cover being pulled in some exposed categories. Adaptation is fast becoming a condition of being insurable at all.

Key Takeaway 3

Asset-level data is where the real decisions get made

Postcode-level assessments are no longer fit for purpose. Images of flooded fields do not move decision-makers. Numbers do.

Broad, postcode-level assessments are no longer sufficient. Grace Thomson from Climate X made clear that the organisations using climate data well are those who geolocate at an individual asset level, model both direct loss (rebuild costs) and indirect impact (operational downtime, road access, labour disruption) and can bring those outputs to the board in financial terms. The example of a Japanese factory that appeared flood-safe in isolation, but whose only connecting roads sat on a floodplain, illustrated exactly why zooming out beyond your own four walls matters.

Key Takeaway 4

The "so what" is as important as the data itself

Knowing your risk is only half the job. The value comes when data is translated into decisions.

Data without context stalls. David Dowson of Mitie made the case that the real value comes when granular risk data is translated into practical, site-level action. This might mean rerouting infrastructure, replacing high-GWP refrigerants before a system fails, or stress-testing whether your EV charging points are sitting in a future flood zone. The partnership between Climate X and Mitie was designed specifically to close this gap: science-backed risk assessment combined with on-the-ground implementation expertise. For organisations unsure where to begin, the advice was consistent: start with your highest-risk assets and work outward.

Key Takeaway 5

Decarbonisation and resilience are the same conversation

The smartest decisions right now are the ones that do both at once.

Will Clare was clear that organisations treating net zero and physical climate resilience as separate agendas are making their lives unnecessarily hard. The decisions that work best right now are the ones that deliver on both simultaneously. Regenerative biomethane was his example: businesses adopting it to reduce Scope 1 emissions are also stepping away from the volatility of global fossil fuel markets and locking in a stable, guaranteed price. The work he described with a manufacturer told the same story. Switching to CO2 refrigerant wiped out their refrigerant leakage emissions, cut breakdown frequency and stacked up commercially. For members, the practical question is: where are your near-term decision windows? An asset approaching end of life, a supplier relationship up for renewal, a product being reformulated. These are the moments where the climate-smart choice and the commercially obvious one are often the same thing.

Key Takeaway 6

Resilience has to be tied to finance, remuneration and capability

If it is not in the budget, the objective or the team, it will not happen.

Three practical barriers came up repeatedly across the panel discussion. The first was funding: Vicki from Mitie made the case that off-balance-sheet financing routes, solar installations, energy efficiency measures and green loans exist right now and remove the need to compete for internal capital. The second was incentives: Helen shared that if climate resilience does not sit in leadership objectives and is not tied to remuneration, it will always be deprioritised against metrics that are. The third was capability. David asked the room how many people were the sole person in their organisation responsible for climate risk. For many, the answer was yes. When that person leaves, the programme stops. Building distributed capability across operations, finance and procurement, not just the sustainability team, is as urgent as getting the data right.

Key Takeaway 7

Never waste a crisis

The urgency is not coming. It is already here.

David closed his contribution with a line that landed hard: "Never waste a crisis." Looking out at an extreme heat event mid-June, the panel agreed that the time to act is now, not in a future risk scenario. The advice from across the panel was consistent: stop reading climate risk as a list and start reading it as a system. A flood is not a single line in a risk register. It is a closed road, a stranded delivery, a missed order and a customer who shops elsewhere, all from one event. Map your dependencies, not just your assets. Find your single points of failure. And stress-test the chain, not the component. The businesses that do this now are building competitive advantage. The ones that wait are handing it to the competitor whose fridges stayed on.

What can you do next?

1. Map your dependencies, not just your assets

Stop asking "what's the worst storm?" and start asking "where would one failure hurt me most?" Identify the single points of failure across your estate: the one compressor, the one substation, the one road. Then stress-test the chain, not the component.

2. Put a number on it

Gut feel and risk registers are not enough anymore. Quantify your physical climate exposure in financial terms: direct asset loss, operational downtime, lost revenue, insurance implications. That is the language that moves decision-makers and boards.

3. Look for the decisions that do double duty

Ageing, heat-stressed refrigeration kit that leaks high-GWP refrigerants is both a resilience risk and a decarbonisation problem. Biomethane that reduces Scope 1 emissions also locks in price stability away from volatile fossil fuel markets. Find the investments that solve both problems at once and make the case on combined return.

4. Explore financing before assuming you need the budget

Off-balance-sheet routes for solar, energy efficiency and resilience infrastructure exist right now. Green loans, fixed-price energy tariffs and third-party funded installations can deliver resilience without competing for internal capital. Know what is available before the next budget cycle.

5. Break the single point of failure in your team

If one person in your organisation owns climate risk and they leave, the programme stops. Distribute capability and accountability across operations, finance, procurement and commercial teams. And tie resilience into leadership objectives and remuneration, or it will always finish last.

6. Use this moment

Never waste a crisis. A heatwave that failed fridges across the country is the clearest possible brief for the board conversation you have been trying to have. Use it. The urgency is not coming. It is already here.

For follow-up support

If this briefing has raised questions inside your business:

Climate risk analysis and data

For organisations ready to understand their physical climate exposure at asset level, including where risk sits across sites, infrastructure, routes and operations.

Contact Vicki Lintern →

Food system, net zero and climate transition planning

For organisations looking to connect climate risk with food system strategy, net zero planning, commercial decision-making and internal capability-building.

Contact Helen Ireland →

How Future Food Movement can help

One of the clearest themes from the evening was that resilience is a leadership, finance, operations and procurement challenge that requires new capabilities across the organisation.

The organisations responding most effectively are not simply investing in better data or stronger reporting. They are building the skills, confidence and decision-making capability needed to identify risks earlier, understand implications faster and act with greater certainty. Future Food Movement exists to help organisations build that capability.

Through membership, teams gain access to the insight, peer networks, working groups and capability programmes needed to:

- Understand emerging risks earlier
- Build capability beyond the sustainability team
- Learn from peers tackling similar challenges
- Translate insight into practical action
- Equip leaders to make better decisions under uncertainty.

Whether the challenge is climate resilience, regulation, supply security or organisational transformation, our focus is the same: helping people across functions develop the knowledge, confidence and network needed to turn complex challenges into informed action.

You can join Future Food Movement as an individual or at an organisational level.

Individual membership

Catalyst:
A curated leadership group within Future Food Movement for senior decision-makers across the food system
From £1,500 per year // Find out more →

Explorer:
Signals and context shaping the future of food
From £269 per year // Find out more →

Corporate membership

Organisational membership for teams that need shared intelligence, aligned judgement and the confidence to act in a fast-moving food system. Designed for organisations to build leadership capability across teams, functions and levels.

Membership from £2,000
Find out more →

To explore all membership options **click here →**

If this discussion highlighted questions your organisation is still working through, we'd love to continue the conversation.

Get in touch: hello@futurefoodmovement.com