

Plenary Speech by Mr. Viranga Wickramaratne

The Future of Food - Trends Shaping our Industry

- It's 2030. This year 2.1 billion tons of food will be lost or wasted.
- Meanwhile, more than 840 million people will go hungry...one-tenth of the human population.
- One-third of SL's population food-insecure in 2022 - WFP



The above headlines are not just catch phrases to grab a reader's attention, but reality. We live in challenging times where the income disparity, knowledge & access to technology, conflicts, political uncertainties, access to funding and a host of other factors have driven the world we live in, to multiple directions. Therefore, food is and will be the currency that we will be dealing with in the years to come. While Digital currencies and a new norm in social media will influence our culture, ultimately FOOD will be doing all the talking. When our primary needs are not met, everything else comes to a halt, therefore being connected to the world of food is indeed both a privilege, a priority and for some a passion.

When taking a wholistic approach to food and the trends that are emerging, one needs to start with the originators of food, namely the farmers. Agriculture has experienced strained labor markets for over a decade caused by an aging workforce, restrictive government policies, and decreasing interest in farm work due to the harsh nature of the job. And in some parts of the world climate changes. Today however, the modern Farmer (mod goviya) globally has access to automation, digitization and an exciting world of alternative inputs to impact their yield. How strategically and purposefully this is adopted by our current generation will have a significant impact on the food security of our nation and planet in the years to come.

Next as food moves to the next step in the process which is the supply chain who aims to bridge the divide between producers and consumers. Operational factors such as production disruptions and external factors such as weather conditions, transportation issues, input shortages, and pricing volatility have led to substantial food supply chain inefficiencies. We experienced this during Covid 19 and now with the conflict in Ukraine this is once again a key topic of discussion. We have at our disposal new ways of process optimization, decentralization of activities and most importantly innovation to reduce food waste. Therefore, Supply Chain Resilience can improve Food Security

Finally, we as consumers are demanding more sustainable packaging and according to the World Economic Forum, the global demand for meat is expected to double by 2050,

and in addition want to know we are doing good by choosing plant-based options . Novel ingredients will enable the next generation of plant-based food to be made available. Today we cannot separate the discussion of Food from Health, as today's consumers want evidence- and data-backed recommendations on what and when to eat to improve their health. Hence food will become central to the effort to prevent chronic disease and improve health outcomes.

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