

What Leading Agricultural Technology Companies Want Food Retailers to Know

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It is no secret that there are more and more of us on this planet every day. In fact, by the year 2030, there will be 8.6 billion of us. How will we feed a population that size on, a more crowded and hotter planet, with finite resources? The answer includes innovation in agricultural technology which is a necessity if our industry is to keep moving forward.

Recently, FMI's Fresh Food Leadership Council (FFLC) hosted a panel with representatives from organizations on the leading edge of agricultural innovation. Neeru Ravi from Boston Consulting Group moderated the panel, which included:

- Katie Seawell from Bowery Farming, which uses controlled environment farming (CEA).
- Laurie Demeritt from The Hartman Group, who provided consumer insights.
- Scott Tassani from Meati Foods, which produces alternative proteins from mushrooms and uses fermentation.
- Kevin Benmoussa from Aleph Farms, a cell-cultured meat producer.
- Sarah Evanega from Pairwise, which is using gene editing to optimize fruits and vegetables.

All the panelists brought forward thought-provoking points while simultaneously helping to educate attendees about the benefits of the products they represent, and what they mean to consumers and the industry. Here are a few important topics the group covered:

The Environment Comes First

Ravi pointed out that the industry has a transformative opportunity to adopt innovative technologies to minimize its carbon footprint. In fact, Boston Consulting Group research named alternative proteins as the most effective investment to achieve climate impact. Tassani offered that innovation in fresh produce is key for individual health, as well as the health of the planet and this aligns with the values of today's consumers.

Consumer Buy-In Is Key

According to Evanega, 77% of Gen Z adults say they are likely to try food grown with technology. While Boston Consulting Group predicts eight percent of all the meat, seafood, eggs, and dairy eaten around the globe will be alternative by 2030. Demeritt from The Hartman Group points out that ethics and health are two key drivers for consumers, both of which are addressed by new technologies. Tassani also pointed out that these technologies solve a key consumer need for nutritious, clean, sustainable, delicious food options.

We're Just Beginning

While agriculture technology is only in its initial phases, these products must be viewed by retailers as an integral part of their strategy. Retailers should not consider these products as novelties or as a specific SKU to grow sales in the near term, but instead, embrace them for the long term. That way everyone in the value chain, including the customer, benefits. Retailers are facing pressures to make sure every item in the department is driving positive results, but when it comes to agriculture technology items, perhaps there needs to be a longer runway to reach the ultimate success. It was suggested during the panel that retailers begin to create "Ag Tech Innovation" categories, to help educate the consumer on offerings available now and more to come in the future.

Want to learn more? [FreshForward](#) will be diving into Gen Z, ecommerce and meal planning at this year's event.

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