



# Beyond the Longevity Hype: How Food, Gut Health, and Metabolic Innovation Are Reshaping the \$8 Trillion Health Economy

**By Michel Brekelmans**



*2 June 2026*

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I recently had the privilege of serving as MC at Future Fit Asia at Singapore's Goodwood Park Hotel, marking the platform's landmark 10th anniversary. Two action-packed days that brought together world-renowned keynote speakers, inspiring panel discussion, 12 outstanding innovator pitches and plenty of opportunity to network and catch up with old friends.

The rebrand from Future Food Asia into Future Fit Asia reflects a crucial evolution: the convergence of food, human health, environmental integrity, and long-term resilience into one compelling investment thesis.

Reflecting on the event, I am sharing key insights across 2 articles. In part 1, I share how innovations in food, gut health, and metabolic science are reshaping the \$8 trillion health economy. Part 2 looks at how innovations and agritech and cleantech are reshaping the \$10 trillion sustainable economy.

## The Longevity Moment: From Niche to Mainstream

Living to 100 is no longer extraordinary. In fact, by 2050, 1 in 6 people globally will be over age 65, up from 1 in 11 today. But the real shift isn't just about living longer; it's about living healthier longer. That distinction is what's transforming longevity from a research curiosity into one of the most compelling investment and innovation opportunities of our time.

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***\$8 trillion market  
growing 12% annually***

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The global longevity economy was valued at over \$8 trillion in 2025 and is growing at roughly 12% annually, driven by aging populations, rising health consciousness, and breakthroughs in understanding how food, metabolism, and environment interact to determine healthspan.

What surprised many at Future Fit Asia 2026 (the platform's landmark 10th anniversary) was how rapidly the conversation has evolved beyond simply "anti-aging," into a systems-level discussion about how food systems, metabolic health, gut biology, and environmental toxicity collectively determine whether people age in vitality or in decline.

## The Gut-Longevity Connection: Why Microbiome Science is No Longer Optional

One of the most significant scientific shifts in longevity research over the past decade has been the recognition that gut health is foundational to healthy aging.

The basics: The human gut contains trillions of microorganisms (the microbiome) that influence everything from immune function and inflammation to metabolism, brain health, and even how we respond to medications. As we age, the diversity and balance of our gut microbiome naturally decline, a process linked to chronic inflammation ("inflammaging"), metabolic disorder, and accelerated aging.

The "Beyond GLP-1" session at Future Fit Asia 2026 crystallized this shift: while pharmaceutical interventions like GLP-1 agonists have transformed weight management, they're not a complete solution.

The most sustainable approaches integrate nutrition, gut microbiome optimization, and digital personalization to address metabolic health at its root.

Traditional View	Emerging Reality
Ageing is inevitable	Ageing trajectory is modifiable through diet, microbiome, and lifestyle
Longevity = genetics	Longevity = 20% genetics, 80% environment + behavior
Gut health = digestion	Gut health = systematic health (immunity, brain, metabolism, mood)
Pharma solves metabolic disease	Nutrition + microbiome can prevent or reverse metabolic dysfunction

For corporate innovators: This means the next wave of health-consumer products won't just be about "low sugar" or "high protein." It will be about functional foods that actively shape microbiome diversity, deliver prebiotics/postbiotics, or provide targeted nutrients that support metabolic resilience.

For investors: The companies winning in this space combine clinical validation (showing measurable changes in microbiome diversity or metabolic markers) with scalable consumer distribution. The moat isn't just a recipe but it's biological proof and brand trust.

## The Gut-Longevity Connection: Why Microbiome Science is No Longer Optional

GLP-1 drugs (like semaglutide and tirzepatide) have captured headlines and created a \$100B+ market for weight loss and diabetes treatment. But a critical insight from Future Fit Asia 2026 is that pharma alone cannot solve the metabolic health crisis.

The limitations of pharmaceutical-only approaches:

- Cost and accessibility: Not all populations can afford or access these drugs long-term
- Side effects and adherence: Many patients experience GI distress or discontinue use
- Symptom vs. root cause: Drugs manage outcomes but don't rebuild metabolic resilience

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***The most promising companies are those building hybrid models that combine GLP-1, with sustainable, lifestyle-integrated solutions***

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The integrated solution emerging: The most promising companies are those building hybrid models that combine:

1. Personalized nutrition based on microbiome and metabolic data
2. Gut-targeted functional foods (prebiotic fibers, postbiotic compounds, fermented foods)
3. Digital health tools for behavior change and ongoing monitoring
4. Clinical validation showing improvements in HbA1c, insulin sensitivity, or inflammatory markers

This is where the real value creation lies: not in replacing GLP-1, but in complementing it with sustainable, lifestyle-integrated solutions that reduce dependency on drugs while improving long-term outcomes.

## The “Detox-Longevity” Gap: An Overlooked Investment Frontier

One of the most revealing, and underdiscussed, themes at Future Fit Asia 2026 was toxicity and detoxification.

The problem: Modern humans are chronically exposed to xenobiotics (foreign chemical substances) — from microplastics in our food and water to heavy metals (lead, mercury, cadmium) in soil and crops, pesticide residues, and industrial pollutants. These toxins accumulate in the body over decades, contributing to chronic inflammation, metabolic dysfunction, and accelerated aging.

The science: Certain foods and nutrients can help the body bind, neutralize, and eliminate these toxins. For example:

- Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, kale) support liver detoxification pathways
- Soluble fibers bind heavy metals in the gut for excretion
- Specific phytochemicals (like sulforaphane) activate antioxidant and detoxification enzymes
- Probiotic strains can reduce gut permeability (“leaky gut”), preventing toxin absorption

The session “Nourish to Cleanse: Building a Future-Fit Food System for Longevity” explored how food systems must evolve to not only feed people but actively protect them from environmental toxicity.

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***Longevity as a ‘Blue Ocean’ untapped market space. Instead of battling rivals, companies “value-innovate” in blue oceans by creating entirely new demand***

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Why this is a massive opportunity:

- Consumer awareness is rising: Blame for chronic illness is shifting from “personal failure” to “environmental exposure”
- No dominant player yet: Unlike the crowded “probiotic” or “functional food” categories, detox-focused nutrition is still early-stage
- IP potential: Proprietary formulations with clinical data on toxin reduction create defensible moats
- Regulatory tailwinds: Governments are tightening limits on microplastics and heavy metals in food

The Detox Award at Future Fit Asia 2026 recognized 11 innovators working at this intersection, signaling that the category is maturing beyond proof-of-concept.

For corporate R&D teams: This is where the next breakthrough functional ingredients will emerge. Think beyond “general wellness” to specific biological outcomes (e.g., “reduces heavy metal burden,” “supports liver detoxification pathways”).

For investors: Categories without a clear market leader are where asymmetric returns happen. The question isn't whether detox-nutrition will matter, rather it's which company will own the category.

## The “Detox-Longevity” Gap: An Overlooked Investment Frontier

While aging populations exist worldwide, Asia is moving fastest on integrating longevity into national strategy and consumer markets:

Region	Key Advantage
Singapore / ASEAN	Policy-supported innovation hub with 650m consumer market access, government commitment to healthy ageing (e.g., Singapore's S\$37bn RIE2030 strategy)
Europe	Strong regulatory framework, high consumer willingness to pay for science-backed health foods
North America	Largest health-consumer market, advanced digital health ecosystem, venture capital depth
China	Rapidly ageing population (20% over 60 by 2035), massive domestic market, growing health consciousness

Singapore has emerged as the regional longevity launchpad, combining regulatory clarity, research funding, and access to ASEAN's growing middle class. But the opportunity is global as the science of gut health and metabolic resilience transcends geography.

For corporate innovators, the question isn't “where do I pilot this?” but “how do I build products with global scalability from day one?” That means:

- Designing for multiple regulatory environments

- Building clinically validated claims that work across markets
- Creating supply chains that can scale without compromising quality

Investors will need to look for companies that think globally but execute regionally, using Asia's policy support and consumer velocity as a springboard to global expansion.

## What This Means for Different Stakeholders

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***Longevity as a 'Blue Ocean' untapped market space. Instead of battling rivals, companies "value-innovate" in blue oceans by creating entirely new demand***

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For Corporate Health & Consumer Professionals:

- R&D focus: Shift from "functional claims" to mechanism-of-action science (how does this product biologically improve healthspan?)
- Product development: Prioritize gut-metabolic axis innovations (prebiotics, postbiotics, fermented foods, detox-supportive ingredients)
- Marketing: Move beyond "healthy ageing" buzzwords to specific outcomes (e.g., "supports mitochondrial function," "reduces inflammatory markers")
- Partnerships: Collaborate with clinical researchers, digital health platforms, and microbiome labs to validate claims

For Private Equity Investors:

- Sourcing: The highest-quality deals are in microbiome-targeted nutrition, metabolic-health platforms, and detox-functional foods
- Due diligence: Look for clinical data (not just consumer surveys), IP protection, and regulatory pathways
- Value creation: Portfolio companies need scientific credibility and brand scale: invest in building both
- Exit timing: The M&A window is reopening; strategic buyers are active in functional nutrition and metabolic health

## The Bottom Line

Longevity is no longer about living longer, rather it's about living better for longer, and the tools to make that happen are emerging at the intersection of food science, gut biology, and digital personalization.

For corporate innovators, this means the next decade of health-consumer growth will be won by those who can translate biological insight into scalable products. For investors, it means the best returns will come from companies with clinical validation, regulatory readiness, and distribution at scale.

The convergence of food, health, and environmental resilience, what Future Fit Asia now calls "Future-Fit", is where the next wave of breakthrough health companies will emerge.

If you are contemplating whether you'll engage with longevity investing, and whether you want to be leading the category or chasing it, very happy to compare notes.

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### **Congratulations to the Winners of the Inaugural Grantham Foundation Detox Awards!**

*At Future Fit Asia's landmark 10th edition conference, we were proud to name Pandawa Agri Indonesia and Prof. Eric Chan together with Dr. Dachuan Zhang from the Bezos Centre for Sustainable Protein (National University of Singapore) as the 2026 Detox Award winners, sharing USD 90,000 in non-dilutive funding.*