By Michel Brekelmans

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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 shared how innovations in food, gut health, and metabolic science are reshaping the $8 trillion health economy.

This Part 2 looks at how innovations and agritech and cleantech are reshaping the $10 trillion sustainable economy.

The Paradigm Shift: Why Food Security Alone Is No Longer Enough

For decades, the global agrifood conversation centered on food security: producing enough calories to feed a growing population. By 2050, we'll need to feed 10 billion people—up from 8 billion today—while climate change, soil degradation, and water scarcity threaten our ability to do so.

Food security without environmental integrity is unsustainable

But the conversation has fundamentally shifted. Future Fit Asia 2026 (the platform's 10th anniversary, rebranded from "Future Food Asia") crystallized a new truth: food security without environmental integrity is unsustainable. The future isn't just about feeding people—it's about building food systems that regenerate planetary health while supporting human health and economic resilience.

This shift from "food security" to "planetary health" is reshaping investment, innovation, and corporate strategy across the global agrifood economy—which now represents over $10 trillion in annual value when including agriculture, food processing, sustainability tech, and related cleantech.

Planetary Health: The New Core of Agrifood Strategy

Planetary health is the framework that recognizes human civilization depends on the natural systems that sustain life—clean air, fresh water, fertile soil, stable climate, and biodiversity. When these systems degrade, human health, food security, and economic stability all suffer.

The reality check:

- 75% of global land is degraded or moderately degraded due to agriculture, deforestation, and pollution

- 40% of global agricultural output is at risk from climate-related stressors (drought, flooding, heat)
- Food systems contribute 26% of global greenhouse gas emissions
- Biodiversity loss is accelerating at 1,000x the natural rate, threatening pollination, soil health, and ecosystem resilience

Building competitive advantage through regenerative, climate resilient and biodiversity-positive food systems

The opportunity: Companies that build regenerative, climate-resilient, and biodiversity-positive food systems aren't just "doing good," they are building competitive advantage. Why? Because:

- Regulatory pressure is increasing (EU deforestation rules, carbon border taxes, biodiversity disclosures)
- Consumer demand is shifting (millennials/Gen Z prefer sustainable brands)
- Supply chain resilience depends on climate adaptation (flood-resistant crops, water-efficient irrigation)
- Capital is flowing to companies with material ESG performance (private equity, family offices, pension funds)

The Future Fit Asia 2026 session on "Rewiring Food Systems for Healthy Ageing and Planetary Health" made clear: the most successful agrifood companies of the next decade will be those that integrate human health and environmental health into a single strategy.

AI in Biodiversity: The Undervalued Investment Category

One of the most surprising and compelling sessions at Future Fit Asia 2026 was "AI in Biodiversity: Intelligence, Integrity, and Investment".

Biodiversity is the foundation of food system resilience. Pollinators (bees, butterflies, bats) support 75% of global food crops. Soil microbiomes determine crop health and yield. Diverse ecosystems

buffer against pests, diseases, and climate shocks. When biodiversity collapses, food systems become fragile.

The problem: We've lacked scalable, accurate tools to measure, monitor, and protect biodiversity at the scale needed. Manual surveys are slow, expensive, and inconsistent.

The AI solution: Artificial intelligence is now enabling:

Application	impact
Automated biodiversity monitoring	Drones + AI identify species, track poluation changes, detect illegal logging / fishing in real-time
Predictive threat detection	AI models forecast biodiversity less risks (e.g., habitat fragmentation, climate-driven species migration)
Ecosystem restoration optimisation	AI designs restoration plans that maximise biodiversity return on investment
Impact verification for investors	AI-generated data provides auditable proof of biodiversity outcomes for ESG reporting

Why this is a PE opportunity:

Biodiversity AI isn't just an "impact play". it's a risk management tool that makes traditional agrifood investments more resilient and attractive to institutional capital. Companies that can prove biodiversity outcomes will:

- Access impact-focused capital (family offices, pension funds, green bonds)
- Meet regulatory requirements (EU Biodiversity Strategy, deforestation-free supply chains)
- Build competitive moats (proprietary data, AI models, ecosystem partnerships)
- Unlock new revenue streams (carbon credits, biodiversity credits, ecosystem service payments)

The session highlighted that responsible investment is no longer optional—AI-driven biodiversity monitoring is becoming the standard for due diligence in agrifood portfolios.

For corporate sustainability teams: By 2027, major retailers and food brands will require biodiversity impact data from suppliers. Companies without AI-enabled measurement will be locked out of premium supply chains.

For investors: Biodiversity AI is still early-stage, with no dominant player yet. This is classic early-stage PE territory where asymmetric returns are possible if you back the right platform.

Alternative Proteins: Beyond Plant-Based to Microbial and Single-Cell

The plant-based meat boom of 2019–2021 captured headlines, but the real innovation in alternative proteins has shifted to microbial and single-cell protein—and institutional investors are finally taking notice.

The science: Single-cell microbial protein (also called single-cell protein or SCP) is produced by fermenting microorganisms (bacteria, yeast, fungi, algae) on sustainable feedstocks (waste gases, agricultural byproducts, renewable energy). The result is a high-protein, nutrient-dense ingredient that can replace animal protein in food, feed, and nutraceuticals.

Why SCP is transformative:

Metric	impact	Single-Cell Microbial Protein
Land use	100% (baseline)	90% less
Water use	100% (baseline)	90% less
GHG Emissions	100% (baseline)	80-95% less
Production time	6-24 months (livestock)	24-72 hours (fermentations)
Climate dependency	High (weather, disease)	None (indoor, controlled)
Gross margin at scale	15-20%	40%+

The virtual site visit to single-cell microbial protein facilities at Future Fit Asia 2026 was among the most inspiring sessions, signalling that institutional capital is taking this seriously.

Why now?

- Technology maturity: Fermentation processes have crossed from lab to commercial viability
- Capital efficiency: Lower capex than traditional agriculture or livestock
- Supply chain control: Production is geographically agnostic and independent of climate disruption
- Strategic buyer interest: Major food conglomerates are actively scouting SCP platforms for acquisition
- Regulatory support: Singapore, EU, and US are fast-tracking approvals for novel protein sources

Real-world validation

Institutional capital is being deployed at scale in integrated agritech platforms

TECHCOOP's recent $70M Series A (co-led by TNB Aura, AVV, BlueOrchard, FMO, AppWorks, Capria Ventures) demonstrates that institutional capital is deploying at scale in integrated agritech platforms that include alternative proteins.

For corporate innovators: The question isn't whether alternative proteins will grow—it's which category will dominate. SCP's advantages in capital efficiency, scalability, and margin profile make it a strong candidate for long-term leadership in the alternative protein market.

For investors: The alternative protein market is projected to reach $290B by 2035, but returns will be concentrated in companies with:

- Proven fermentation tech (not just concept)
- Scalable production (industrial-grade bioreactors)
- Strong IP moats (proprietary strains, processes)
- Clear paths to commercialization (food, feed, or nutraceutical applications)

The Toxicity-Detoxification Gap: An Overlooked Sustainability Frontier

One of Future Fit Asia's signature themes—Toxicity & Detoxification—reveals a massive, underaddressed challenge in global food systems.

The problem: Modern food systems are increasingly contaminated:

- Microplastics in seafood, salt, water, and even human blood
- Heavy metals (lead, mercury, cadmium) in rice, leafy greens, and soil
- Pesticide residues exceeding safe limits in 30% of produce
- Industrial pollutants (PFAS, dioxins) accumulating in the food chain

These toxins don't just threaten consumer health—they also degrade soil health, reduce crop yields, and damage ecosystem resilience. Cleaning up food systems is essential for both human health and planetary health.

Range of corporate technology pathways to address the global toxification challenge

The sustainability solution is around companies that are developing:

1. Detection technology for rapid toxin screening in supply chains (AI-powered sensors, blockchain traceability)
2. Bioremediation solutions for soil/water decontamination (microbes that break down pesticides, heavy-metal-absorbing plants)
3. Detoxifying food ingredients that bind/remove toxins in the human body (Certain fibers, phytochemicals, probiotics)

The Detox Award at Future Fit Asia 2026 recognized 11 innovators in this space, but no dominant platform operator exists yet—classic early-stage territory for investors.

For corporate R&D teams: This is where the next breakthrough sustainability ingredients will emerge. Think beyond "organic" or "non-GMO" to active detoxification (e.g., "reduces heavy metal absorption," "binds microplastics in the gut").

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

The Global Opportunity (With Asia as a Strategic Hub)

While sustainability challenges are global, Asia is moving fastest on integrating agritech and cleantech into national strategy:

Region	Key Advantage
Singapore/ ASEAN	Policy-supported innovation hub: government commitments to food security (30 by 30) and agri-food funding (S$40.5m); gateway to 650m consumer market
Europe	Strong regulatory framework (EU Green Deal, deforestation rules); high consumer willingness to pay for sustainable food
North America	Largest agtech venture capital; advanced biotech/ fermentation ecosystem; strong IP protection
China	Massive domestic market (1.4bn people); rapid agricultural mechanisation; growing investment in vertical farming and alternative proteins

Asia's unique role: Singapore has emerged as the regional agritech launchpad, combining regulatory clarity, research funding, and access to ASEAN's growing middle class. But the opportunity is global—climate change, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss affect every continent.

For corporate sustainability leaders: The question isn't "where do I pilot this?" but "how do I build solutions with global scalability from day one?" That means:

- Designing for multiple regulatory environments
- Building measurable impact that works across markets
- Creating supply chains that can scale without compromising sustainability

For investors: The companies that will win are those that think globally but execute regionally and using Asia's policy support and consumer velocity as a springboard to global expansion.

What This Means for Different Stakeholders

Implications for corporate professional and financial investors

For Corporate Agritech/Cleantech Professionals:

- R&D focus: Shift from "sustainability claims" to measurable outcomes (e.g., "reduces soil carbon by X%," "increases biodiversity by Y species")
- Product development: Prioritize regenerative agriculture tech, AI-driven biodiversity monitoring, fermentation-derived ingredients, and detox-supportive solutions
- Partnerships: Collaborate with climate scientists, AI labs, and farmer cooperatives to validate impact
- Supply chain: Build transparency and traceability into every step (blockchain, IoT sensors, AI verification)

For Private Equity Investors:

- Sourcing: The highest-quality deals are in AI-biodiversity platforms, single-cell protein, bioremediation tech, and regenerative agriculture infrastructure
- Due diligence: Look for scalable tech, regulatory readiness, IP protection, and clear paths to commercialization
- Value creation: Portfolio companies need scientific credibility + operational scale—invest in building both
- Exit timing: The agrifoodtech M&A window is reopening; strategic buyers (food conglomerates, agribusiness majors) are active in alternative protein and sustainability tech

The Bottom Line

Sustainability in agrifood is no longer about trade-offs (yield vs. environment). The future is about integration: food systems that feed people, regenerate ecosystems, and generate economic returns simultaneously.

For corporate innovators, this means the next decade of agrifood growth will be won by those who can translate environmental insight into scalable business models. For investors, it means the best returns will come from companies with measurable impact, regulatory readiness, and global distribution.

The convergence of food, health, and environmental resilience—what Future Fit Asia now calls "Future-Fit"—is where the next wave of breakthrough agritech and cleantech companies will emerge. The question isn't whether you'll engage with sustainable agrifood. The question is whether you'll be leading the transformation or adapting to it.

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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.