



# Net Zero Week

## Webinar Summary

Food Systems; Towards Net Zero and Nature Positive

**Date:** Thursday, 26 September 2024

**Time:** 10.00 – 11.30 GMT

**Location:** Online

**Facilitated by:** Emily Field, Food Sector Lead, BSI



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As part of BSI's Net Zero Week, the "Food Systems: Towards Net Zero and Nature Positive" webinar brought together experts to discuss the critical role of sustainable food systems in achieving global climate goals. The focus of this event was to explore how the food system contributes to global net zero goals, looking beyond just net zero to understand how we can transition towards a food system that is positive for both population and planetary health. It also highlighted how adopting sustainable practices in the food industry not only advances net zero ambitions but also improves biodiversity and enhances public health.

## **Understanding Food Systems**

The event began by exploring the complexity of food systems, which include all stages from production to consumption and their interconnections. This holistic view is essential due to global dependencies affecting emissions and supply chain vulnerabilities.

## **Challenges in the UK's Food System**

The UK's heavy reliance on imported food contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and exposes the supply chain to climate disruptions and geopolitical tensions. Beyond climate change, issues like public health crises due to unhealthy diets, social inequality with high food costs for low-income households, and environmental degradation and biodiversity loss were discussed.

## **Benefits of a Systemic Approach**

Adopting a food systems approach offers multiple benefits. It enables holistic problem-solving by addressing interconnected issues simultaneously, which helps to identify significant leverage points like food waste. It also promotes cross-sector collaboration and encourages long-term sustainable thinking. Holistic thinking also helps to avoid unintended consequences by anticipating system-wide impacts.



## Strategies for Net Zero

Emma Piercy, Head of Climate Change and Energy Policy at the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) outlined net zero strategies, noting that most emissions stem from ingredients, not manufacturing. Emphasizing a "just transition" for farming, the need to support farmers in adopting regenerative practices was highlighted. Addressing imports and deforestation by improving supply chain transparency is crucial.

### Ambition 2030 Strategy

The FDF's Ambition 2030 strategy focuses on five areas: net zero emissions, nature conservation, sustainable commodities, reducing food waste, and improving packaging. Recognizing that businesses are at different sustainability stages, the strategy provides tailored guidance and sets specific targets like a 50% emission reduction by 2030 and halving food waste.

### Regenerative Farming

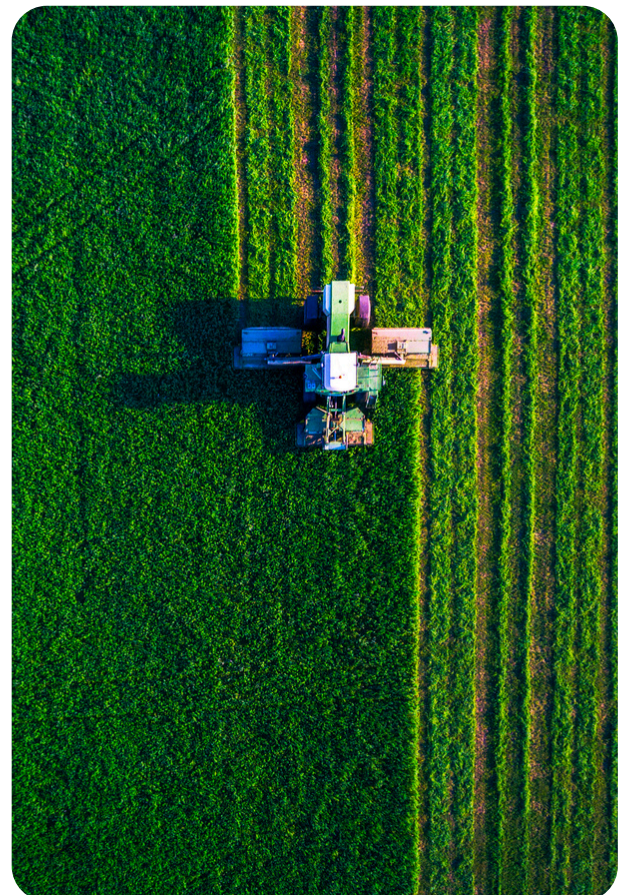
Thomas Gent, a 4th generation regenerative farmer, shared insights on farming practices that contribute to net zero goals. Key principles include minimizing soil disturbance, reducing synthetic inputs, and maximizing plant cover year-round. Thomas highlighted the importance of healthy soil as major carbon sinks, they can also improve water retention, promote biodiversity, and yield more nutritious crops.

## Benefits and Challenges

Regenerative farming offers financial benefits through reduced input costs and less machinery investment, leading to increased profitability. Environmentally, it reduces emissions and improves ecosystem services. However, challenges include the initial transition cost, knowledge gaps due to limited expertise, and cultural resistance within the farming community.

## Healthy Diets for Net Zero

Joanna Trowhan, Director of Partnerships, and Institutional Engagement at ProVeg International, emphasized the link between food choices and climate goals. Healthy, sustainable diets are plant-rich, varied, and based on whole foods, reducing emissions, and improving health outcomes. Current UK diets are emissions-intensive and fall short of health recommendations.





## Facilitating Dietary Shifts

Key interventions to promote dietary shifts include encouraging companies to rebalance protein sales towards more plant-based options, promoting healthy meals in public institutions, and using marketing to influence consumer behavior. Barriers such as lack of supportive policies and affordability issues need addressing.

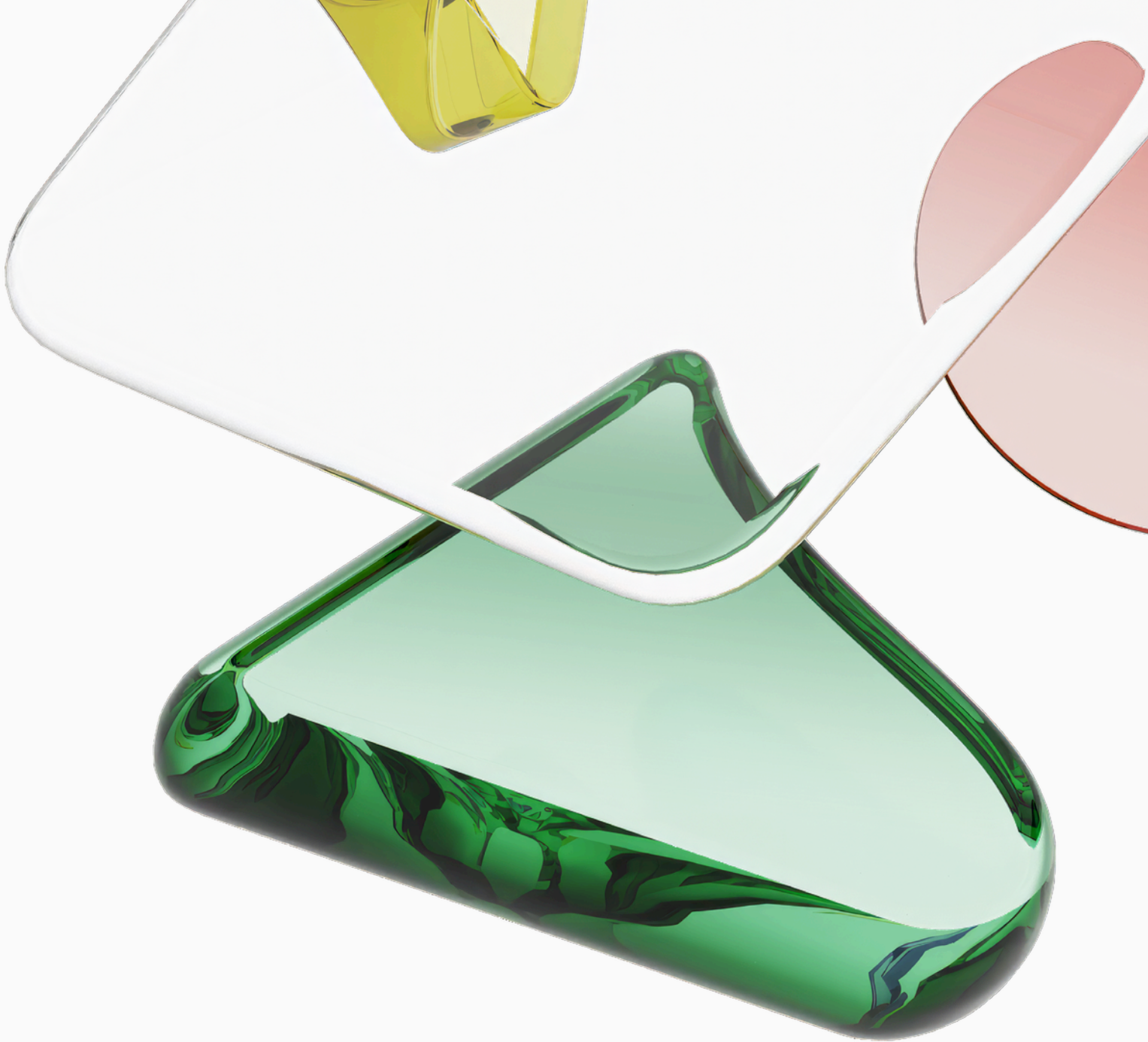
The panel agreed on the vital role of consumer behavior in advancing sustainable food systems. Education and awareness are essential for encouraging healthier food choices.

The discussion highlighted the importance of balancing flexibility with accountability when it comes to standardizing regenerative agriculture practices. Balancing reduced meat consumption with sustainable livestock farming was also explored, highlighting the importance of integrating livestock in environmentally friendly ways.


The webinar underscored that sustainable food systems are essential for achieving net zero emissions. Systemic approaches addressing agricultural practices, corporate strategies, and consumer behaviors can tackle multiple challenges simultaneously.

Regenerative farming and healthy, plant-rich diets offer significant environmental and health benefits. Collaboration, supportive policies, and cross-sector engagement are crucial for transforming food systems towards a sustainable and equitable future.

**Watch the webinar** to explore how sustainable food systems can lead us toward net zero emissions and a nature-positive future. Learn from experts about transforming the food industry through regenerative farming, sustainable diets, and systemic approaches that benefit both planetary and public health.



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