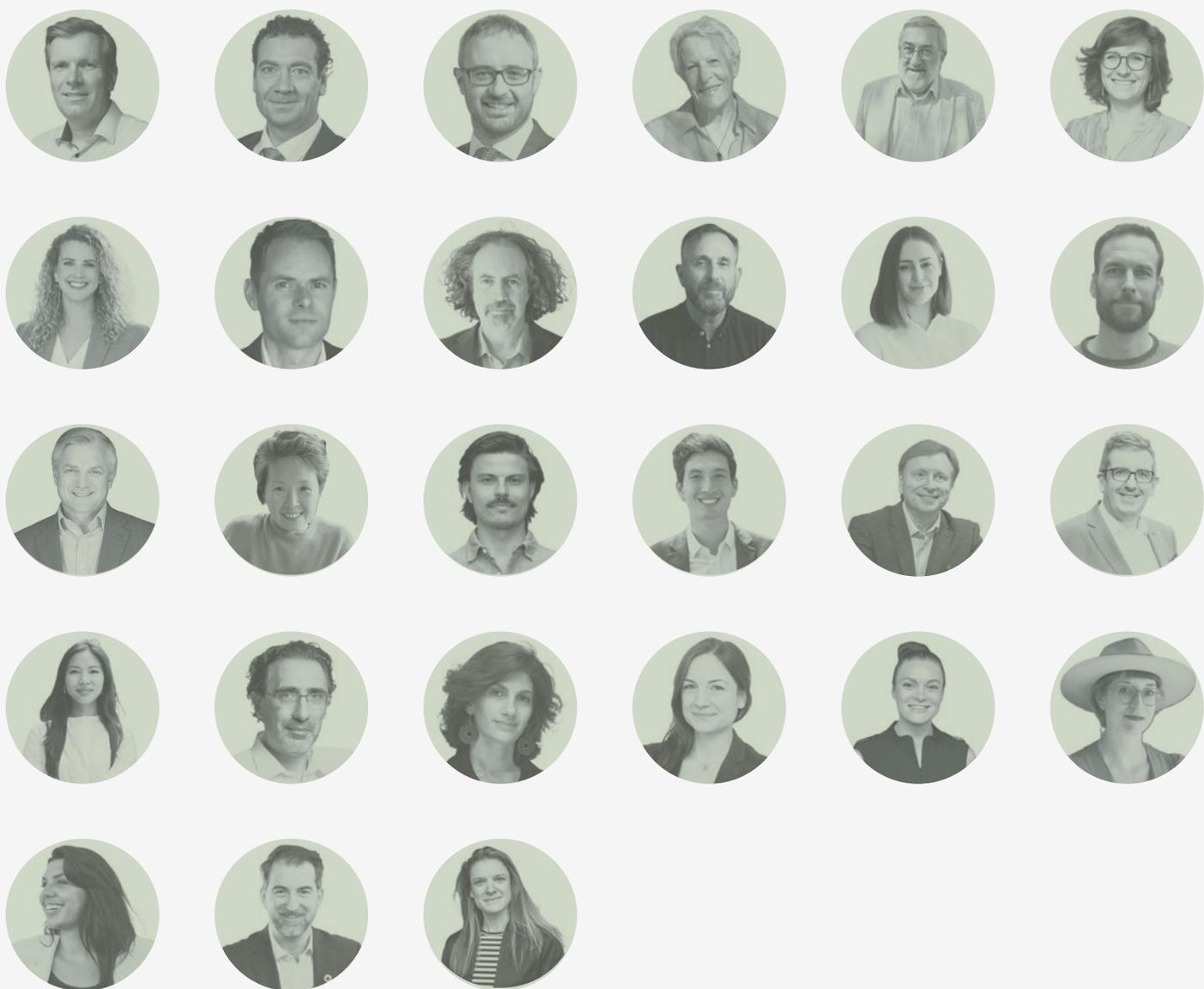


HYB26

Sustainability Edition

The Regenerative Question - What Hospitality Must Become



The Hotel Yearbook

Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry



HY8



Food and Beverage, a drain on resources or a regenerative lever?

Food systems

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Adam and Bumjoo MacLennan propose that food & beverage is not a low-margin nuisance but the beating heart – and biggest lever – of regenerative hospitality. By shifting sourcing toward regenerative agriculture, empowering chefs as tastemakers, and designing menus that prioritise soil health, biodiversity, and zero waste, hotels can turn every meal into a catalyst for healthier ecosystems, communities, and guests.

Food and beverage.

What comes to mind?

Food and beverage (F&B) are a conundrum for many hoteliers, adding complexity to the operation and difficult to make money from. However, F&B is fundamental to hospitality. Regenerative hospitality is not possible without regenerative food systems, and the hospitality industry has a substantial role to play!

In an increasingly institutionalised hospitality industry – driven by expectations of high profit margin, yield optimisation, and shareholder value – F&B is often looked at as a necessary evil. A department with low margins which many hotel concepts try to streamline, outsource or remove altogether.

And yet, food is synonymous with hospitality. When we want to be hospitable, we share food and drink: we invite others over for a cup of tea, a glass of wine, or a meal. Around dining tables, we build lasting relationships, exchange ideas and even debate our differences.

The hospitality industry, however, appears comfortable commoditising food in favour of convenience and profit.

What if that's the mistake?

What if food—so ordinary, so underestimated—sits at the centre of today's most urgent and complex crises: biodiversity loss, climate breakdown, crop failures, inequality, and public health?

Because it can do so much harm, what if the reverse is possible? And what if hospitality industry has the power—and responsibility—to lead the change in shaping new narratives about food?

Agriculture alone accounts for roughly 25% of greenhouse gas emissions, occupies 50% of the world's habitable land, and consumes 70% of global fresh water. Yet, up to 40% of all food produced is wasted which equates to an estimated 10% of global emissions.

Our health is at risk. Poor diets and lifestyle-related illnesses (non-communicable diseases) account for nearly three-quarters of all deaths annually. Two billion people worldwide are overweight and, in the US, half of all adults and one third of teenagers have Type 2 diabetes or are prediabetic.

Climate breakdown, driven by biodiversity loss and rising greenhouse gas, is accelerating desertification, fuelling famine-driven migration, and increasing the risk of conflict.

These pressures exacerbate polarisations and populist movements. Repeated crop failures were a key trigger of the Syrian migration crisis – forcing people from ancestral lands in search of food, destabilising regions and fuelling war, a connection powerfully illustrated in the documentary series, *Years of Living Dangerously*. It is expected that climate-disaster-driven migrations will increase.

Industrial agriculture's heavy reliance on chemical inputs is depleting topsoil, causing erosion, eliminating biodiversity above and below the ground, polluting water systems, and increasing the likelihood of crop failures—further destabilising global food production. Farmers face financial hardships driving rising suicide rates in agricultural communities. Meanwhile, the food and hospitality industries remain notorious for their reliance on forced labour.

The question, then is no longer whether food systems sit at the root of these— and many other—deeply interconnected global crises, but whether the hospitality industry is ready to participate and even lead the change within our global food systems.

Today's food culture has handed enormous power of influence to those who can cook—from recipe developers, home cook influencers, to master celebrity chefs. Media platforms are saturated with cooking shows, food travel programs, and cooking competitions. We seek out highly rated restaurants, new openings in search of extraordinary experiences. We trust chefs' opinions on ingredients and flavour. One can easily find, sometimes unsolicited advice on what to eat—what to avoid—for longevity, weight loss, brain function and everything in between.

Chefs and cooks have the power to inspire new ways of eating – and reinvigorate traditional ways of eating based on local biodiversity and seasonality. We don't have to eat blueberries and string beans all year round. Chefs can show us how to transform overlooked or unfamiliar ingredients into something delicious by showcasing them in their restaurants, cookbooks or online cooking classes.

If chefs begin to champion food grown in healthy soil in thriving ecological environments, and share how good it tastes, they can help drive demand for these foods and encourage their wider production.

Chef Dan Barber uses the example of sea bass in his book, *the Third Plate, the field notes on the future of food*. It was not a historically rare or inherently luxurious fish but acquired its reputation as a premium fish because chefs embraced it—promoting its mild flavour and versatility—on their menus. It became so popular that wild sea bass are now endangered, exemplifying the ecological consequences of food choices popularised by *chefs*.

Changing how we source, produce and consume food can trigger a powerful chain reaction of benefits. Farming is inherently risky: the results of today's decisions may only become visible months later and often years later. For farmers to take such risks, they need confidence that their efforts will pay off.

When farmers know that there is a market for their produce that could also promote healthy soil, they will grow more of it. Restoring degraded soil with organic matter fosters biodiversity, creating healthier ecosystems both below and above the ground. This leads to higher-quality crops and livestock that are more resistant to pests and diseases, cleaner water systems, and reduced reliance on fossil-fuel-based agrochemicals. Healthy soil sequesters more carbon too, which is a bonus.

That is all fine, you might say, but can it be profitable and is it scalable? Hotel brands with aspirations of delivering regenerative hospitality can provide the support that promotes systemic changes to the food industry. In countries such as Austria, there is financial support for local producers of healthy, organic regenerative agriculture, making it possible for these farmers to earn a decent living selling their produce at affordable prices to be enjoyed more widely.

Regenerative hospitality and food and beverage need bold leaders who believe that long-term shareholder value and profit is only possible if we can play our part in support farming practices that improve soil health and biodiversity. This might involve a commitment to allocate a slightly higher budget for ingredients grown locally in the regenerative way, and a laser focus on waste reduction as well as creative menu optimisation and innovation. Working with F&B teams and suppliers to seek out options that are local, delicious, grown regeneratively, and prepared sustainably, while developing recipes that will delight guests is the essence of what makes hospitality fun!

The hospitality industry has always led the way in creating something special, a memorable experience. We are trendsetters, shaping people's lifestyles. We anticipate our guests' need before they realise they have them. So why can't we do the same for food—delivering meals that are not only delicious, but that also generate powerful cascading effects for society and the planet?



“Show me only chemical-free,
bed bug-safe hotels.”



What becomes searchable
becomes bookable.

