EIGHTH ANNUAL FUTURE FOOD 2026

تجمع الإمارات للغذاء UAE Food Cluster



Youth Hub

BIG IDEAS. BRIGHTER FUTURES.

2026

POST EVENT REPORT

INNOVATION CHALLENGE

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29–30 Sep
FORUM DATES 2026

01 Executive summary

The Youth Hub brought 76 participants into ten teams to develop and present responses to food security, waste, water scarcity, sustainable production and the changing needs of consumers and workers. Each pitch was followed by questions from other participants, turning the session into both an innovation challenge and a peer-review exercise.

The concepts ranged from digital demand forecasting and smart pantries to controlled-environment farming, portion choice, food upcycling and organic-waste processing. Artificial intelligence appeared in several proposals, usually as a tool for forecasting, monitoring, spoilage detection or farm management. Other teams focused on physical systems such as hydroponics, irrigation, composting and alternative packaging.

The questioning was a significant part of the session. Participants tested the affordability of vertical farming and bioplastics, the business model for waste collection, the feasibility of growing rice in the UAE, the effect of automation on jobs and the health controls required for aquaponics. These exchanges exposed the difference between an attractive concept and a pilot-ready solution.





Main findings

01

Youth participants connected food security with water, waste, logistics, consumer behaviour and workforce design rather than treating it as a single production problem.

02

Most concepts would benefit from a narrower first use case and evidence from a small pilot before national-scale claims are made.

03

Commercial viability, regulation, food safety, data governance and operating partnerships need the same attention as technology and environmental benefit.

04

The strongest next step is a structured development pathway that helps selected teams validate assumptions with industry mentors and real operating data.



02 Challenge format and concept portfolio

How the session worked

Sherina moderated the ten presentations and invited questions after each pitch. The audience was encouraged to explain what it understood, identify gaps and test whether the proposed solution answered the challenge. This produced a practical discussion about purpose, cost, scale, jobs, consumer adoption and technical risk.

STEP 1
Pitch
Ten teams present a response to the challenge

→

STEP 2
Peer questions
The audience explains, identifies gaps and tests the fit

→

STEP 3
Response
Teams clarify purpose, cost, scale, jobs and risk

Concepts by theme



Number of the ten concepts addressing each theme. Most concepts address more than one.



Concept portfolio

TEAM AND CONCEPT	PRIMARY CHALLENGE	PROPOSED RESPONSE
1 Food Cloud	Mismatch between consumption and production	AI-enabled demand signals connecting households, producers, local farms and imports.
2 Team-ba	Delivery impact and single-use packaging	Central delivery hubs, route optimisation and cellulose-based food containers.
3 AquaFarm AI	Water stress and import dependence	AI-managed water use, recycling and controlled-environment urban farming.
4 FoodPrint	Overproduction and plate waste	Customer-selected portion sizes linked to kitchen preparation and future data collection.
5 Arice	Rice import dependence and resource use	Climate-adapted rice farming with drip irrigation, solar pumps and residue reuse.
6 Food Loop	Household and business food waste	Smart-pantry alerts, collection, composting and rewards linked to agricultural partners.
7 OuraCycle	Imperfect and unsold food	Upcycled products made from usable surplus and cosmetically imperfect produce.
8 MyCoFarm	Limited land and water for local production	Hydroponics, smart irrigation, greenhouses and selected vertical-farming applications.
9 BioLoop 2035	Resource-efficient crop and fish production	Integrated hydroponic and aquaponic production supported by water treatment.
10 Waste2Trade	Food-system shocks and organic waste	Local production capacity, spoilage detection and conversion of waste into useful inputs.

03 Concepts

TEAM 1 Food Cloud



Food Cloud proposed an AI-enabled network that would translate household food choices into demand forecasts for producers. Users would confirm planned purchases and actual consumption, while the system would route demand to an appropriate source such as a smart farm, greenhouse, local producer or importer. The team demonstrated a prototype and described a transaction-fee model, while acknowledging that the commercial figures shown were assumptions.

QUESTION RAISED

Questions focused on the clarity of the company's purpose, how information would reach distant farmers and how an AI-heavy system would benefit workers. The team said the platform would connect producers and consumers and help businesses produce closer to actual demand.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Test one product category with a local producer and a limited household cohort. The pilot should measure forecast accuracy, changes in waste, user retention, data permissions and the operational action taken by the producer.

TEAM 2 Team-ba



Team-ba combined a personalised delivery application with local delivery hubs and lower-impact packaging. The proposal included nutrition-based recommendations, route optimisation, support for local ingredients and cellulose-based containers for items that cannot be carried in paper packaging. The team also discussed drone delivery and reducing pressure on delivery workers.

QUESTION RAISED

Participants asked the team to identify its main solution, explain the cost of bioplastics and distinguish food containers from paper bags. The team clarified that its packaging focus was on bowls, cups and lids, with plant material such as sugarcane or corn considered as feedstock.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Separate the proposition into a packaging pilot and a logistics pilot. For packaging, validate food-contact safety, heat and moisture performance, end-of-life conditions and unit cost. For hubs, model order density, worker conditions and delivery economics in one area.

TEAM 3 · THE POWERPUFF GIRLS

AquaFarm AI



AquaFarm AI proposed a digital management layer for water-efficient urban farming. The concept linked water monitoring and recycling with renewable energy and controlled-environment production, aiming to reduce resource use and strengthen local supply. The application was presented as a decision-support system rather than a simple monitoring dashboard.

QUESTION RAISED

The main question concerned whether automation would remove employment opportunities. The team argued that urban farming could create new roles in a controlled environment and offer an alternative to outdoor work in extreme heat.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Define the decisions the application would make, the sensors and farm systems required, and the human roles that remain accountable. A pilot should compare water use, crop yield, energy demand and labour requirements against an existing farm process.

TEAM 4 · A PLUS

FoodPrint



FoodPrint proposed a cafeteria tray and service system that lets customers choose small, medium or large portions before food is plated. The team's central argument was that prevention should start in the kitchen rather than after food is discarded. It also envisioned using portion-choice and waste data to improve planning in dining halls.

QUESTION RAISED

The audience asked whether customers in a hospitality culture associated with generous servings would select smaller portions. The team responded that the approach would offer choice rather than impose a single serving size.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Trial the three-size service in one school, workplace or hospital cafeteria. Measure selection patterns, return servings, plate waste, kitchen overproduction, customer satisfaction and service time. The design should allow a smaller first serving without limiting access to more food.

TEAM 5 Arice



Arice proposed local rice production using climate-tolerant varieties, underground drip irrigation, solar-powered pumps, water treatment, soil monitoring and compost made from rice residues. The concept connected staple-food resilience with reuse of husks and straw.

QUESTION RAISED

Participants challenged the availability of suitable land and the water requirements of rice. The team referred to rice varieties selected for heat and salinity tolerance and to earlier UAE cultivation trials as the basis for further exploration.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Begin with an agronomic feasibility study rather than a national-scale production target. The study should verify variety suitability, land and water requirements, salinity tolerance, yield, energy use, brine implications and cost relative to imported rice.

TEAM 6 Food Loop



Food Loop combined prevention, collection and resource recovery. A smart pantry would alert users before products expire, while eligible organic waste would be collected, weighed and converted into compost or fertiliser. Users would earn credits that could be redeemed for products supplied by farms and nurseries.

QUESTION RAISED

The audience questioned whether the concept was a business or a voluntary service and asked how it would cover collection, processing, legal and ethical requirements. The response referred to partnerships, licensing and customers across households, restaurants and farms, but the revenue model remained broad.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Choose one paying customer segment and map every cost in the collection and processing chain. A pilot should establish acceptable inputs, contamination controls, collection density, processing partner responsibilities, revenue sources and the value of the reward system.

TEAM 7 OuraCycle



OuraCycle proposed sourcing usable surplus and cosmetically imperfect food, then turning it into products designed for younger, health-conscious consumers. The example given was converting unsold bread into croutons. The concept aimed to create demand for food that retailers or consumers might otherwise overlook.

QUESTION RAISED

The discussion asked how imperfect food would become desirable and sellable. The team pointed to processing and product design rather than asking consumers to buy the original item in its existing form.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Select one predictable surplus stream and develop a safe, appealing product with a clear shelf life. The next stage should confirm supply consistency, traceability, food-safety controls, processing cost, customer acceptance and margins.

TEAM 8 · MYCO MyCoFarm



MyCoFarm combined hydroponics, moisture-based irrigation, greenhouses and selected vertical-farming applications to increase local production with less land and water. The target customers included households, restaurants, supermarkets, grocery stores and farmers.

QUESTION RAISED

A participant challenged the capital cost of vertical farming and whether the approach could remain affordable at national scale. The team clarified that vertical farming was only one element and referred to lower-cost prototypes, public partnerships and corporate partnerships.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Focus on a specific crop and production setting, then compare two or three cultivation methods. The business case should include capital cost, energy and water use, yield, maintenance, labour, selling price and the conditions under which each method is competitive.

TEAM 9 · SYNERGY

BioLoop 2035



BioLoop 2035 proposed a linked production system combining hydroponics with fish cultivation and resource-efficient agriculture. Fish waste would supply nutrients for plants, while treatment systems would maintain water quality. The team also linked the concept with upcycling imperfect food before it reaches landfill.

QUESTION RAISED

The audience raised disease, parasite and water-quality risks and asked how fish maintenance would affect operating costs. The team said filtration and cleansing systems would protect the fish and produce.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Develop a complete aquaponic hazard and operating plan. The team should specify species, stocking density, water parameters, biosecurity, monitoring, failure response, veterinary or technical oversight, energy demand and operating cost.

TEAM 10 · DA BIG 4

Waste2Trade



Waste2Trade presented a broad resilience model involving strategic production inputs, controlled-environment agriculture, heat-adapted livestock, spoilage detection and conversion of organic waste into animal feed, fertiliser or biodegradable packaging. The proposal aimed to shift spending from repeated import dependence towards domestic production capacity.

QUESTION RAISED

The audience challenged the upfront and replacement cost of precision agriculture, sensors and animal systems. The team argued that investment in productive capacity could provide continuing value, unlike recurring import expenditure.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

Narrow the concept to one investment case. Compare the proposed local system with the relevant imported product across capital cost, operating cost, maintenance, replacement cycles, production risk and resilience value. Waste-derived feed and packaging should be assessed separately under the applicable safety rules.

04 Cross cutting findings

Where the concepts overlap

CONCEPT	FOOD WASTE	LOCAL PRODUCTION	WATER	DIGITAL AND AI	PACKAGING
1 Food Cloud	●	○	○	●	○
2 Team-ba	○	○	○	●	●
3 AquaFarm AI	○	●	●	●	○
4 FoodPrint	●	○	○	○	○
5 Arice	○	●	●	○	○
6 Food Loop	●	○	○	●	○
7 OuraCycle	●	○	○	○	○
8 MyCoFarm	○	●	●	○	○
9 BioLoop 2035	●	●	●	○	○
10 Waste2Trade	●	●	○	●	●

Food waste appeared across the full chain

Teams addressed food waste before purchase, during preparation, at the point of consumption and after disposal. Food Cloud and Food Loop focused on forecasting and expiry prevention. FoodPrint addressed serving decisions. OuraCycle and Waste2Trade focused on recovery and conversion. This range suggests that future youth challenges should distinguish prevention, redistribution, upcycling and treatment so that each solution can be assessed against the right outcome.

Before purchase

Food Cloud: forecasting
Food Loop: expiry prevention

Preparation and serving

FoodPrint: portion choice

Recovery

OuraCycle: upcycled products

After disposal

Waste2Trade: conversion into feed, fertiliser and packaging



Local production was linked to resource efficiency

AquaFarm AI, Arice, MyCoFarm, BioLoop 2035 and Waste2Trade all proposed some form of local production. Their concepts recognised the UAE's constraints, but the pitches also showed why land, water, energy and maintenance need to be quantified together. A system can conserve water and still face high energy or capital costs.

Artificial intelligence needed clearer boundaries

AI was used as a general term for forecasting, optimisation, monitoring and detection. The next stage should require teams to state the exact input, decision and user action supported by the model. Data ownership, consent, accuracy, human oversight and the consequence of a wrong prediction should be part of the design.

Questions improved the commercial focus

The audience repeatedly asked who would pay, whether the solution was affordable and how it would scale. These questions were productive because several proposals combined multiple customers, technologies and revenue sources. A narrow pilot customer and a complete cost model would make the ideas easier to evaluate.

Jobs remained part of the 2035 challenge

The teams did not present automation solely as a labour-reduction tool. They discussed reducing strain on delivery workers, improving production planning and creating controlled-environment farming roles. Future development should identify the skills, training, safety requirements and job quality associated with each proposed system.



05 Development pathway

A practical route from pitch to pilot

STAGE 1 Define	STAGE 2 Test assumptions	STAGE 3 Build	STAGE 4 Pilot	STAGE 5 Decide
One problem, one primary user and one measurable outcome	List of technical, behavioural and commercial assumptions	Small prototype or service workflow	Time-bound test with an operating partner	Evidence-based decision to refine, scale or stop
Problem interviews, current process and baseline data	*Expert review, supplier data and simple experiments*	*Function, usability, food safety and data controls*	*Cost, adoption, reliability and outcome measures*	*Pilot comparison, risks, partner commitment and economics*

UPPER: REQUIRED OUTPUT *LOWER: EVIDENCE TO REVIEW*

Recommended support for selected teams

- Assign one industry mentor and one technical mentor to each shortlisted concept.
- Provide access to a real operating problem and baseline data, subject to privacy and commercial controls.
- Run short clinics on business models, unit economics, food safety, regulation, data governance and impact measurement.
- Require a pilot plan that names the partner, location, duration, success measures and stop conditions.
- Hold a follow-up review where teams present evidence collected after the Forum rather than a revised pitch alone.



Suggested evaluation criteria

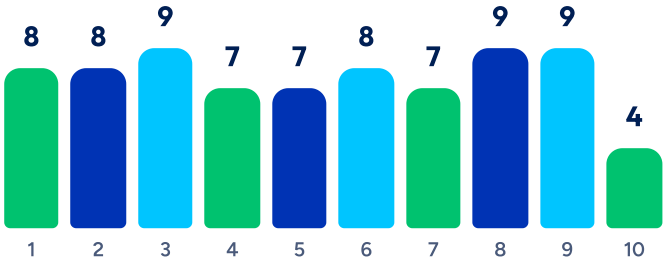
CRITERION	WHAT REVIEWERS SHOULD EXAMINE
Problem relevance	Importance to the UAE food system and evidence that the user experiences the problem
Feasibility	Technical requirements, operating partners, regulation and implementation constraints
Resource impact	Water, energy, materials, waste and any trade-offs between them
Commercial logic	Customer, payer, unit economics, maintenance and path to adoption
Workforce effect	Roles created or changed, skills, safety and human oversight
Pilot readiness	Scope, data, measures, timeline and accountable partner



06 Team roster



76 PARTICIPANTS ACROSS TEN TEAMS



Members per team

TEAM	CONCEPT	MEMBERS
1 Food Cloud	Food Cloud	Armina Aguinaldo; Euri Giron; Elisha Arancillo; Izianne Tish Berjamin; Gabrielle Ravago; Ebb Hector Navato; Jed Lorenz Smith; Ahrgelle Maniego
2 Team-ba	Centralized Delivery System and Sustainable Material Integration	Alexander Ernest N. Reyes; Lois Bren Cruz Bacit; Vhen Mhykel Lucas Villacorte; Ethan Christopher Caballero; Peter Bakshi; Eavanah Janelle Umangay; Evann Ezekiel Araneta; Angelique Katelin Luansing
3 The PowerPuff Girls	AquaFarm AI	Erika Hapatinga; Patricia Lara Ignacio; Shae Arielle Sandajan; Daniella Isabel Velasco; Leigh Margarett Curso; Ivy Ariadne Aberin; Maxine Leane Lapuz; Mischa Adrianah Cabral; Kirina Chloe Navarro
4 A Plus	FoodPrint	Aeden Aquino; Emirha Mendelebar; Reeze Umali; Kendrik Maramag; Joshua Borbe; Brayden Villareal; Kahil Manla
5 Arice	Arice	Yuri Zachari Uno de Joya; Mary Lyn Lourdes Luna Barayoga; Mariha Zerin Ali; Bernice Chena; Viktor; Brielle Mojares; Caleb Lopez
6 Food Loop	Food Loop	Keizha Sinag; Ulysses Laviña; Chris Jane Lubang; Ceejey Guevarra; Kassandra Vitug; Jullian Salonga Agno; Jianne Mollasgo; Sophia Nebrida
7 OuraCycle	OuraCycle	Marc Mendoza; Johnvier Matthieu A. Barola; Usama Dost Carreon Mohammad; Cierkyle Angello T. Flores; Ronan Bernabe; Joash Andrei; Ayan Paril Moussa
8 MyCo	MyCoFarm	Mickaella Jenelle De Jesus; Audrey Kaye Manalo; Zhenea Francisco; Youssef Bata; Andrei Briones; Samantha Sophia Fyel Santos; Justine Kiesha Nina Baco; Stephanie Guanga; Francine Evangelista
9 BioLoop 2035	Synergy	Ryan Renzo Angelo Gonzales; Ralph Frederick Ormido; Miguel Ynigo Zaraspe; Ceriz Euan Isaac; Juan Rolando De Guzman; Jevi Clarence Gabayan; Christopher Simmons; Mark Luigi Simeon Plumo; Kenjin Karlsten Manulid Lim
10 Da Big 4	Waste2Trade	Chris Policarpio; Kyle Rosales; Russel Mateo; Jared Llenarezas

07 Conclusion

The Youth Hub gave young participants a serious role in discussing the future of the UAE food system. The ten concepts addressed real pressures including food waste, water scarcity, import exposure, delivery impact and the affordability of local production. The peer questions strengthened the session by testing cost, scale, safety, jobs and consumer behaviour.

The programme's next opportunity is to convert a small number of concepts into evidence-generating pilots. Food Cloud could test demand forecasting with one producer. FoodPrint could measure portion choice and waste in one dining hall. OuraCycle could validate one upcycled product. Other teams could test a defined farm, packaging, collection or processing component rather than the complete national system described in the pitch.

A structured follow-up process would preserve the creativity of the Youth Hub while giving participants the disciplines needed to develop credible solutions. Mentoring, access to operating partners and clear pilot measures would help teams learn whether their ideas work, what they cost and what must change before wider adoption.



CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

The session showed that young people are ready to engage with the practical choices behind food security. Their strongest contribution was the willingness to propose, question and revise. That approach should remain central to future editions of the Youth Hub.

08 Event gallery

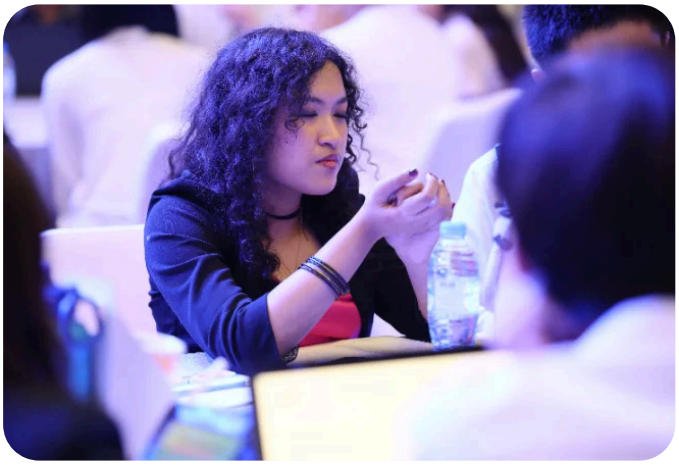
















08 Event gallery continued

















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