



2026 GLOBAL CONFERENCE LEADING IN A NEW ERA



THE NEXT ERA OF FOOD LEADERSHIP

Holly Freishtat 00:07

Good morning, everyone. I'm Holly Freishtat. I'm the senior director for Feeding Change at the Milken Institute. I lead the food system portfolio. We use social and financial capital to create a more nutritious, affordable, accessible, resilient, sustainable food system. So today, we're going to talk about the next era of food leadership. This has been the theme of the conference, how do we lead in a changing time? While food has been the center of attention, good, bad, and everything in between, you can't go a moment in time with the news, with geopolitics, or hearing about food. So here we are with leaders. Every day, we think about food 24/7, That's pretty much all we think about. And we are probably one of the most passionate bunch on food. And I hope we will continue to be very lively. We already were a few moments ago. And we're going to talk everything from dietary guidelines to growing, from GLP-1s, which we just talked about a few moments ago, to the MAHA movement, to the fragile food supply chain, and where are fertilizers to the food supply. So I would love to introduce my panelists: Soren Bjorn, CEO of Driscoll's; Amanda Davies, chief research and development, procurement, and sustainability officer at Mars Snacking; Colleen Lindholz, group vice president and president of Kroger Health; and Peter McGuinness, CEO of Bel North America. So the first topic and theme we're going to talk about is this mandate for health. Is this really about—is health and food a growth strategy for companies, or is it a constraint? Where are we seeing this amazing opportunity? Is this the moment where we're going to suddenly and all be healthy as individuals and choose the foods because we can afford it and because we can eat it for our greatest health? Are the companies going to all be able to support us, or are there areas that we're going to see significant constraints across the line? So Colleen, I'm going to start with you here.

Colleen Lindholz 02:14

Oh.

Holly Freishtat 02:14

And you sit at this intersection of retail, pharmacy, nutrition. You know all of us better than we know ourselves, right?

Colleen Lindholz 02:22

Lot of data.

Holly Freishtat 02:23

So you see how health shows up in the consumer behavior.

Colleen Lindholz 02:27

Yeah.

Holly Freishtat 02:27

What I really want to hear about is Kroger has a food for health strategy. So tell me about that strategy. Where is that thriving, and where is it like the constraints and the challenges to that?

Colleen Lindholz 02:38

Yeah, so we have a food for health strategy because it's the right thing to do. Chronic disease is on the rise in the United States. We've known this for a long time, and 50 percent of chronic diseases can be affected by what you eat, basically. It could be impacted. So we have a food is health strategy to really help people live healthier lives, to do what we should be doing. And as a retailer who actually makes our own food, too, we have a nutrition scoring system that we put in place so our customers can more easily make a choice at the shelf in the commodities in which they shop for a more nutrition density, more nutrition dense product. But retailers just in general, if you think about retail, we all have this opportunity. We see people come in our stores, millions of people come in our stores each and every day. We have an opportunity to make an impact, Holly, and the thing is, is that it's our responsibility, I believe, to do that, to be more transparent with what we put on the shelf. And so at Kroger, we've taken that next step and tried not just to bring transparency to the shelf, but to try to bring everyone else along the way with a nutrition scoring system.

Holly Freishtat 03:41

I think it's interesting, though, because you're talking about the grocery and the aisles, but you also have your pharmacy. So weave in for me a little bit of how are you looking at the full health of the store, from the pharmacy to the aisles around the store in the middle?

Colleen Lindholz 03:56

Yeah, so we do sit at that intersection of being able to not only take care of people from a pharmacy and clinic perspective, but be able to look at their groceries also. So we have this more interconnected, sort of

coordinated wellness platform, Holly, that really makes it easy for us to take care of people through understanding what they eat and then understanding what their disease is. And then also more importantly, understand what consumers desire to do. So just because you aren't using our pharmacies right now doesn't mean that we can't help you make healthier food choices, whether you want to get ready to run a marathon and have some kind of a goal like that, or you're having your first baby in life. So we really value the whole idea about connection, connection between the data, and we've been working on a consent strategy for quite some time that allows us to cross that data with the customer's permission and provide personalized approach. Our pharmacists—pharmacists are one of the most accessible healthcare professionals in the United States of America. We're open 364 days a year, and we are a place where people come to get not only advice on pharmaceuticals, but advice on life in general and things that they can do to be healthier.

Holly Freishtat 05:02

Great. Amanda, bringing you in here. So from the perspective of products—in the middle of the store, can you talk to me about the expectations? There's so much expectation now, right? Mars has been an indulgence company. Now it's an indulgence and snack. And now we're seeing the dietary guidelines and the pyramid flip upside down, and this craze for protein. Talk to me a little bit of how are you seeing reformulation. Are you seeing reformulation? Where is science leading? Where are trends leading? I would love to hear a little bit of your perspective of where is health an opportunity for you, and where is it really a constraint?

Amanda Davies 05:36

Yeah, to build on Colleen's point there, I think the starting point is about transparency. So, I really agree with our responsibility to create transparency so our consumers know what they're eating so they can eat the right thing in the context that they find themselves. But if you come back to what we're seeing in a snacking business, the first thing is we've got to really understand our consumers and what their needs are. And yeah, we're seeing some real trends, as you say, in terms of nutrition, moving from what the calories count for, the quality of the nutrition. We're seeing some real trends as everybody is around protein, fiber. And our approach is in two ways. So first of all, how do we lean into those trends with new offerings, things like RXBAR, protein balls. We're really trying to meet consumers where their needs are, as well as reformulating some of the favorites that we have, Snickers protein or something to that sense. And then there's a lot of reformulation that's happening at the moment. And with some of the natural colors, things like that. We're working hard, working really hard, on making some of these transitions. And I think what two things that underpin everything, understanding what the consumer wants and what science says, and then the most important thing as you're doing any reformulation is it has to taste. Taste is at the top of every consumer's pyramid. They may try it once for what it says on the packaging and the promise. They'll only try it again if the taste hit their expectations.

Holly Freishtat 07:36

Thank you, Amanda. And Peter, bringing you into this conversation now. We're going into who are really the winners right now with this upside-down pyramid, who's at the very top.

Peter McGuinness 07:46

Sure.

Holly Freishtat 07:46

Well, protein is sitting right at that top of the pyramid, and so is fruit. I want to hear from your perspective. Talk to me about where are you seeing this growth opportunity with protein, with plant-based. Is there an opportunity there?

Peter McGuinness 08:00

Sure.

Holly Freishtat 08:00

And portion control. Would love to hear where is an opportunity and where are your constraints?

Peter McGuinness 08:04

Yeah, I think first of all, I want to echo, if it's not delicious, it's a non-starter, right? No one wants the warm beer, cold shower compromise, right? So if you're reformulating, you better make sure it tastes good. When I was at Impossible—there's 250 plant-based brands, and not all tasted great. And so I encourage everyone just to up the taste factor, so that you could increase adoption sooner rather than later. And look, I think the reverse pyramid was not great for plant-based, particularly plant-based meat. I love it now at Bel. It's fruit, veg, and dairy. I'm right there. And you just got to change jobs, and you'll be fine. But look, the plant-based thing was widely misunderstood, too, because we talked about processed, and processed is the most misunderstood thing. Over 50 percent of everything in a grocery store is processed. I look at it as nutrient density. So in plant-based, yeah, it has a lot of ingredients to mirror animal meat, but you have more protein than the animal. You have fiber, which the animal doesn't have. You have zero cholesterol. So it's density of nutrients, and I just think by definition, that's not processed. Move over to Bel, everything's portion controlled. So, 100 years ago, they made Mini Babybel because you had to buy, literally, a wheel of cheese. And who wants to buy a three-pound wheel of cheese? So Bel pioneered democratizing cheese and putting it in little portions, so that you can enjoy it and snack with it, and it's one cup of milk to one Mini Babybel. It's milk, cultures, and a pinch of salt. It's three ingredients. GoGo squeeZ has obviously, it's fruit and veg in a pouch on the go. And so I think you got to try to make it easier for people to eat better, and you have to make it affordable and accessible. And I think that's the key. I think the future of food is better food for more people. There's a lot of better food out there that's niche and that's expensive and for people that have money, and then there's a lot of not-so-good food that's available to everyone. And so better food for more people is a very tricky food equation. So how do you craft it but also make it affordable? And I think we struggle with that. There's tension in that, but that's the future. I think good food's a right, not a privilege, particularly in 2026. So as food manufacturers, we all need to try to constantly innovate, renovate, reformulate to make the food better and also kind of take cost out of it without taking quality out of it so that more people can eat it, right? Last thing I'll say is 40

percent of people are getting their calories from snacks, so I think we need healthier snacks out there, right? Forty percent. And then less than 50 percent eat enough fruit and veg. So how do we make this fun, enjoyable, tasty, attainable, affordable, accessible? I think that's the trick in all of this.

Holly Freishtat 11:08

Okay, so that brings us right to you, Soren. There is no question. Berries are healthy, right? There's no qualms there, but—

Peter McGuinness 11:15

—He's sitting pretty—

Holly Freishtat 11:15

—Yeah—

Soren Bjorn 11:15

—Looking okay. Yeah, that's right—

Holly Freishtat 11:21

—Because the berries are healthy. There's no debate on berries being healthy, but you also have the odds stacked against you a little bit. So talk to me a little bit about where is it going great in the berry world, and where are you really seeing those constraints and those challenges? And we were just talking about affordability, right? That everyone should be able to eat the healthy foods, but not all the healthy foods are—

Soren Bjorn 11:44

—Sure—

Holly Freishtat 11:44

—Priced and as affordable as others. So talk to me a little bit about opportunities and constraints.

Soren Bjorn 11:49

Yeah, we are clearly in the spot where I think we should all want to be, right? Healthy, convenient, and great tasting, that's a difficult combination, and we have all of that in berries, so that's obviously really good. But as you said, the deck is stacked a little bit against us, okay? And some of those things are choices we make as a society, right? The reality is that we, through Farm Bill and other programs, we mostly support processed foods. There's really very little money going to the specialty crops, right? It's the fruit, the vegetables, the nuts. And it's not so much about getting the money to all of us, it's more that the money is going to the other products, right? So it's going to the corn and the soybeans and wheats, which we break down into all these ingredients that are not that good for us. And so more than 60 percent of all children under 18 get their calories from ultra-processed foods. And so we shouldn't stack the deck that way against us. We also have—we can say it's unfortunate—but the vast majority of fruits, vegetables, and nuts in the United States are produced in the state of California. And this is a very expensive place to do business, right? And so, our state is not really helping with the national agenda to be more healthy. So I think those are some of the things we need to address if we'd want to really, truly have a society that embraces the idea that we all need to eat healthier lives, which would be good.

Holly Freishtat 13:10

So in the US, we definitely are seeing that, right? We do know the farm bill, and with the specialty crops and so forth. But talk to us a little bit about globally as well. Are you seeing it still stacked against you internationally? In which regions, or where are you seeing more opportunities?

Soren Bjorn 13:26

Yeah. So it's interesting. So for example, in China, they just put out the new five-year plan, as they do sort of every couple of years, and you see a shift where they're clearly recognizing that they're producing enough calories today in China, and they're shifting their farm policy to produce more nutritious, higher-end products. And so that's how they're moving their support. And I think any society that produces enough calories should really be focused on how can we produce more nutritious foods. And we have produced enough calories in this country for almost 50 years, but we haven't shifted our policy. And so as soon as China got to that point where they have enough calories, they shifted the policy towards nutrition. And, so we are lacking pretty far behind in that regard.

Holly Freishtat 14:09

So that brings us to the consumer, right? So we're seeing really a tale of two consumers. We're seeing consumers who are, many are on GLP-1s, right, and eating less. And then we see a lot of consumers who truly just cannot afford the food. Whether it is in the reductions of SNAP or many other factors, and also food inflation and the rising cost of food. So Peter, I want to hear from you a little bit about—so many of your products are serving kids, right? And snacks and kids. Where are you seeing the consumer trends

changing? Are you seeing it with kids, with parents, with families? Talk to me a little bit about the changing consumer.

Peter McGuinness 14:49

Yeah, I think everyone's constrained. And I think the only—there's the 1 percent of the 1 percent, you can do whatever you want, whenever you want, no matter what's happening in the world. And I think everyone else is constrained. And so we're not seeing—and I think that's where, as a food company, you have to look at pack size, you have to look at portion size, you have to look at multi-packs, make sure that from a portfolio perspective, one thing is SKUs. The other thing is how do you make it more attainable, right? So in Impossible, I did sliders, right, because it was smaller than a burger, and it was a way to get into plant-based. It was much less expensive, because plant-based tends to be more expensive. If I look at Bel, we're doing a lot of multi-packs at a pretty big discount on a per unit basis, even though the basket's more. And so you have to kind of look at your portfolio. And we're also doing big multi-packs with GoGo squeeZ and all the apple sauces we're doing, just to make it easier on parents, right? We increased our promotions pretty dramatically just to—if people want to shop and wait for a promotion, we increase the frequency dramatically so that people could get our products at a discount. We didn't play around with EDLP, but we did do promotional windows that were deeper and more frequent. So I think it's also our responsibility to make things more attainable while your supply chain is inflated. And at the end of the day, we're a for-profit business, but you have to be conscious about it. How much profit's too much profit? And so, the whole supply chain, whether it be feed, whether it be milk, whether it be transportation, that's all inflated. So the cost of goods is up, and the consumer's pinched. And so working with retailers and as a supplier, we have to work together—whether it's deeper discounts, whether it's lower margins—to try to unlock that. Because we live in an unequal world, we live in an unfair world at times. And again, if we all believe the future of food is delicious, nutritious, natural, affordable, that's our DNA, well, then we have to act that way, behave that way, develop products that way, market products that way. And we can't do it alone. Suppliers can't do it alone. Retailers can't do it alone. We have to be in concert.

Holly Freishtat 17:24

So these collaborations are essential, and we are seeing with SNAP right now, the SNAP waivers, where right now many states have different requirements of what is and is not allowed through SNAP. Colleen, you're seeing this play out in many states. Talk to me a little bit about how are you seeing SNAP, from the retailer perspective of operations to the consumer side?

Colleen Lindholz 17:47

Yeah, the SNAP changes have been interesting. There's 22 states that have SNAP waivers right now. We have 17 states in which we have stores that we operate in. So, I would say that the SNAP waivers are working. Where there's soda and candy has been restricted—we've seen in one of our states it was a 26 percent decrease in soda, and these customers are taking their dollars and moving them more towards everyday essentials, versus the sodas and the candies, which I think that's working. That's what they

should be doing. The question is can we do more? I mean, can we do more? There's soda and candy is mostly what's being restricted right now, Holly. But, overall, it is hard for retailers. There's not a SNAP playbook, if you know what I mean. It's by state, and it's very hard and difficult for us to execute this at the store level across all point of sale system. But we're doing it, and I believe that it's working. I just think there needs to be more.

Holly Freishtat 18:47

And I think there's always a balancing act, right? We have never been a country to tell people what to eat. Right? And now we're starting to shift a little bit, right? Of this right to food, this right to health, what is and is not available to us, and I think there is that tension there, and we're always going to be able to see that. I would love to see, Soren, for you to talk a little bit. As we're starting to see SNAP shift, are you seeing that shifting dollars going towards berries as well? What are you seeing in this constrained consumer?

Soren Bjorn 19:20

Yeah, I think whether it is the very dramatic increases in the uses of GLP-1 drugs, the changes in SNAP benefits, it's all shifting a little bit of the demand into the produce department. Right? And so we are benefiting from that. I think Colleen can share that they see that in their data. Right? They can see that people, they used to buy stuff in the center of the store, they're now buying more over in the produce department, and they're buying more berries. So that's obviously is a very good thing, and it's great that there are 22 states that are doing this, but it makes you wonder what are the other 28 states doing. Right. Right? It just seems like the SNAP, the N in SNAP is Nutrition Assistance Program. Right? That's what the program is. And so there's not nutrition in soft drinks and candy, and I don't understand why at a federal level we can't recognize that. Right? This is why the program got put in place in the first place. I said before, we should have a national program to have more nutritious foods and not just more calories. And this is a great place to start. This is 80 percent of the farm bill, is that money. So it is a great place to start, and we are seeing a little bit of benefit from it, so for sure.

Holly Freishtat 20:24

And I do think that SNAP is a very controversial issue in some areas, but it's also—food is one that we can all agree to, that we all are needing to eat. And we all want to be able to move towards a healthier place. But with that, GLP-1s, on the other side, has changed things a lot. Right? And so Amanda, I want to hear from you first and then Colleen, a little bit on how are you seeing this market shift on GLP-1s. Are you seeing these trends impacting you now? How are you starting to shift as a result of it?

Amanda Davies 20:53

Well, I think, first of all, and Colleen's probably a better place to see some of the shifts from the consumer, but if you think about the last year, we've been deeply curious about what this shift will mean for our business and our products and trying to anticipate where the consumer is going to be. And some things have probably surprised us and some things haven't. So what hasn't surprised us is the users wanting to have more protein and we responded to that with some of the products I mentioned earlier. What has surprised us is that even the people on GLP are not wanting to move away from having a sweet treat, a reward. It's about the proportion, the portion size. And so that's the change that we've seen. Things like Tru Fru, which—got berries in it as well. But the hydration, ice cream is something that we've seen GLP move towards, and portion size. So those are some of the things that we've seen, and as with everything GLP uses, the calories just count more, and they're paying more attention. They're more digitally savvy, so seeing a lot more of the uptake on some of the apps and using that, and again, which I think is a good thing, a trend to follow. So again, what we want is consumers to understand their context and what nutrition they need, because it's different for everybody.

Holly Freishtat 22:36

And Colleen, from GLP-1s, from the pharmacy to the products, talk to me a little bit about what you're seeing on both sides of that.

Colleen Lindholz 22:44

Yeah. So the GLP-1s have been obviously an explosion onto the market. They've been blockbuster breakthrough for a tremendous amount of patients. I'm happy to say that I know of a number of people that even are working on my team that have used or are using a GLP-1 and have really seen tremendous results and have a new look on life. It is reshaping the basket overall at Kroger. I know when we first started down the road, we had a lot of people say, "Oh, no. People are going to eat less. They're going to spend less." It's actually not true. They're actually spending more.

Peter McGuinness 23:13

Different.

Colleen Lindholz 23:13

They're spending more. They're just spending it in different places. That's exactly right. They're spending more. So we're super excited about being able to offer the more holistic approach to obviously helping these patients. We're the one-stop shop. We've got health care inside of a grocery store. Obviously, the fiber and the protein, hydration you mentioned are big ones, but they're also looking for supplements. And

what's interesting, too, is they're buying more in the beauty category. So, people are losing tremendous amount of weight, and they're like, "Wow, now I want to take care of myself a little bit more. I want to look better." Yeah. So we're seeing increases in beauty and that type of thing also.

Holly Freishtat 23:52

So we've been spending the first half of this conversation really around what we're eating, the trends, the changes. But now let's put it into the global landscape. Right? We have so many different odds against us. We have a fragile food supply chain. We're trying to build a more resilient food production, because we need to see the land, the resources, the food for the future, at the same time as we're as seeing a lot of restrictions, whether it's from fertilizer to geopolitics. There's so many different issues that we're seeing playing out right now in our landscape. So Peter, I would love to hear a little bit of—how are you navigating these waters related to this tension area, and also opportunity for resiliency in our food supply chain as we're in this current day of 2026?

Peter McGuinness 24:43

Yeah. Well, I just want to touch on something Soren said real quick, which is, we talk a lot about price. We don't really talk about value, and I think the value comes back to quality per calorie, which Soren touched on. I think what the consumer's doing, and I think, to a degree, Colleen mentioned this too, it's people are still spending money, they're just choosing very carefully what they spend their money on. And it is bang for the buck. I know that's a cliché. But if you have nutrient-dense food and you have high nutrition per calorie, it's worth it. And I think value is a very interesting thing in reshaping this, right? So they are cutting back on things that they don't see value in, right? And GLP-1's doing that to a T as well. But also when you're money-constrained, you're going to pick and choose things that deliver as much nutrition as possible, right? So the more we can— and sure, that's protein, fiber—so the more we can make nutrient-dense foods, right? And quality per calorie—I think that's a new currency, in my opinion, in food making. Right? And so I think we should really push ourselves in that direction. Yeah, the supply chain's super fragile. If you look at—I don't want to get into war and politics, but we have a factory in Iran, and it's very tenuous there. The supply chain and the supply routes we've had to all redirect over the land and not the sea, obviously. But we have family there, and we have a factory there, and of course we said it's not mandatory to go to work, and people are showing up to the factory because they think it's safer in the factory. And so when you look at—there's regulatory pressures. It's interesting to have more regulatory pressure here than ever before because we were a country that never kind of imposed, right? And now we're starting to impose, right? And so you asked, your first question was, is it a growth opportunity or constraint? And yes and yes. So yeah. You look at it, it's a very confusing environment, right? But look, I think if you're on the right side of the trend in truth, I think if you're making high quality foods, and I think yet—and they're nutrient dense, and they're as less processed as possible, and they're as natural as possible, and your mindset's in the right place of trying to make good food, I think you're going to be fine when you look at the global landscape. When you look at Europe, which is more regulated, they don't have soda in schools. When you look at China, right, they're imposing very strict guidelines around food. But that goes back to the supplier and what you make. And so I think it depends on the business you're in, and the products you make, and the brands you have.

Holly Freishtat 27:30

And Amanda, Mars is a private company, right? And so you're really looking at this from a longer perspective, multi-generational perspective. Talk to me a little bit about how are you building resilience into your supply chain, into the way that the company is thinking? How are you looking at soil health? Talk to me a little bit about where you're planning to go in the future here.

Amanda Davies 27:52

Yeah. I think it starts with understanding your supply chain and kind of soil to snack. Because as a business, if you don't understand the role that the whole supply chain has in kind of—you're a small part of it—then you can't start thinking about resilience, because first of all, you've got to understand it. So one of the first things I did a few years ago when I came into this role looking after sustainability was take all of our business leaders to the farms around the world so that we could look at our business farmer forward versus kind of office and PowerPoint back. And a small act, but has had huge impact in trying to ensure that we then start to build generational resilience. Because if your leaders, if your teams have stood in—is it Georgia or Argentina or wherever in a peanut field—and realizing only 30 peanuts in every 100 get into the food supply chain, it starts to think about action. If you realize that the mint that we're growing from India, we haven't yet got a path for a living income for those farmers, that we need to think about different things. So the first thing—and it honestly is—and the most important thing as any business, is understanding your connection to the planet. Then thinking about the vulnerabilities, not just today, but projecting those forward for the next decade. And then starting pieces of work that quite frankly none of us are going to be in our chairs in our businesses when they impact, but still making sure that you put the money, the resources, and the energy behind them. Because I'm sat here incredibly lucky now that there's been programs in peanuts and cocoa that were started two decades ago that we're now being able to use. And so I think part of leadership is doing the thing for the next generation, not just for the people who happen to be in the seats today.

Holly Freishtat 30:06

All right. Thank you, Amanda. Soren, I know you're chomping at the bit here. I would want to hear a little bit about, the farmer is the center of your work, right? And I want to hear about how are you looking at resilience from your breeding of your crops, to water constraints, to all these different issues. What are you looking forward towards?

Soren Bjorn 30:27

Yeah. So when we talk about food, obviously it always starts with the farmer, right? That's the truth in all food. And luckily in the mission of our company, we have had the farmer at the center from the beginning. We were started by farmers. We are still today mostly owned by farmers, people that farm. And, so it's our

job to make sure that they are successful, right? If farmers can't be profitable growing the healthy food we need, we won't have healthy foods. It's as simple as that. In our company, that starts with the genetics. And so we today spend a lot more efforts on developing new genetics that's more resilient to all the stuff we're seeing in environment, right? Where the fact is there are more pests. And so if we don't want to use more pesticides, then the genetics has to be more resilient. And there's really progress in this area, right? So it looks like in a couple of weeks, we're going to have harmonization between the European Union, United States on having common standards finally, okay? And I'm very glad to say, as a Dane, okay, before I became an American, it was under the Danish leadership of the European Union last year that this really moved forward. And I know this was their number one objective is to get this harmonization. I think once the European Union breaks, then it will break with a lot of other countries like Australia, and that is a big deal for the specialty crops because we move our genetics around the world. We use the same genetics here in Australia and in China and in Europe, unlike corn and soybeans that may go and develop it in those regions. So it starts there, right? And if we can make the genetics more resilient, we can in fact use less pesticides and less overall inputs, and that is going to make the farmers more successful, right? That lowers their cost. It makes them more resilient to whatever is in their environment. And, so that is a very, very clear objective we have. In our company, we've come to say is that sustainability without resiliency is nonsense, right? And, I think that's really, really important that we are built in that resiliency.

Holly Freishtat 32:23

Well, thank you. It's interesting, we're almost to the end of our conversation, and there's one word we have not said yet, which we've been talking about the entire time at Global Conference, which is AI, right? Like how is this an opportunity? How is it accelerating some of the work that we're doing? Where are we seeing places that we better pay attention to immediately and in the future? So I would love, Colleen, can you talk a little bit about how is AI playing out, I mean—so many different ways, from the shopper's perspective all the way to the way that you do operations?

Colleen Lindholz 32:58

Yeah. So at Kroger, we are using it on the operations side, manufacturing, transportation. Right now it's been sort of our first deep dive into how can we be more efficient there. From my perspective, in our pharmacies, we're looking at how can we make it easier from the filling of prescriptions, workflow, back end, billing, that type of thing, so that our pharmacists and our healthcare professionals can spend more time with people at the counter. Because that's what people do need and want, is that one-on-one personal time that we can spend with them. And, so that's what we're digging into right now. But I think the future overall is sort of like reframing what the jobs really are inside of our stores. And so that will be something that we're working on right now. It's a little scary to me sometimes when you think about it. It's exciting but scary at the same time, especially in healthcare because you have to be really careful because healthcare is very personal. It always will be, and I do believe that people need people when it comes to people's personal needs and chronic disease and things like that. So Holly, we're working on things at Kroger that are going to make us better and more efficient. And I think that it most definitely is going to shape the future.

Holly Freishtat 34:05

Great. Amanda, you want to jump in here?

Amanda Davies 34:06

Yeah. I have to say when you asked the question, and I was linking it back to the conversation on kind of resilience and farmers. To kind of take the decades of knowledge that we have in different crops and put it into the hands of farmers. I was literally with the team a couple of weeks ago, and they were showing me this super simple app that you can use on a phone where you can scan a cocoa tree, and it kind of tells you the level of disease or any of the issues that it has. And kind of imagine putting that into the hands of farmers around the world so that we can start to kind of take our knowledge and kind of use it at the moment that kind of action can be taken. So I think there's so many applications. I think we've just always got to, to kind of Colleen's point, make sure that we understand how we integrate the human-led, digitally enabled, and make sure we kind of really take care of that partnership.

Holly Freishtat 35:10

And Soren?

Soren Bjorn 35:12

Yeah. I mean, we are using it tremendously in genetic development today, right? The very advanced breeding models, the predictive breeding models will not only allow us to more or less figure out what happens when we take two parents and put them together, right? What's the likely outcome? When we develop a strawberry variety here, we can now predict the likelihood that it's going to work in Australia, and that's all because of AI. And it's going to come to many other areas in our business. Supply forecasting was a big challenge in agriculture. How we advise farmers on agronomy and getting their support is definitely coming there. And then also for the benefit of everybody, it's going to come in how we predict the price we use every day, so we are not mismatched on the price. We have a lot of volatility in our business, so we have to manage that every day, and a lot of times we use the price to manage it. And so we always have the product priced right. So we have extra product, which we have a lot of times, then we've got to get the price down, benefit all the consumers. Obviously, vice versa, when we don't have a lot of supply, we've got to get the price up so the farmers can make money. And AI will play a tremendous role in these areas.

Holly Freishtat 36:16

So this brings us to this moment, right, of what does it take to lead in this next era, right? This era of complexity, where we have AI with such great opportunity. We're seeing disruption at the same time. We're seeing trends towards health. And I really want to leave here today, I mean, we started this conversation saying food is the center of everything. Yeah. I know we all believe that anyway. But as we think about what does it take to lead, Peter, I want to hear your views. Five years from now, what did we get right and what did we get—that we're doing too slow right now? Yeah. How do you want to see leadership in the future?

Peter McGuinness 36:54

Yeah. I just want to say one thing on AI, which is interesting, and it's part of this five-year leadership, I think. We have to be very careful with it and use it to the best of its ability. And we have 39 factories at Bel, and we use AI in the factories. And if that increases the quality of the product, maybe takes some cost out of the production of the product, and we can pass that on to the consumer and make things more accessible, it's beautiful. But I think AI is a little scary, and I think it needs to be... So if it's quality and cost, beautiful in food production, right? And the farmer's benefiting, and the consumer's benefiting. But I think we have to be very, very careful. And so for me, what does leadership look in this new era? We have to be—our mindset needs to be in the right place. We have to be conscious about the consumer. We have to be conscious about the planet. When I was at Impossible—there are real resource issues. Climate change is real, whether you want to admit it or not. The farmers struggle, whether we want to admit it or not. And we sit right in the middle of all of that. And so we can impact more than most, frankly. And so, if you put the planet in the center, if you put the farmer in the center, and you put the consumer in the center in the way you run your business and develop your products, I think we're going to be on the right side of the trend in truth. I think your business and your brand is going to be extremely powerful, and I think it's going to be very sustainable. And we're getting pulled in a lot of different directions. And if we just stay planet, consumer, farmer, animal, right? That should never change. I don't care how much technology there is.

Holly Freishtat 38:44

So moving into this—

Peter McGuinness 38:45

—The mindset—

Holly Freishtat 38:46

—The mindset. So let's talk. We're lightning round here. So Colleen, when you think about leading in this new era, what do you think about?

Colleen Lindholz 38:53

Intentional collaboration—

Holly Freishtat 38:54

—Right—

Colleen Lindholz 38:55

—That we've never seen before.

Holly Freishtat 38:56

Amanda?

Amanda Davies 38:58

Yes, absolutely that. And what does that take in terms of that intentional collaboration? Leadership in the next era is about taking ego out of the middle of the room and putting our opportunity statements in the middle.

Holly Freishtat 39:11

Soren?

Soren Bjorn 39:13

Well, as you and I talked about this week, is we should do a better job of bringing the best farmers to the table, make sure they're part of the conversation, and not all of us that make a lot of PowerPoint presentations, okay? And do good board decks, okay. So we need to get a few more farmers in the room. That's what leadership looks like.

Holly Freishtat 39:27

And we do have some farmers in the room. So I think that really looking at what does it take to lead in this new era with food being absolutely essential to everything we do, it is about that collaboration. It's about the partnerships that make us uncomfortable, right? It's no longer just sitting in our camps. It's how do we lean into the discomfort and creating partnerships where we never would have imagined, to embrace and really find a way to see the optimism in how do we bring in greater health, a more resilient food supply chain through partnerships in ways we never imagined. So with that, I thank you all for being here today, and I thank the audience. And thank you again.

Soren Bjorn 40:09

Thank you.

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