

Futurist Mike Walsh: Food producers must embrace innovation to succeed with next generation

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The most successful food producers and manufacturers in the next decade will be the ones who harness the rapid advancements in science and technology to meet the demands of the first fully digital generation as they become adults, according to a July 13 keynote address by futurist Mike Walsh at IFT15: Where Science Feeds Innovation hosted by the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) in Chicago.

"If you really want to understand the future, you have to start with the people who are going to live in it," said Walsh, author of *The Dictionary of Dangerous Ideas* and CEO of the consultancy firm Tomorrow. "And the most disruptive group of future food consumers, I believe, are people who are currently celebrating their eighth birthday. If you can understand how an eight year old thinks, you're a long way toward really understanding a transformative change in consumer behavior. "

Walsh said that age group is of particular interest because they were born in 2007—the same year the iPhone was introduced. They are the first generation to be connected from birth, so they are growing up with a much different outlook on shopping, cooking and eating than other generations. They will expect products that are customized, readily available and—as already apparently on Instagram—look good enough to be photographed and shared on social media.

"When you think about an eight year old, how they will be making judgments about food, about food brands, eating and dining, it's all going to be very connected to their experience on that smartphone," he said. "Look at the way the next generation forms their views on food today. Look at Instagram—there is some extent to which the next generation doesn't want to eat a meal unless they are going to take a picture of it."

Walsh said the challenge for the entire food industry is to be prepared to meet the demands of these tech-savvy, on-demand consumers while still producing enough food for a population expected to grow to about 9 billion by 2050. He said that will elevate the discussion already taking place about whether to genetically modify plants and livestock to meet the population's food needs.

"As a futurist, one of the things really that fascinates me is that intersection point where [science and technology](#) head-butts the realities of everyday human experience," Walsh said. "As food scientists and technologists, this is something you encounter every day, because for all of the developments that you come up with, at the end you're still talking about [food](#)."

More information: am-fe.ift.org/cms/

Provided by Institute of Food Technologists

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