

UAE's FoodTech Challenge Unveils 42 Trailblazing Semifinalists from Around the World Competing for \$2 Million Cash Prize

- *The third edition of the FoodTech Challenge received more than 1,200 submissions from 113 countries*
- *A panel of regional and international judges selected 42 standout startups as this year's semifinalists*
- *Four winners will be announced later this year, sharing a \$2 million cash prize to scale their solutions across the UAE and underserved markets in the Global South*

Abu Dhabi, UAE: 06 May 2025—The FoodTech Challenge (FTC) has shortlisted 42 innovative early-stage startups for their tech-driven solutions that have the potential to transform global food systems.

Organized by the International Affairs Office at the UAE Presidential Court and Tamkeen and delivered in partnership with the Gates Foundation, ne'ma, the UAE's Food Loss and Waste Initiative, and Silal, a leading UAE agri-food company, the third iteration of FTC offers its biggest cash prize to date. The competition was announced at the Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting in 2024.

Later this year, four winners will receive a share of \$2 million in cash grants. In addition to funding, each winner will benefit from go-to-market support and access to a global network - empowering them to deploy their solutions in the UAE and scale across the Global South. With its arid desert climate, limited arable land, and scarce freshwater resources, the UAE offers an ideal launchpad for pioneering innovations that can be adapted to similar environments worldwide.

FTC's shortlisted candidates were selected by a panel of more than 30 technical and commercial experts spanning agri-tech, venture capital, climate science, food systems, and policy.

Judges received more than 1,200 entries from across 113 countries, an 80% increase in applications over the previous edition. Submissions feature groundbreaking solutions, from lab-grown dairy products and regenerative seaweed farming to AI-powered crop monitoring and biodegradable hydrogels.

Startups from the UAE accounted for 16% of the semifinalist cohort, underscoring the Emirates' emergence as a global hub for agri-tech innovation, while 40% have at least one female co-founder and 33% are led or co-led by youth entrepreneurs. The cohort includes startups from Australia, Austria, Brazil, Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Morocco, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, the UAE, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Khuloud Hassan Al Nuwais, Chief Sustainability Officer, Emirates Foundation and ne'ma Committee Secretary General, said: "The third edition of the Food Tech Challenge continues to spotlight the power of innovation in transforming the future of food systems. This year's shortlist is a testament to the ingenuity of local and global startups working at the intersection of technology and



sustainability—45 percent of which are tackling food loss and waste, one of the most pressing challenges facing our world today. From smart packaging and AI-driven analytics to urban agriculture and renewable energy solutions, these finalists reflect the bold, cross-sectoral approaches we need to build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food systems. ne'ma is proud to support this platform that accelerates impactful solutions and contributes to building a vibrant community of changemakers.”

Salmeen al Ameri, Chief Executive Officer, Silal, said: “As the UAE emerges as a global leader in agri-tech innovation, we take pride in contributing to its successes by supporting initiatives such as the FoodTech Challenge. Bold and scalable solutions require a launchpad for growth, and this year’s cohort is filled with truly innovative solutions that, with the right support, can help make a real impact. We look forward to working closely with the finalists and winners, providing them market access as part of our wider commitment to catalyzing change in the food and agriculture industry.”

In the next phase of the competition, selected startups will participate in a series of interviews and pitches, ultimately leading to the selection of a final top 10 shortlist.

Finale judges for the third edition of the FTC include HE Mariam Almheiri, Head of the International Affairs Office at the Presidential Court of the UAE, and Co-Chair of FTC; Rima Al Mokarrab, Chair of Tamkeen and Co-Chair of FTC; HRH Prince Khaled bin Alwaleed bin Talal Al Saud, Founder and CEO of KBW Ventures; Khuloud Hassan Al Nuwais, Chief Sustainability Officer, Emirates Foundation and ne'ma Committee Secretary General; Rodger Voorhies, President of Global Growth & Opportunity at the Gates Foundation; Dr. Shamal Mohammed, CEO, Innovation Oasis at Silal; Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Executive Managing Director at CGIAR; and Dr. Agnes Kalibata, President of AGRA and former UN Special Envoy to the Food Systems Summit.

Launched under the UAE’s National Food Security Strategy 2051, FTC leverages the country’s arid, resource-scarce environment as a launchpad for scalable innovations. With an estimated two billion more people to feed by 2050, the competition is anchored in the UAE’s broader vision to food security by identifying and supporting solutions related to the food-water-energy nexus, reducing food loss and waste, and accelerating solutions that can be replicated globally.

Winners of previous editions have gone on to achieve notable success, securing follow-on funding, forming strategic partnerships, and bringing their innovations to market. Among them are iyris (formerly Red Sea Farms), which has raised over \$34 million since its win and scaled its technologies across Silal farms in Abu Dhabi, and Orbisk, which completed a €8.3 million Series A funding round in December 2024. To date, FTC winners have raised a total of \$60 million for their solutions following their participation in the challenge.

To explore the full list of 42 semifinalists and learn more about the FoodTech Challenge, visit www.foodtechchallenge.com.

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About the Food Tech Challenge (FTC)

The FoodTech Challenge (FTC) is a global competition that identifies and supports leading early-stage, tech-driven solutions poised to transform food systems in arid, hot, and increasingly challenging environments. These environments, in addition to being among the most food-insecure



nations, are also underserved, untapped for innovations, and underinvested in by traditional agricultural practices.

Organized by the United Arab Emirates, FTC is on a mission to catalyze innovation to address the unprecedented strain that climate change, changing demographics, and other supply disruptions are placing on the food security of more countries each year. The third edition of the FoodTech Challenge is structured around three key focus areas related to the food-water-energy nexus: Food & Water, Food & Energy, and Food Loss & Waste. The competition will enable four winners to develop their solutions in the UAE and deploy them across underserved markets in the Global South, with each winner benefitting from a shared prize of \$2M in cash grants, as well as access to a robust network of partners.

FTC empowers innovators to contribute to a world where food security is a reality for all. The competition is delivered by the International Affairs Office at the Presidential Court of the UAE and Tamkeen in partnership with ne'ma, the UAE's Food Loss and Waste Initiative; Silal, the UAE's leading agtech company; the Gates Foundation, Clinton Global Initiative, and other key partners.

The program is further supported by Ecosystem Enablers, including start-up accelerators such as Hub71, Sheraa, and startAD; organizations like the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture, AGRA, and CGIAR A4IP; and companies such as Al Tamimi & Company.