

The UAE FoodTech Challenge 2026 Winners to Join National Agri-Tech Ecosystem and Support Global Food Security

- *Global agri-food innovation competition names four winning startups during Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week.*
- *HyveGeo, Permia Sensing, Flybox, and Akorn Technology to share USD 2 million to pilot and scale solutions in the UAE and the Global South.*

Abu Dhabi, UAE: 15 January 2026 – The third edition of the UAE FoodTech Challenge, a global competition that identifies and scales the world's most promising agri-tech innovations, concluded at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week with the announcement of four winning startups:

Category: Climate-Smart Food Production

- **Permia Sensing** uses AI, bioacoustic sensors and drone imaging to monitor tree health. Already covering over 15,000 hectares of palm plantations in Sri Lanka, the technology offers early detection of stress factors, such as dehydration and pest infestations, enabling farmers to boost yields and reduce waste. They now plan to work with local partners to finesse and localize their solution for the UAE and scale its application across the Middle East.
- **HyveGeo** turns agricultural waste into a carbon-rich biochar, then enriches it with microbes to create a high-performance soil enhancer. This circular, nature-based approach is already being used by farmers and landscape managers across the UAE, transforming arid, desert soil into fertile, arable land. As winners, they plan to expand their research and launch pilots in markets across the Global South.

Category: Food Loss & Waste Reduction

- **Akorn Technology** produces a natural, edible coating for fruit and vegetables, including a vegetable protein to slow ripening, a wax to reduce moisture loss, and a vegetable oil to maintain color. Their solution is already being used in Egypt and Ghana to extend the shelf life of produce and cut post-harvest losses, and will now be optimized for use in the UAE and arid environments across the region.
- **Flybox** uses black soldier fly larvae to convert agricultural byproducts into high-quality protein and fertilizer, while reducing waste sent to landfill. Housed in shipping containers, their off-grid, low-cost solution is currently being used in Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria, and will now launch in the UAE, with plans for working with local waste management partners to deploy at scale.

From an initial pool of 1,215 submissions from 113 countries, ten finalists advanced to the final stage of the competition, presenting their solutions in live pitches to an international judging panel comprising senior leaders and experts in food systems, sustainability, investment, and international development. Following evaluation, the four winning startups were announced during an awards ceremony on the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week main stage.

Rima Al Mokarrab, Chair of Tamkeen and Co-Chair of the FoodTech Challenge, remarked:

“Building resilient and secure food systems is central to the UAE’s long-term vision for a prosperous future. The latest winners of the UAE FoodTech Challenge now join a growing community of past awardees, who have since raised over USD 48 million in follow-on funding and launched more than 50 pilot projects across the UAE and other markets. As they begin this next phase of their journey, support

from our network of partners and UAE's world-class innovation ecosystem will serve as a launchpad for their solutions, enabling them to contribute to more resilient and sustainable food systems in the UAE, the global south, and worldwide."

The four teams will share a USD 2 million prize and will be invited to scale their solutions in the UAE, where they will receive tailored in-kind support, including pilot opportunities, access to research facilities, market-entry guidance, mentorship, and investor introductions through an extensive network of local and international partners. From this base, the winners will work to deploy and scale their solutions across key markets in the Global South, supporting more resilient and sustainable food systems.

Fatema Almulla, Senior Specialist Development, International Affairs Office at the UAE Presidential Court, said:

"The UAE plays a leading role in international development, with agricultural innovation central to its global engagement. Through the UAE FoodTech Challenge, winning startups are embedded within a proven development ecosystem; where advanced technologies, policy leadership, and global expertise come together to accelerate solutions from pilot to scale. This is how innovation is translated into measurable impact, from the UAE to climate-vulnerable regions worldwide."

This year's FoodTech Challenge is organized by the International Affairs Office at the UAE Presidential Court and Tamkeen, in partnership with the Gates Foundation, ne'ma (The National Food Loss and Waste Initiative), and Silal. The finalist cohort represents a diverse range of approaches to food system innovation, including advanced technologies for post-harvest preservation, waste-to-value conversion, precision agriculture, and resource-efficient food production.

Shelly Sundberg, Deputy Director of Adaptive and Equitable Food Systems at the Gates Foundation, said:

"The UAE FoodTech Challenge plays an important role in advancing practical, scalable, and accessible solutions that can strengthen food security across underserved and climate-vulnerable populations. At the Gates Foundation, we are proud to support initiatives that translate innovation into real-world impact, helping food systems reduce loss, improve sustainability, and expand access to safe, affordable and nutritious food. These are essential to building more resilient food systems in the face of climate and economic pressures."

Khuloud Nowais, Chief Sustainability Officer at Emirates Foundation and Secretary General of the ne'ma Steering Committee, said:

"Seeing the caliber of this year's winners and the diversity of their solutions has been truly inspiring. As a judge, it has been encouraging to witness the growing sophistication of solutions that address food loss and waste challenges. At ne'ma, we are proud to support initiatives that turn ideas into actionable, lasting impact for food systems."

The UAE FoodTech Challenge identifies and accelerates agri-food technology solutions that boost food production and reduce food loss and waste in arid and increasingly climate-stressed environments. Attracting technology-driven innovations that can be refined in the UAE and scaled internationally, the competition directly supports the UAE's long-term food security ambitions and contributes to global food system resilience.

To learn more about the FoodTech Challenge, visit: www.foodtechchallenge.com

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