

Monday 19 August 2019

**“Food is fundamental to our being able to make progress,” says Robyn Metcalfe.**

Self-declared “Food Futurist”, Robyn Metcalfe appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival to discuss her new book *Food Routes* and to talk about the supply chain that food production and distribution operates under.

Speaking about the process of food production running smoothly, Metcalfe said that any issues in the supply chain can lead to a “ripple effect of this entire system and it really shapes whether we have access to food at all. Alongside really complicated parts of it, there’s some really simple truths, and that is about food in general... and that is that it really does unite us and it really empowers us. In fact, if we can really solve how to get more food to more people at a low cost, that’s nutritionist, then we can turn our attention to solving other problems.”

She went on to explain that consumers and food producers are currently at the end of a “period of distrust” between larger food companies, who “have built a culture of distrust between consumers, ourselves, and the food systems.”

Metcalfe described her “four key ingredients to get food moving”, these were; reliability, trust, adaptability and technology. She went on to explain that the relationship between a consumer of food from the supply chain relies on these factors more than choosing to go with a local supplier because of their close proximity.

“The supply chain is built on trust and so many times you think that ‘this person should buy food from this person because they’re just down the street’, but actually the person that they might have a trust relationship with might be much further away.”

Discussion turned to the recent trend of meat free substitutes and products that emulate animal by-products. Metcalfe isn't totally convinced about merits the forays into meat-free-meat, she said, "There's a lot to be determined about it. "People have been against processed food, pushing back on processed food, and you really can't get anything more processed than an Impossible Burger, right? I mean... it's got GMO yeast in it and it's made behind locked doors by people wearing white suits. So it's just interesting that now, there's an acceptability of technology that we haven't seen before.

When discussing the impact of technology on food production and distribution, Metcalfe stated that she believed that the global food chain is enough to feed the population in the world as "we're going to be growing the food in new places, whether it's vertical, you know. Or you get two or three harvests or six harvests a year in enclosed environments. You're going to see a lot more engineered food. I mean, I think that's just where we're going now in order to get food to grow in new places because of climate change.

"We're pretty good at producing food, we're really bad at distributing it. Which is another reason to pay attention to supply chain. A lot of it sits around in rocks, sits in caves, you know, all kinds of places it shouldn't."