



UN spotlights the hidden heroes changing food systems in Europe and Central Asia

Ten inspiring, diverse, and powerful small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from across Europe and Central Asia are among 50 winners of the UN Best Small Business: Good Food for All competition.

Tuesday, July 27, Rome – Ten SMEs from Europe and Central Asia have been announced within the contingent of 50 Best Small Businesses of the “[Good Food for All](#)” competition, held in conjunction with the UN Food Systems Summit.

Selected from nearly 2,000 applications from 135 countries, the 50 winners all showcase inspiring, diverse, and impactful solutions in improving access to healthy, sustainable food. They will also share US\$100,000 in cash prizes.

“Small businesses are the hidden heroes of our food systems, managing at least half of our food economies and keeping food on our plates throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,” said **Dr Agnes Kalibata**, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the 2021 Food Systems Summit. “We must understand the challenges they face and work together to ensure they remain at the heart of efforts to improve the future of food.”

Each winner was selected for how their business contributes to healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food for the communities they serve; the strength of their vision for the future; and how well they communicate the current and future impacts of their business.

Among the regional winners in Europe and Central Asia, several female-led enterprises demonstrate the critical role of SMEs in nourishing people and providing inclusive livelihoods and equity.

With a mission to train others in the knowledge and implementation of zero waste, Blaghichka is the first zero waste restaurant in Bulgaria, employing under-privileged youth. “Our restaurant food is 95% locally grown; we compost all waste, including from our neighbourhood. Our vision is to spread the message so more and more people in Bulgaria act on zero waste,” explains founder and CEO **Blazhka Dimitrova**.

Many other enterprises are innovating and scaling solutions for nutrition and sustainability, including [IUV](#), an innovative Italian start-up working on edible, plastic-free packaging solutions. Their packaging consists of biodegradable, compostable vegetable biopolymer film designed to protect and/or improve the freshness, firmness, shelf-life, appearance, taste, colour, and smell of foods.

The social and economic wellbeing of local populations, plus care for the environment, is the stimulus behind many small enterprises providing solutions for sustainable consumption, including a leading Portuguese restaurant. “We are totally committed to sustainable eating in our vision to provide a cuisine of emotion and respect for seasonal produce as we strive for near zero with using only local products and little waste,” enthuses owner and chef **Antonio Loureiro**. His restaurant, [A Cozinha](#), is not only Michelin-starred but Green Key awarded for excellence in environmental responsibility.



A hydro-powered irrigation pump, developed by Netherlands-based [Aqyista](#), avoids the need for electricity or other fuel – just a source of flowing water to pump over 43,000 litres a day. The Barsha (meaning rain in Nepalese) pump has been taken up in more than 12 countries, including Indonesia, Nepal, Spain, and Zambia.

The future of food and global ecosystems requires new ways of doing business. Rapid developments in digital agriculture during recent years is bringing in a tide of new approaches. [Whole Surplus, a social enterprise](#) in Turkey, uses digital technology and a circular economy model to help businesses recover value from food surplus across the value chain – from retailers and recycling firms to non-profits managing food donations. “Our aim is to raise awareness across the sector and reduce partner’s food waste-related carbon emissions by 50%, as well as set an example for the formation of other new start-ups,” states CEO and co-founder **Olcay Silahlı**.

Also working to reduce waste, [Encantado de Comerte](#) is an app developed by a team of young entrepreneurs in Spain that allows food retailers to publish unsold food at the end of each day. “Our ambition is to be a company that generates a positive impact,” enthuses CEO and co-founder **Gabriel Ramas**. “Caring for the planet is not a matter of fashion, but a citizen duty; and we trust in the empowerment of people and their ability to generate change.”

The competition winners were announced alongside a new [report](#), based on a global survey of these businesses’ ambition and needs. The report outlines three critical pathways for supporting small businesses in realising their full promise: creating more conducive business environments, offering more positive incentives, and empowering small business leaders to have greater influence in sector planning.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

For all media enquiries and interview requests, **contact:** FSScommunications@un.org

Find out more about the 50 winners on the [Food Systems Summit Community Page](#)

View the announcement ceremony via the livestream: www.facebook.com/UNFoodSystems

Download the full accompanying report “A Small Business Agenda for the UN Food Systems Summit” (PDF): www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/unfss-small_business_agenda.pdf

Executive summary of report available in: [French](#); [Russian](#); [Spanish](#)

About the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit

The UN Food Systems Summit was announced by the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, on World Food Day last October as a part of the Decade of Action for delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The aim of the Summit is to deliver progress on all 17 of the SDGs through a food systems approach, leveraging the interconnectedness of food systems to global challenges such as hunger, climate change, poverty and inequality. More information about the



2021 UN Food Systems Summit and a list of Advisory Committee and Scientific Group members can be found online: www.un.org/foodsystemssummit

Additional European and Central Asia winners' information and quotes:

In Serbia, [Agro Iris](#) is a social enterprise created to help small- and medium-sized agricultural producers in rural areas. Producers harvest quality fruits and vegetables from family orchards and farms for drying and packaging without artificial additives/preservatives, under the brand ZaDruga (ForFriend).

In the Russian Federation, mobile app B-Pay has been developed by [Briskly](#) for scanning and paying for goods in retail stores and in restaurants. "We offer our clients secure purchasing to enable any retail business to be more innovative without large cost and time investments," states innovator and CEO **Gleb Kharitonov**.

In Italy, [Treedom](#) is the first global platform to enable individuals and companies to plant trees online. Since being launched, more than 1.9 million trees have been planted across 17 countries. All the trees are planted by local farmers, thereby contributing to social, environmental, and economic benefits.

A pioneering digital platform by [Fresh.Land](#), in Denmark, is enabling farmers to sell fresh products directly to consumers. The company's integrated approach eliminates the use of chemicals to preserve products and saves up to 88% of greenhouse gas emissions from storage and food waste. "Our vision is to scale across the EU and make the food industry more economically and environmentally sustainable," emphasises CEO and co-founder **Mathilde Jakobsen**.

List of regional winners with 2 minute video links:

A Cozinha by Antonio Loureiro	Portugal	Link
AGRO IRIS d.o.o.	Serbia	Link
AQysta	Netherlands	Link
Blagichka Ltd. - the zero waste company	Bulgaria	Link
Briskly	Russian Federation	N/A
Encantado de Comerte	España	Link
Fresh.Land	Denmark	Link
IUV	Italy	Link
Treedom	Italy	Link
Whole Surplus	Turkey	Link