



Longread | Executive MBA Alumna on sustainability can lead to value creation

I Bridging the sustainability gap in the board room

In Brazil, 41.000 tonnes of food are being wasted annually, enough to feed 25 million people. At the same time, people are going hungry. "Wasting so much food has a tremendous social impact on public health and food security. Besides, it is a source of environmental pollution and a waste of labour, water and transport. There is a huge potential to improve the relationships between food production systems, nature and economic growth, in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals", says Brazilian environmental scientist Raquel Paiva Serôa da Motta.



From 2018, Raquel developed her business skills by participating in the Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programme Food and Agribusiness, a joint effort of Wageningen University & Research and TIAS School for Business and Society in Tilburg. As a capstone in the final part of the EMBA programme, she developed a business model for a food surplus start-up, focussed on Brazil. She joined hands with another entrepreneur based in the capital of Brazil and co-founded Food Flow, an early stage start-up for fighting food waste. "I want to have an impact, do something back for my home country."

Food Flow is a mobile marketplace and app that supports local economies. Users of Food Flow can pick up surplus quality



food at a discount up to 70%. "Restaurants, bakeries and hotel can offer deals at this marketplace to avoid food waste, improve their sustainability reputation and have an additional revenue income", says Raquel. "This concept was already thriving in Europe, but for Brazil, it was totally new.

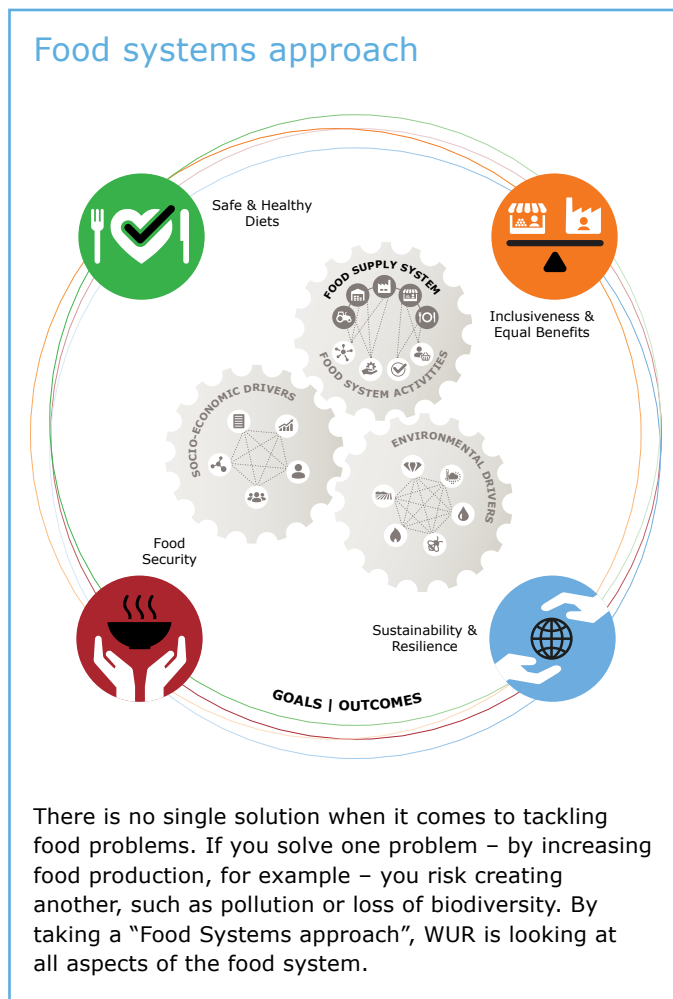
We face many challenges, we have to change a mindset and overcome constraints caused by COVID. But in the end everyone wins, including our planet by avoiding the impact created by wasting food."

The app fills a gap. Within a year, Brazilian restaurants, bakeries and food retailers have joined the mobile marketplace. Remarkably, Food Flow has no office, everything happens on-line. Raquel contributes from her home in Antwerp, where she lives with her Belgian fiancée,

in the late hours, on top of a challenging job as an international sustainability, nutrition and health manager for Kellogg Company. "The food industry is putting more and more effort into tailoring healthier food, natural, local ingredients, sustainable practices, decent pay for local farmers, protection of local watersheds. It is a challenging and impactful arena to navigate in."

"I'm passionate about sustainability. In food and agriculture, you can tangibly see the impact of sustainability. Sustainable practices can really improve your productivity and create better, future-proof systems."

Raquel originates from Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. This young city, founded 60 years ago, is full of expats from the whole country. When Raquel went to university, sustainability was a novel concept in Brazil. She and her classmates were the first batch of students of environmental sciences. Raquel won a scholarship to study abroad for a year, and chose to study sustainability in the Netherlands. She moved back and forward between Brazil and the Netherlands several times, got a MSc degree at Radboud University, worked in Brazil. "I went job hunting and was delighted to find a very interesting position as an interdisciplinary researcher at Wageningen Livestock Research. Wageningen is a great environment."



Why an MBA?

She considered continuing her scientific career as a PhD student, but instead chose for a more business-oriented approach. Participating in the Executive MBA programme by WUR and TIAS provided this opportunity. "I had all the scientific skills, but I needed more business tools in order to make sustainability a business case in the board room. I am sure that in companies, sustainability should be as important as marketing and accounting. But in order to convince directors of sales, trade and marketing, you need to share their vocabulary. When they are talking about balance sheets, profit and loss, margins, long term provisions and short term decisions, you can't just talk back in scientific terms and from a scientific mindset. Looking back on myself, I used to be more of a 'scientific dreamer'. You need to have

a business objective and a value perspective as part of your sustainability strategy." Thanks to my EMBA, I can now provide the arguments to prove that sustainability will lead to value creation. "I am confident that I can do it and the MBA brought me here."

Though Raquel is convinced that participating in the EMBA programme was the best decision she ever made, it was a hard decision. "I would spend a lot of time and effort on it and have to finance it myself. I had to take my life savings and cut down on all possible expenses, let go of traveling and other nice things, no opportunity of buying a house. But I needed to invest in myself if I wanted to continue the steps of my career."

Ain't no mountain high enough

Raquel considers herself a 'people's person'. Traveling so much and living abroad has helped her to communicate and connect easily with people. "But I also get major satisfaction when I see my peers and colleagues thriving. It makes me very happy when I can support people in achieving their objectives. During the MBA programme we had multiple sessions on developing management skills and personal leadership. Exploring my leadership capabilities was super valuable. Strong focus on this aspect distinguishes the Wageningen MBA programme from those at other

universities. The leader is the one who keeps evolving, believing that *ain't no mountain high enough* and together we can get there!"

The MBA programme with its tight assignments and demanding assignments also helps students to develop their consultancy skills. "Navigating among lots of projects with tight deadlines, under pressure, understanding the needs and expectations of your clients, that's just like the life of a consultant", says Raquel.

Learning from each other

Now, how could Wageningen further improve the MBA programme? Raquel: "Wageningen is the Silicon Valley for Food and Agriculture. Major companies are settling around the WUR campus: Unilever, FrieslandCampina and so on. We had some excellent classes from their executives, but there is much more potential there. It would be very interesting to

visit their innovation labs, facilities and pilot farms, be more in touch with them. That would be great. Still, the MBA brought me a wonderful experience, and beyond all, I was surrounded by a class of executives – now, friends - as ambitious and passionate as I am. And I've made some friends for life!"

The world needs a new generation of skilled professionals to tackle the challenges in agribusiness. The Executive MBA in F&A can help you to make sustainable changes in food and agriculture and in doing so, change the face of our future world. **Here you can find more information about the MBA Programme.**



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Would you like to know more about the Executive MBA in Food & Agribusiness? Contact our programme adviser:



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