

pioneer

Das Förderprogramm für ein
zukunftsfähiges Food-System

Since 2010, the foodward Foundation has been supporting the transformation towards a regenerative value creation network in the food sector.

foodward shares knowledge and builds bridges between industry, research, NGOs and startups – creating synergies and enabling impactful innovation.

Industry Partners



University Partners



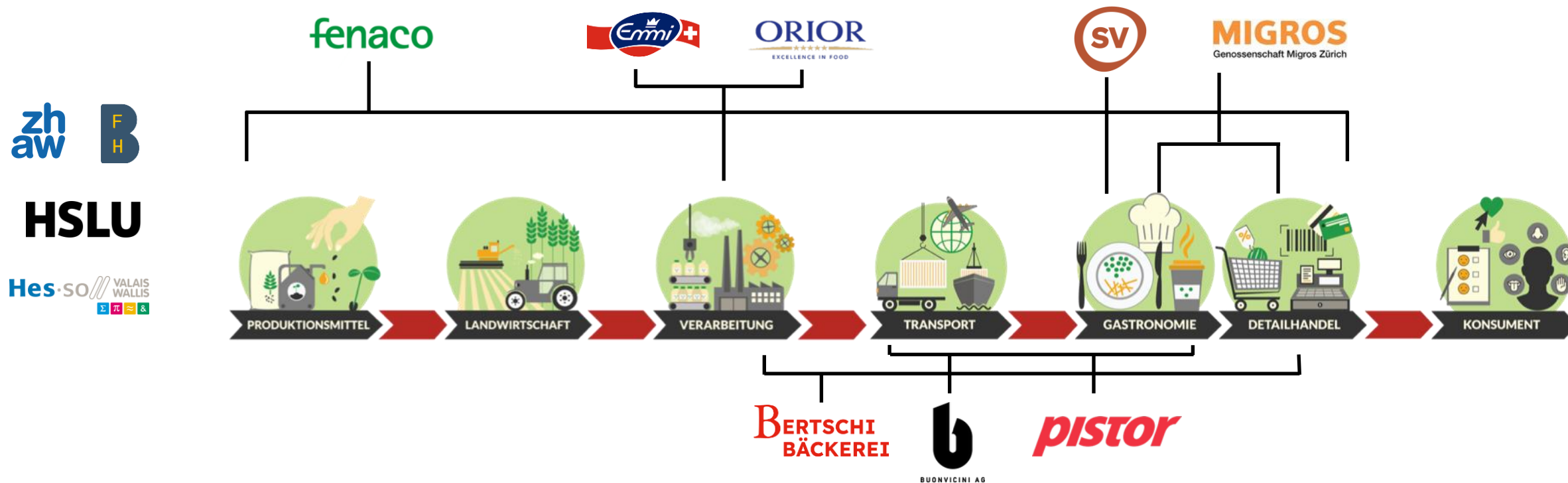


The Swiss Food Innovation Challenge 2026

An initiative by the **foodward Foundation** in close collaboration with **ZHAW entrepreneurship**, offering students the opportunity to develop innovative and entrepreneurial solutions for real-world challenges. This takes place in close cooperation with leading companies from the food industry.

The pioneer partners

Our partners and challenge providers cover the entire food value chain.



pioneer Partner Committee 2026

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Division Food

fenaco



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**BERTSCHI
BÄCKEREI**

University Partner Committee 2026



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Ursula Kretzschmar-Rüger
Head of Food Science & Management



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Representative – University of
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Beyrer Michael
Head of the Sustainable Food Systems Research
Group



Fields of Innovation 2026

Field 1: Smart Food Operations

AI, data and digital tools for a
more efficient food system

Field 2: Waste to Value

Turning side streams and unused
resources into new value

Field 3: Food for Life

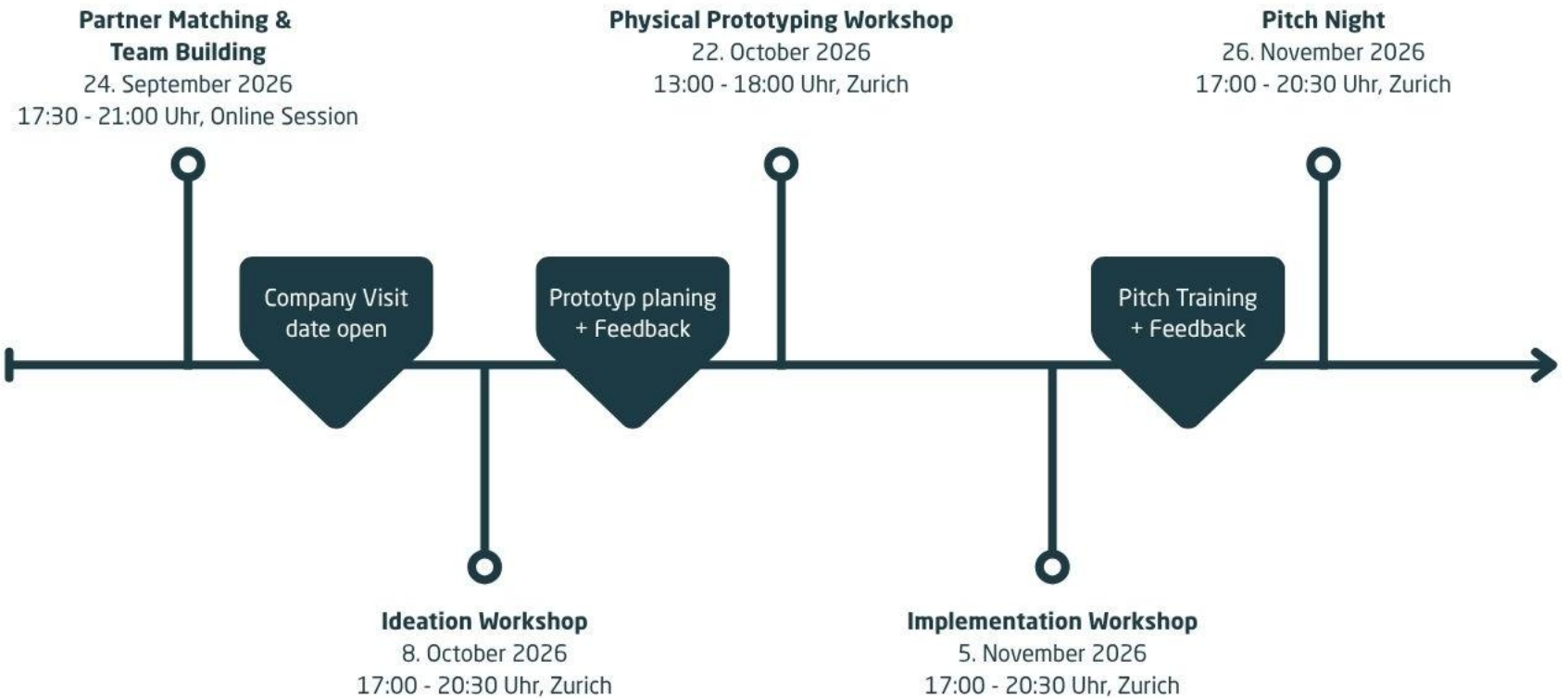
Products and experiences that fit
modern consumer needs

Field 4: Next-Gen Ingredients

Better ingredients for the food
products of tomorrow

Challenge Timeline

Pre-Challenge Phase



Who Can Participate?

Different participants. Different paths. One shared goal: creating impact in the food system.

Individual Student Participants

Students who join the Challenge independently, either as individuals or as a team. They can bring their own idea or join a suitable team during the team-building process.

Module-Based Student Teams

Student teams participating through a university or university of applied sciences module. Their Challenge Journey is aligned with their module structure and lecturers.

Startups & Research Groups

Early-stage startups or research groups with an existing idea, solution or expertise that can contribute to one of the Fields of Innovation.

* All participants start with the Pre-Challenge Phase and the Partner Matching. The following Challenge Journey may differ depending on the participant type.

Important Steps - Pre-Challenge

Your first step into the real-life food system

Before the Challenge Journey starts, you will receive partner briefings, explore the challenge fields and submit a first idea snapshot. This helps partners identify which teams and ideas they would like to meet during the online matching event.

✓ **Challenge Briefings Release** (31 August 2026)

Partner briefings are shared with more information on the four challenge fields, including partner interests, problem areas and possible challenge opportunities. Explore the topic fields and identify what you would like to work on.

✓ **Idea Snapshot Submission** (14 September 2026)

Submit a short idea deck outlining the problem you want to address, your first approach and why your team is motivated to work on this challenge (3-4 Slides max.).

✓ **Partner Review & Interest Check** (till 23 September 2026)

Partners review all submitted idea snapshots and indicate which teams they would like to meet during the online partner matching.

Please note:

- You do not need to present a fully developed solution at this stage.
- The goal is to show a clear problem focus, a first direction and why your approach matters.

Partner Matching & Team Building

Partner Matching

Finding the right partner and team setup

In this online session, teams meet the partners who are interested in their idea snapshot.

- ✓ Together, they clarify whether the idea, challenge focus and collaboration setup are a good fit for the Challenge Journey.
- ✓ If more than one partner is interested, the team chooses one partner to continue with.

Team Building

Individual participants are supported in finding or joining a suitable team.

By the end of this step, each team should have:

- ✓ one partner
- ✓ a clear challenge focus
- ✓ a suitable team setup

Please note:

- Further information on the team building process will be shared in time with the participants concerned.

Different participant streams, one shared final event

The Swiss Food Innovation Challenge brings together individual students, module-based student teams, startups and research groups. After the Partner Matching Event, each participant stream follows the path that best fits their needs and setup.

- ✓ **Individual Student Teams**

Join the guided workshop journey (see “Timeline”-slide) with foodward experts and develop their challenge concept step by step.

- ✓ **Module-Based Student Teams**

Follow a journey aligned with their module structure, lecturers and study program requirements.

- ✓ **Startups & Research Groups**

Continue on a more individual development path, based on their existing solution, expertise or research focus.

All streams come together at the final Pitch Night, where teams present their concept, progress and possible next steps with their partner.

Fields of Innovation 2026

Field 1: Smart Food Operations

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more efficient food system

Field 2: Waste to Value

Turning side streams and unused
resources into new value

Field 3: Food for Life

Products and experiences that fit
modern consumer needs

Field 4: Next-Gen Ingredients

Better ingredients for the food
products of tomorrow

Field 1: Smart Food Operations

AI, data and digital tools for a more efficient food system

This Field is about using digital solutions to make food businesses smarter, faster and more resource-efficient. It focuses on practical improvements in processes, planning, quality, transparency and collaboration.

Possible starting points:

- AI-supported planning, forecasting or decision-making
- Digital tools for reducing waste, errors or manual work
- Better data use in production, quality control or logistics
- Platforms or tools to improve collaboration across value chains



Field 2: Waste to Value

Turning unused resources into new value

This Field explores how food waste, side streams or underused resources can become valuable products, ingredients, materials or business opportunities. The goal is to create more value from what already exists.

Possible starting points:

- New products from side streams or imperfect raw materials
- Upcycled ingredients for food, beverages or other applications
- Concepts to reduce waste in production, retail or consumption
- Circular business models for food, packaging or resources



Field 3: Food for Life

Products and experiences that fit modern consumer needs

This Field starts with people: their everyday lives, habits, expectations and challenges. It is about creating food products, services or communication ideas that are healthy, sustainable, enjoyable and easy to choose.

Possible starting points:

- New product concepts tailored to specific consumer groups (e.g.: longevity, seniors, athletes, allergy-sensitive)
- Healthy, sustainable and/or convenient food solutions
- Better ways to communicate sustainability, origin and/or nutrition
- Ideas for making sustainable and/or healthier choices easier and more attractive



Field 4: Next-Gen Ingredients

Better ingredients for the food products of tomorrow

This Field focuses on the building blocks of food: ingredients, raw materials and recipes. It explores how products can become more sustainable, robust, local, healthy or attractive through smarter ingredient choices.

Possible starting points:

- Replacing critical ingredients with better alternatives
- Using more local, seasonal or underused raw materials
- Reformulating products for better nutrition or sustainability
- Simple tools to compare ingredients by price, function, availability and impact



Why participate?

Your first step into the real-life food system

- ✓ Work on a real challenge from the food industry
- ✓ Build your professional network early
- ✓ Connect directly with industry partners and experts
- ✓ Explore potential topics for a Master's thesis
- ✓ Show your skills in a practical, high-impact setting
- ✓ Create follow-up opportunities: internship, working student role or future job
- ✓ Use the project and partner feedback as a reference for your CV
- ✓ Present your next-step proposal at the Pitch Night: how the idea could continue, and what role you could play in it
- ✓ Potentially earn 3 to 5 ECTS credits, if the Challenge can be integrated into your study program

Previous Challenges - 2024 & 2025

The topics for the Swiss Food Innovation Challenges 2026 will be announced till late August. Previous Challenges are shown here for orientation. The topics are intentionally broad and leave room for creative approaches.



Sustainable Impact - Testimonials



[Link to
Partner Video](#)



[Link to
Student Video](#)

Success Stories

In the first two years, several success stories emerged. Here are a few examples:

- A ZHAW student team impressed Emmi with their idea for senior nutrition. The project is being further pursued: [Link 1](#), [Link 2](#)
- In 2025, a research group from HES-SO received a research project through the Challenge.
- In 2024, a startup successfully solved the Kündig Group's Challenge. Implementation followed.

Several additional follow-up activities resulted from the Challenges, including pilot projects, reviewed Bachelor thesis topics, feasibility assessments, and more.

Contact to the Organizer

For further information please reach out to the project lead:

Philipp is open to provide you with further information and available to support you in the decision-making process.



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shaping the future of food