# ARTICLE # 4 – APRIL 2026

**Industrial Symbiosis: Good Practice, Great Impact**

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Industrial symbiosis is a powerful circular-economy strategy where companies exchange resources (materials, energy, water, or by-products) to reduce waste and create shared economic and environmental value.

**Industrial Symbiosis means:**

- A cooperative model where waste or underused resources from one company become inputs for another.
- A key mechanism to extend resource life, reduce environmental impact, and strengthen local industrial ecosystems.

**Good Practices in Industrial Symbiosis**

*Mapping Underused Resources*

- Identifying materials, heat, water, or by-products that are currently wasted.
- Highlighting the importance of systematic resource mapping to detect symbiotic opportunities.

*Cross-sector collaboration*

- Successful industrial symbiosis networks rely on public–private partnerships and active stakeholder engagement.
- The textile sector, for example, shows how collaboration accelerates waste-to-resource innovation.

*Shared infrastructure & knowledge*

- Co-developing facilities, logistics, or treatment systems.
- Sharing localized knowledge strengthens regional circular ecosystems.

*Clear Governance & Facilitation*

- Dedicated coordinators or platforms help overcome barriers such as regulatory complexity, trust issues, or technical uncertainty.

- Reports emphasize the need for structured facilitation to scale industrial symbiosis networks.

Industrial Symbiosis provides environmental, economic and social benefits as shown in next table:

| **Environmental Benefits** |
|---|
| • Reduced waste generation and landfill use. |
| • Lower emissions through energy and material efficiency. |
| • Extended resource life, supporting circular economy goals. |
| **Economic Benefits** |
| • Cost savings from reduced raw material and waste management expenses. |
| • New revenue streams from valorized by-products. |
| • Increased competitiveness through resource efficiency. |
| **Social & Systemic Benefits** |
| • Stronger regional industrial ecosystems. |
| • Enhanced innovation capacity through cross-sector collaboration. |
| • Better alignment with sustainability regulations and corporate responsibility goals. |

However, industrial symbiosis has key barriers to overcome related to regulatory uncertainty, lack of trust between firms, technical incompatibilities, and limited stakeholders' engagement. But these barriers can be removed when companies collaborate intentionally, map their resource flows, share infrastructure, and build trust—unlocking major environmental, economic, and social benefits.

**Industrial Symbiosis in the Food Sector**

The food industry is uniquely positioned for industrial symbiosis because its by-products are abundant, biodegradable, and often nutrient-rich, perfect for creating new value streams.

**Some practices of industrial symbiosis in the Food Sector comprise:**

*Valorizing Organic By-products:* Food production generates large volumes of residues (peels, pulp, whey, spent grains, shells and bones).

These residues can be converted into animal feed, biofertilizers, biogas, enzymes, nutraceuticals, or compost. They can also use to co-develop extraction facilities with nearby industries (e.g., citrus peel for extraction of pectin for pharma/cosmetics).

*Sharing Heat, Cold, and Energy***:** Food processing is high energy consuming (pasteurization, refrigeration, drying). Industries can exchange waste heat with neighbouring industries (e.g., breweries), or share cold storage infrastructure to reduce peak loads and energy waste.

*Joint Logistics & Packaging:* Food supply chains rely heavily on transport and packaging. Shared logistics hubs can reduce empty return trips. And co-invest in local packaging recycling or composting systems.

*Water Reuse Networks:* Food processing uses large volumes of water for washing, blanching, and cooling. Water can be treated and reuse for irrigation, cleaning, or cooling.

*Cross-sector innovation platforms:* Food by-products often have high biochemical potential. These products can be used by biotech, chemical, and cosmetic industries to extract proteins, fibers, pigments, oils and antioxidants.

All these practices could have environmental, social and regional impact economic impacts:

| **Environmental Impact** |
|---|
| • Massive waste reduction in a sector where up to 30% of biomass becomes by-product. |
| • Lower methane emissions by diverting organic waste from landfills. |
| • Reduced water footprint through reuse loops. |
| • Lower energy consumption via shared heat/cold networks. |
| **Economic Impact** |
| • New revenue from valorized by-products |
| • Lower disposal costs for organic waste. |
| • Shared infrastructure reduces CAPEX and OPEX. |
| • Increased resilience against volatile raw material prices. |
| **Social & Regional Impact** |
| • Strengthens local agri-food clusters. |
| • Creates jobs in bioeconomy, logistics, and resource recovery. |
| • Supports rural development and short supply chains. |

Industrial symbiosis in the food sector also presents some barriers, such as perishability of residues, strict food safety regulations, Variable composition of organic waste, and high water/energy needs. There some solutions: rapid collection networks; on-site pre-treatment (drying, pressing); standardized testing, blending; and digital traceability; neat separation of food-grade and non-food-grade flows by certified partners; and shared utilities and circular infrastructure.

In summary, industrial symbiosis in the food sector transforms organic residues, energy, water, and logistics into shared value, turning waste into resources and strengthening regional food ecosystems.