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MINDSPRINT

TAKE 5 REPORT

Stop bankrolling your food and agri partner's learning curve; demand expertise

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Executive summary

Food and agriculture enterprises are caught in an AI paradox: nearly two-thirds remain in early-stage adoption, yet they are aggressively prioritizing AI-led modernization across manufacturing, sustainability, and customer engagement. The gap between ambition and execution is widening, and the partner ecosystem is failing to close it. Nearly 50% of the respondents in this study said their current partners lack the deep domain expertise that food and agriculture transformation demands. Enterprises are not looking for generic technology providers. They want partners that understand commodity trading floors, traceability chains, and food safety regimes as well as embed AI natively into those workflows.

HFS Research, in partnership with Mindsprint, surveyed 101 senior leaders across food and agriculture enterprises to map transformation barriers, AI maturity, investment priorities, and partner ecosystem gaps.

The survey uncovered five key takeaways:

1

Nearly two-thirds of food and agriculture enterprises (64%) are stuck in early or isolated AI deployments, and 51% are not measuring returns or seeing them below expectations. The industry is in an AI holding pattern.

2

Legacy ERP systems (49%) and data silos (42%) are the dominant barriers, dwarfing budget constraints (15%) and regulatory burden (17%).

The message: Fix the data estate before scaling AI.

3

Investment is concentrated in post-harvest functions such as manufacturing (53%), customer engagement (45%), and sustainability (43%). However, farming and plantation (13%) are starved of AI, where traceability and food safety originate.

4

Roughly 82% rate deep domain expertise as critical or important (55% at "critical" alone). Around 73% demand AI and agentic AI productized offerings. Enterprises want partners that bring context-specific, deployable AI, and not generic staff augmentation.

5

Every enterprise sees unmet needs.

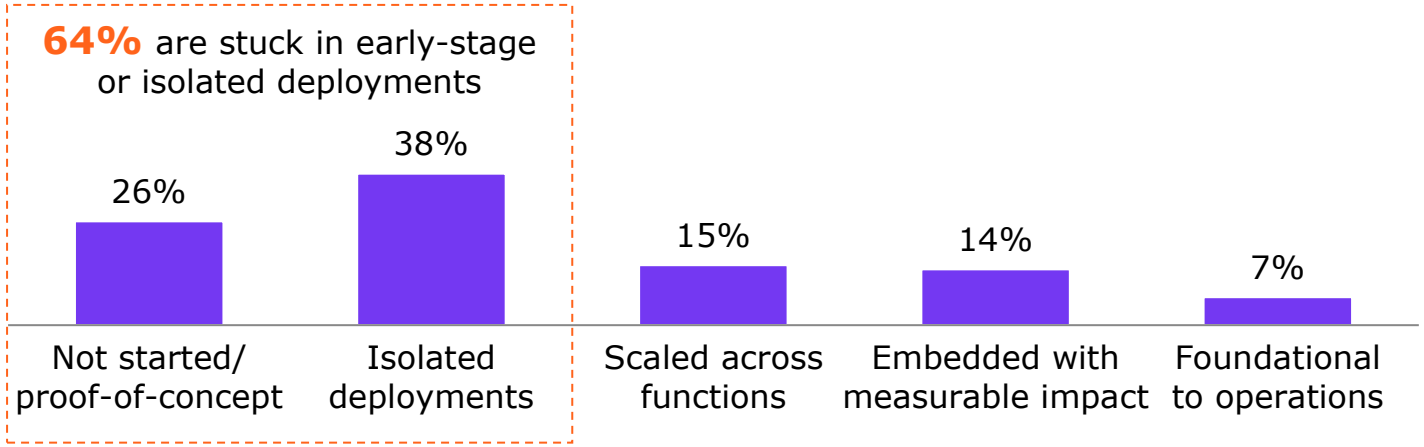
Around 47% say their partners lack deep domain expertise, the most demanded capability. Another 40% point to missing AI and agentic AI productized offerings. Notably, no one reported any significant gaps.

The Bottom Line: Stop bankrolling your food and agri partner's learning curve. Roughly 82% of enterprises rate domain expertise as critical, 47% say their partners lack it, and 40% say partners can't deliver productized AI. The data is unambiguous. Demand expertise or keep paying for someone else's education.

Nearly two-thirds of food and agri enterprises remain stuck in early-stage AI; half of them aren't even measuring or seeing returns

1

Q. How would you describe your organization's current maturity in deploying AI and advanced analytics across your food and agriculture operations?



Q. What returns are you seeing from AI today?

26%	25%	29%	13%	8%
Not measuring	Below expectations	In line; few use cases	Exceeding expectations	Fundamentally changed

51% are not measuring returns or seeing them below expectations

Sample: 101 senior enterprise leaders across food and agriculture globally
Source: HFS Research, 2026

- The industry is in an "AI holding pattern." Sixty-four percent of food and agri enterprises are either still exploring AI or have only isolated deployments. Only 7% have reached a state where AI drives most operational and strategic decisions.
- The returns picture is equally sobering: 51% are either not measuring AI returns at all (26%) or seeing returns below expectations (25%). Only 21% report returns exceeding expectations.
- This gap between aggressive AI prioritization and anemic execution points to a structural problem. Enterprises are not short of tools; they lack the organizational readiness and domain-specific implementation capability to make those tools productive.

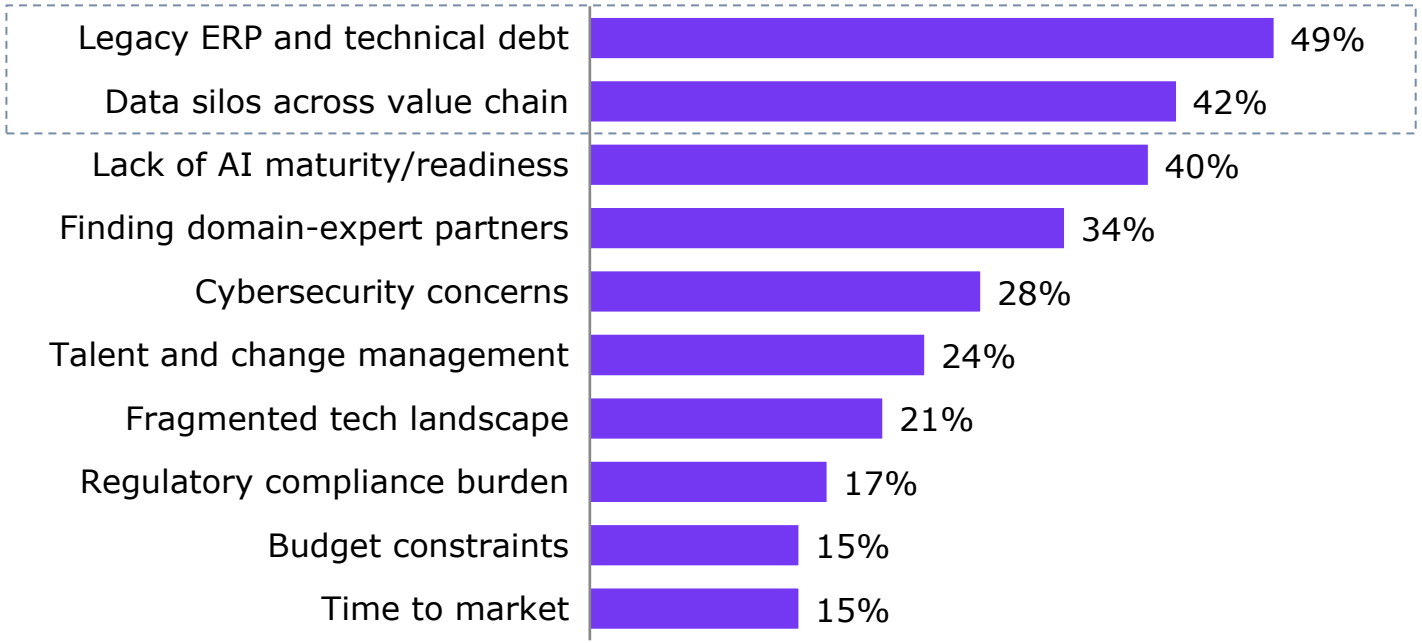
"Fewer pilots. More scale. We have 47 proofs of concept and maybe 4 things actually running in production."

— VP of operations at a livestock and animal protein company in North America

Legacy ERP and data silos dwarf every other barrier, so fix the data estate before scaling AI

2

Q. What are the top three technology and operations challenges holding back digital transformation in your food and agriculture business today?



Budget (15%) and regulatory burden (17%) rank near the bottom. Thus, the conventional excuses don't hold.

Note: Percentages will not add to 100% as respondents could choose up to three answers
Sample: 101 senior enterprise leaders across food and agriculture globally
Source: HFS Research, 2026

- The top two barriers are structural: legacy ERP (49%) and data silos (42%). These are the foundational debts that make AI scaling impossible without first modernizing the data estate.
- Budget constraints (15%) and regulatory burden (17%) rank near the bottom. The conventional excuse that "we don't have the budget" is not what enterprise leaders are saying. They have the money. What they lack is a coherent data layer and modern ERP infrastructure to deploy AI against.
- The implication for enterprise leaders is clear: AI transformation programs that start with use cases instead of data modernization are building on sand.

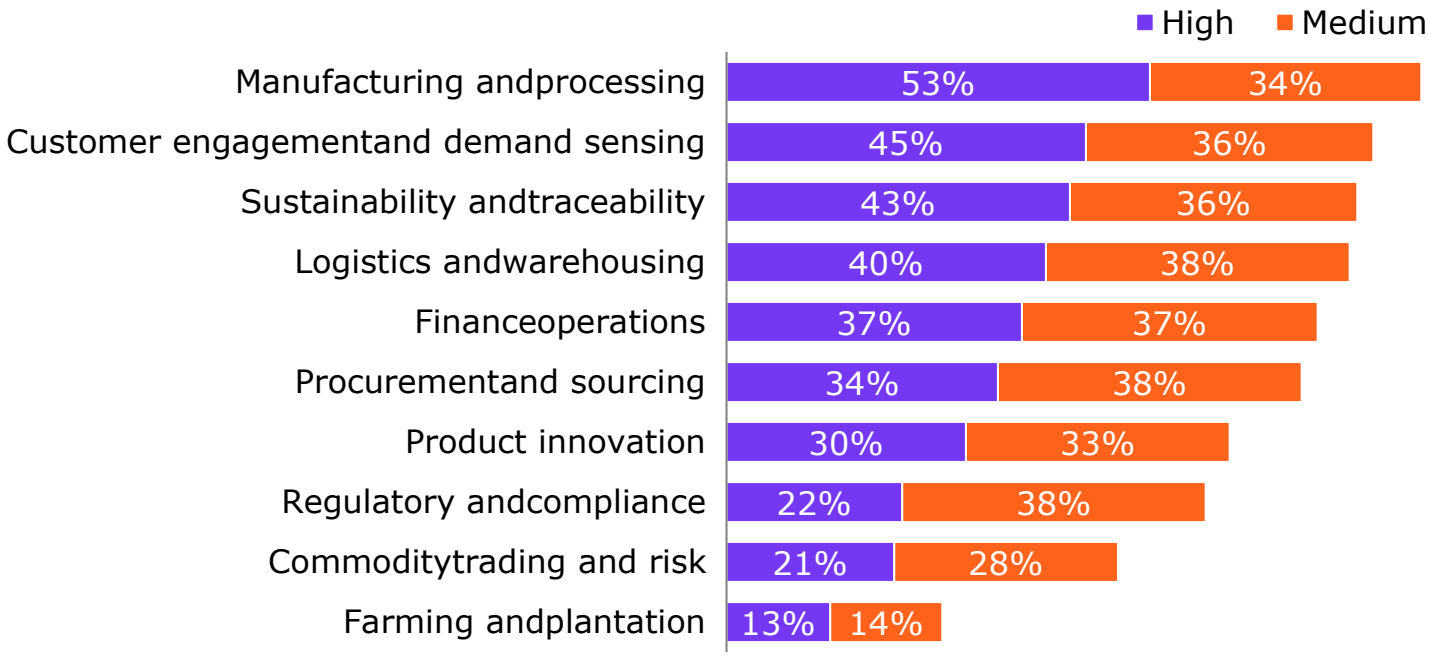
"We've spent more on consulting fees than on people who can actually sustain the systems once they're live."

— C-suite executive at a protein and dairy company in North America

The upstream blind spot: AI investment clusters in post-harvest, while the origin of traceability is starved

3

Q. Which operational areas is your organization prioritizing for modernization through AI infusion over the next 12–18 months?



Farming and plantation (13%) ranks last, despite being where traceability and food safety originate

Note: Percentages will not add to 100% as respondents could choose up to three answers
Sample: 101 senior enterprise leaders across food and agriculture globally
Source: HFS Research, 2026

- The post-harvest cluster tells where the AI budget is going today: manufacturing and processing (53%), customer engagement and demand sensing (45%), and sustainability and traceability (43%). These are the functions closest to revenue and cost optimization, and where AI delivers the most immediate, measurable impact.
- Farming and plantation ranks dead last at 13% high priority, yet it is where traceability, food safety, and sustainability compliance originate. The regulatory imperatives that are existential for market access in Europe and increasingly in APAC start upstream. Enterprises are investing in the middle and end of the value chain while leaving the origin underserved.

"Stop calling it transformation. Just fix the basic workflows."

— C-suite executive for a protein and dairy company in Asia-Pacific

What enterprises demand from partners: Domain expertise leads, followed by proven AI capability

4

Q. When evaluating services or technology partners for food and agriculture transformation, how important are the following capabilities?
Percentage rating on Important (4) or Critical (5) on a 5-point scale

Of those, % Critical (5) alone: Domain expertise 55% | Cybersecurity 56% | Proven AI 45%

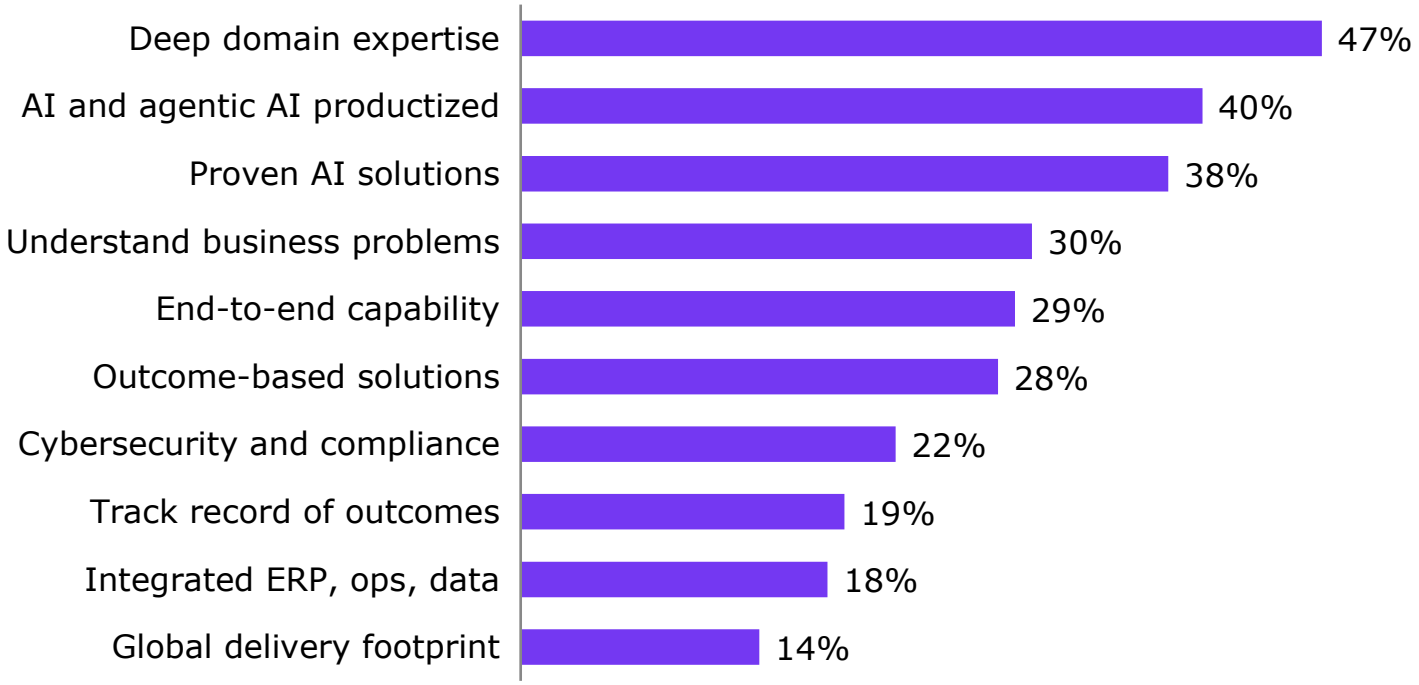
Note: Percentages will not add to 100% as respondents could choose up to three answers
Sample: 101 senior enterprise leaders across food and agriculture globally
Source: HFS Research, 2026

- Domain expertise leads the pack: 82% rate deep food and agriculture domain expertise as critical or important, with 55% at "critical" alone. This is the single strongest signal in the survey.
- Cybersecurity and compliance (77%) reflects the regulated nature of food and agriculture. FSMA, EU traceability mandates, and emerging sustainability reporting requirements make this non-negotiable.
- The demand for AI and agentic AI productized offerings (73%) and outcome-based solutions (72%) confirms that enterprises are past the experimentation phase. They want partners that can show a working product, not a roadmap.

Where partners are failing: 47% say domain expertise is the biggest need unmet

5

Q. Where do you see the biggest gaps in your current partner ecosystem?



0% said "no significant gaps," insinuating that every enterprise sees unmet partner needs

Note: Percentages will not add to 100% as respondents could choose up to three answers
Sample: 101 senior enterprise leaders across food and agriculture globally
Source: HFS Research, 2026

- Forty-seven percent of enterprises identify deep domain expertise as their single biggest partner ecosystem gap. This is the defining constraint, meaning that the most demanded capability (on the previous slide) is also the most absent.
- The second and third gaps: AI and agentic AI productized offerings (40%) and proven AI solutions for agri-food (38%) tell a complementary story. Enterprises don't just want domain knowledge; they want it embedded into ready-to-deploy, AI-native product constructs.

"Our biggest mistake was letting procurement lead vendor selection. They optimized for price. We now have six incompatible systems."

— VP of operations at a food manufacturing company, Asia-Pacific

The Bottom Line:

Stop bankrolling your food and agri partner's learning curve. Around 82% demand domain expertise, 47% say their partners lack it, and 51% are not even seeing measurable returns from AI. Demand expertise or keep paying for someone else's education.

Fix the data estate before chasing AI use cases

The "AI holding pattern" (64% early-stage) will not break with more pilots. Forty-nine percent cite legacy ERP as the top barrier. Enterprise leaders should sequence data modernization before AI scaling, not alongside it.

Audit your partner roster against domain expertise

Eighty-two percent of your peers rate domain expertise as critical, and 47% say their current partners fall short. If your transformation partner can't demonstrate specific knowledge of this value chain, replace them. DO NOT wait for them to learn on your budget.

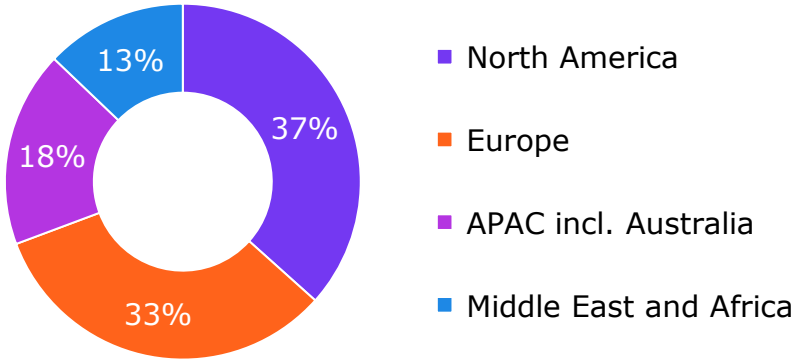
Demand productized AI with outcome accountability

Seventy-three percent of enterprises want productized AI and agentic AI offerings, but 40% say their partners can't deliver them. Stop accepting roadmaps and proofs of concept as progress. Ask for deployable products with measurable outcome commitments before signing.

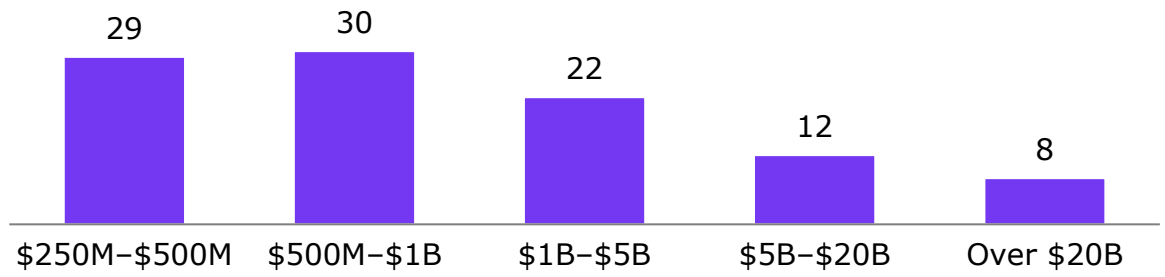
Survey demographics

Industry sub-vertical

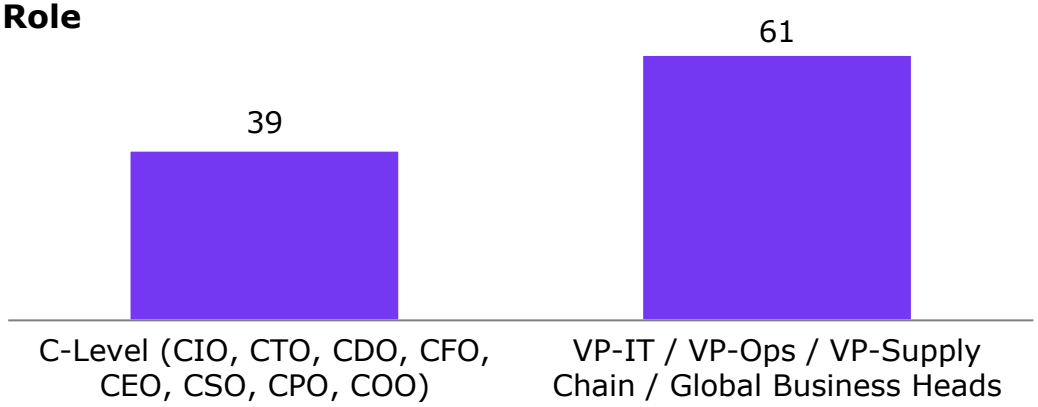
Geography



Revenue band



Role



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About Mindsprint

Mindsprint exists to responsibly engineer the next generation of enterprises, driven by insight, innovation, and passion. With a proven track record spanning two decades, we are the partner of choice for high-impact, AI-driven technology solutions for clients across the globe in industries such as retail, agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, and life sciences, among others.

Our offerings include enterprise technology applications, business process services, cybersecurity solutions, and automation-as-a-service, delivered with a strong commitment to responsible innovation.

Headquartered in Singapore, Mindsprint has a global workforce of 3,200+ professionals across the US, UK, Middle East, India, Australia, and Africa.

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Ashish Chaturvedi is an Executive Research Leader for HFS Research. He leads coverage for supply chain operations, the retail and CPG industry, and business 'data' services. He is an accomplished IT industry analyst, regarded as a top retail expert globally, and is featured regularly in various IT media publications. Additionally, he is a member of multiple industry associations, including RetailWire BrainTrust and RETHINK Retail. With more than 16 years of technology research experience, Ashish has authored over 100 research reports covering retail technologies, enterprise modernization, the platform economy, future supply networks, data platforms, and digital-driven growth.

About HFS

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