

FRIDAY BY Noon

This Week's Hot Topics in
Food, Bev, and Ag



“Balanced diets, featuring ... animal-sourced food produced in resilient, sustainable and low-GHG emission systems, present major opportunities for adaptation and mitigation while generating significant co-benefits in terms of human health.”

— *The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*
(see the unedited quote below)

IPCC: Land and Food



On August 8, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), United Nations' body for assessing science related to climate change, [released](#) a report detailing the relationship between land management, climate change and the global food supply. The undertaking [involved](#) 107 authors from 52 countries assessing more than 7,000 studies.

The influential voices The Intel Distillery tracks were quick to examine the report and share summaries and findings specific to food and agriculture:

- An alarming number of the report summaries suggest IPCC's recommendations center around reduced meat consumption. To achieve this, several sources, including [Grist](#), [The Guardian](#) and [EcoWatch](#), inaccurately omitted any mention of meat consumption from a quote found on Page 26 of the [report](#): "Balanced diets, featuring plant-based foods, such as those based on coarse grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, **and animal-sourced food produced in resilient, sustainable and low-GHG emission systems**, present major opportunities for adaptation and mitigation while generating significant co-benefits in terms of human health." Whether one misquoted and the others simply copied and pasted is impossible to say, but we can conclude reporters should always read the actual report. Seriously.
- David Festa from Environmental Defense Fund [suggested](#), "The scientific breakthroughs that were so successful in boosting yields in the 20th century to fight global hunger are now threatening our food system."
- A [BBC](#) summary [pointed out](#) another tradeoff the report posed: either "concentrate intensive farming into the smallest possible area of land, in order to leave as much natural land as possible to soak up CO2 ... [or] farm in a less intensive, more climate-friendly way — but that means taking up more natural land to compensate."

- Natural Resources Defense Council's reaction to the report [focused](#) on the food waste component, noting that waste also includes packaging, labor and fertilizers.
- A senior climate policy adviser from hunger-focused organization Oxfam [commented](#), "Politicians must aim for zero hunger as well as zero emissions."
- *Wired*'s Matt Simon [shared](#) a common frustration: "There's no cure-all, and every potential fix is fraught with maddening complications."
- Both the [EAT-Lancet Commission](#) and [World Resources Institute](#) published reports earlier this year, making the IPCC report the third major report from a widely influential source that reaches similar conclusions about environmental stewardship with food production.

Dieting to Death



It's an endless cycle: new diets claim results that are too good to be true. Five popped up this week, each promising or debunking a different health benefit.

- Harvard's health blog [detailed](#) how ultra-processed foods can affect the balance of good and bad bacteria in our stomachs known as the "human microbiome." The article discusses the "gut-brain axis" and suggests there is a connection between ingesting too many chemical additives and an increased risk for depression and anxiety.
- To maintain a healthy microbiome, *The Atlantic* [recommended](#) ingesting a diverse assortment of microbes. The best source of these diverse microbes are apparently fruits and vegetables, which the article claims "are healthier than the sum of their parts, not just because of nutrients and fibrous skeletons, but because they contain microbes themselves."
- *The Washington Post* [fact-checked](#) "hormone diets" that claim to adjust the body's hormones as a way to lose weight quickly and easily. Author Christy Brissette, RD, quoted doctors and endocrinologists, and the consensus was, "diets that claim to help you 'hack your hormones' for weight loss don't have the evidence to back it up."
- *The Wall Street Journal* [posted](#) a book excerpt from Andreas Michalsen, MD, PhD, that endorses the weight loss trend of intermittent fasting, saying it's not just another fad. Dr. Michalsen claims the positive health benefits of fasting come from reducing "the time spent each day processing food" and making more time for "cleansing and restoring the body's cells."
- Haider Warraich, MD, [said](#) in an essay in *The New York Times*, that humans must "stop testing ourselves with lifestyles and diets that put our body's defenses at odds with our well-being," lest we continue to put ourselves at risk for heart disease. Warraich suggests less fat, salt, sugar and meat in our diets, warning: "The density of calories available to us coupled with the minimal effort required to obtain them is a toxic recipe."

Judging a Box by Its Cover



Investing in sustainable packaging is a popular way for brands to align themselves with positive messages of responsibility and trust. Unfortunately, as we dug into stories about some of these ecological solutions in our scan of the news, it became apparent that the focus

centers more on messaging and aesthetics than actual environmental impact.

- *New Food Economy* [connected](#) the popular molded fiber bowls used by Chipotle, Sweetgreen and others with "cancer-linked forever chemicals." Despite the bowls' positioning as a compostable and thus more sustainable option, the article claims that they contain perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) — compounds that do not biodegrade naturally in the environment. This means that contrary to popular opinion, the bowls actually make compost heaps more toxic, "adding to the chemical load of the very soil and water they were supposed to help improve."
 - Eater [criticized](#) McDonald's failed efforts to phase out (recyclable) plastic straws at some U.K. locations in favor of a more eco-friendly paper version. In feedback, customers found the new paper offering too thin ... sooo McDonald's beefed up the straw. But that made it too thick to be processed by waste management solutions and, ironically, unrecyclable. The author wondered, "Have we really not figured out ecological solutions at scale yet? If humans can formulate believable meatless meat, truly environmentally friendly mass-market packaging must be feasible, right?"
 - On August 2, San Francisco International Airport became the first airport in the U.S. to ban the sale of plastic water bottles inside of its terminals. *Travel + Leisure* [summarized](#) the new rule, effective August 20, which will apply to restaurants, cafes and vending machines in the airport, but will exempt flavored water. Flyers are encouraged to bring their own (empty) reusable bottles and refill them at "hydration stations" throughout the airport.
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Worth Reading.

Some important points of view worth checking out this weekend.

With Partners Like These, Who Needs Rivals

Grubhub, America's largest food ordering service, [announced](#) on August 2 that it would update some controversial policies following a *New Food Economy* [article](#) that accused the company of making shadow websites of restaurant partners without the owner's permission, for the purpose of intercepting online orders to collect a fee.

Less than a week later, on August 6, Eater [implicated](#) the company in even more deceptive practices. Eater claimed that Yelp and Grubhub pulled a bait and switch by combining the two platforms and then allowing users to place delivery orders straight from Yelp. Yelp is also accused of replacing restaurants' real phone numbers with number reroutes created by GrubHub in order to collect a "referral fee."

What Goes Up Must Come Down

The Wall Street Journal [wrote](#) that restaurants and manufacturers are seizing the opportunity for upcharging. The businesses wager that as the economy continues to expand, consumers won't mind paying more to help cover "higher costs for ingredients, transport and labor that many companies say they are facing." This raises the question of how much and for how long, because as the article notes, "Analysts caution that some companies risk eroding their customer base if price increases outpace wage gains."

Tariffs. They're What's For Dinner

In a *Food Dive* opinion piece, Specialty Food Association President Phil Kafarakis [rebuked](#) the Trump administration for its recent trade policy decisions. "Remember the abrupt U.S. tariffs against Mexico over immigration policy? They hit avocados and threatened tequila. And those against China aimed at remedying unfair Chinese influence in steel and technology exports? They dragged in our soybean farmers. ... All of this seems like bullying the little guy: Food. If any industry needs protection from unfair government actions, let's pick the one that makes human life possible."

The Kids Are Not Alright

The Wall Street Journal [spoke](#) with some kids and parents who want health food companies to stay away from their ice cream. The publication profiled various plant-based, dairy-free and nutrient-infused alternatives to the traditional offerings and asked kids and adults what they thought of them. "If I'm going to spend my calories on ice cream," one Ohio mom said, "I'll hold out for a scoop of some really good ice cream from some fancy ice cream place." "I do not think ice cream is supposed to be healthy," a 10-year-old remarked.

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The Intel Distillery is your essential source for food industry analysis and intelligence. As we work through beta-testing, we will share some of our thinking with you every week on Fridays, by noon (Central Time, of course). We welcome your feedback.

