

# Coronavirus in 3 Charts:

## Food Industry Reactions

Our mission at The Intel Distillery is to offer a wide perspective of the entire food production continuum and to provide analysis to help our subscribers understand specific issues in a larger context. Our unique system of analysis tracks hard-hitting topics by conversation volume and ranks those issues, relative to each other.

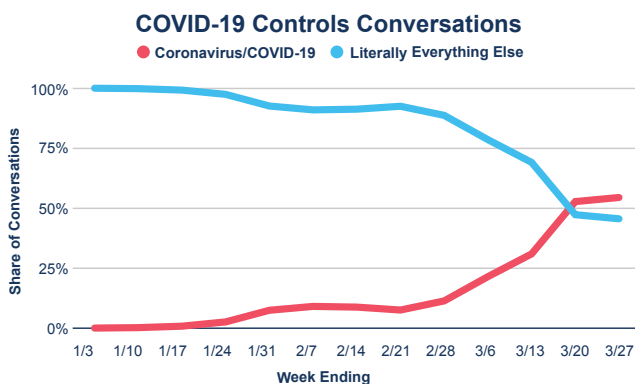
Over the past eight years, topics have ebbed and flowed as influential voices react to various forces guiding our industry.

Legislation, consumer demands, international dynamics, activist campaigns, corporate policies and health guidelines have all shaped conversations.

As the coronavirus spread throughout the world population in the first quarter of 2020, phrases like “unprecedented” and “now, more than ever” have never resonated with greater meaning. Definite parallels to these phrases exist in the food production world that The Intel Distillery tracks.

## Zero to 50% in 3 Months

By mid-March, discussions about the coronavirus dominated the food production conversation in all of the sources tracked by The Intel Distillery database.



Source: The Intel Distillery ©2020

This chart compares the volume of conversations about the coronavirus with “literally everything else” during the first quarter of 2020. Not unlike the steep exponential curve of the virus’ spread, food industry conversations about coronavirus took a similar tack.

1. Until mid-February, conversations focused on reports from China, with few hints of impacting the U.S. food supply.
2. By the beginning of March, as the situation became more urgent, media began reporting food hoarding and Americans getting sick.
3. Late in the quarter, the coronavirus accounted for the majority of conversations as retail demand surged, foodservice venues closed and workers fought for their jobs and their health.

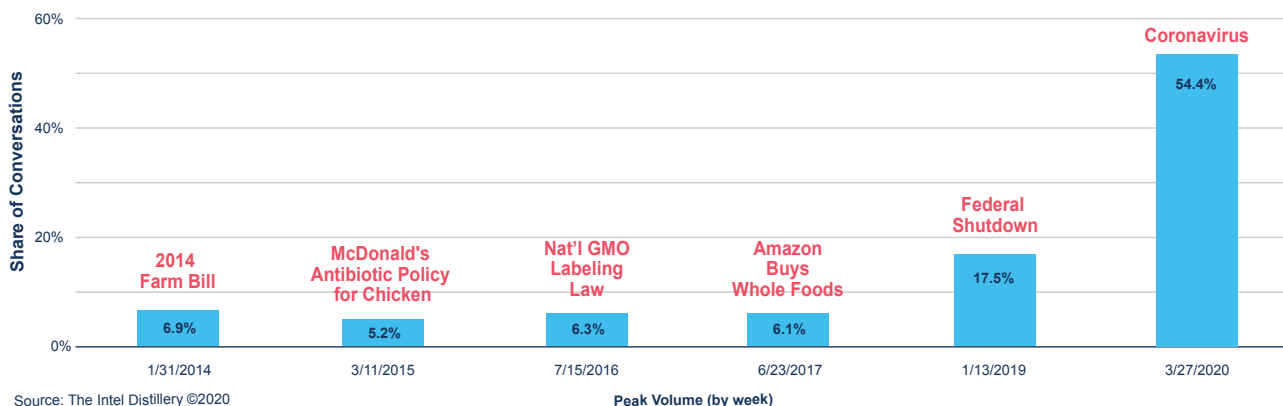
**“THESE ARE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES WITH UNPRECEDENTED NEEDS, BUT IF WE CAN THINK IN TERMS OF PARTNERSHIPS AND PROBLEM SOLVING, WE CAN GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER.”**

— LESLIE SARASIN, PRESIDENT AND CEO  
FMI, THE FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

## Peak Week Comparisons

As we looked back, no other event since 2012 even came close to controlling the same proportion of conversations as coronavirus. Often a big story will fire up one or two segments of the industry, but the current crisis hits every aspect of food production.

### Momentous Events in Food and Agriculture

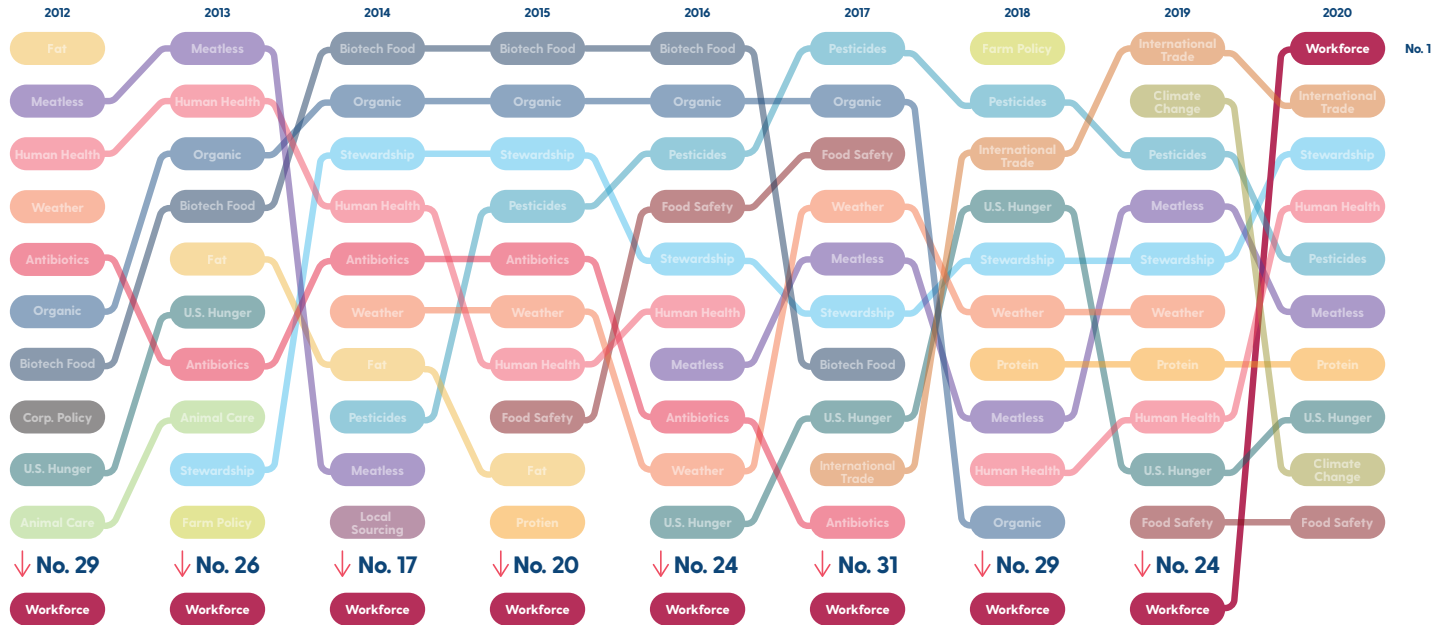


Source: The Intel Distillery ©2020

Since The Intel Distillery started tracking conversations by the most influential voices in food production, a few key events stand out as truly dominating the food production conversation. This graph compares influential conversation volume in their peak week. Until the coronavirus, the shutdown of the federal government in the beginning of 2019 had been the most commanding topic of conversation, with only about one-third of the volume of conversation.

# Market Driving Topics 2012-Present

Indeed, talk of the coronavirus has touched on many of the Top Ten Topics, including hunger, international trade and workers. But the bulk of this massive spike in discussion has focused on workforce issues. In the food industry, the pandemic's impact has hit hardest for frontline workers on farms, food production and at channels. Between rampant unemployment and massive shifts in supply chain needs, the food workforce faces health risks and an uncertain future.



In the context of ranking the Top Ten Topics from 2012 through the present, discussion about the workforce has consistently placed in the 20s (out of 40+ topics), with a previous high rank of 17. Despite being in the back half of the rankings, worker issues are a consistent factor in discussions of food and agriculture production. Back in November, we published the focus feature “[Workers in the Spotlight](#)” to highlight the critical role the workforce plays in every link in the food supply chain. Up to this point, the topic has been eclipsed regularly by more pressing or timely topics. This is not the case in light of the coronavirus crisis. This quarter, the workforce became the pressing topic and climbed a whopping 23 spots in our rankings.

**IT IS CRITICAL THAT FOOD PRODUCERS AND FOOD WORKERS AT PROCESSING AND RETAIL LEVEL ARE PROTECTED TO MINIMISE THE SPREAD OF THE DISEASE.**  
 — U.N. FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

**PLEASE DESCRIBE ANY MEASURES THE CDC AND FDA HAVE TAKEN TO ADDRESS CORONAVIRUS-RELATED SAFETY CONCERNS FOR WORKERS IN THE RETAIL FOOD INDUSTRY. HOW DO THE CDC AND FDA PLAN TO IMPROVE AND PROMOTE THAT GUIDANCE?**

— SEN. EDWARD J. MARKEY (D-MASS.)

## Looking Ahead

The impact of the coronavirus within food production is fluid and unpredictable, but it will have long-standing ramifications for employment, regulation and supply chain divisions between foodservice and retail. The Intel Distillery will continue to monitor this massive disruption from important perspectives across all sectors of the industry.

For more food and ag insights, visit [TheIntelDistillery.com](http://TheIntelDistillery.com).  
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