

In a Chaotic Year, Mother Nature Piles On

Top Ten Topics: Third Quarter 2020



The coronavirus crisis continued to dominate the attention of prominent figures in the food industry, with food insecurity leading a long list of concerns in the third quarter of 2020. The ongoing impact of unemployment — a result of pandemic-containment policies — greatly increased the number of Americans who face hunger each day. This, in turn, led to debates about the best policies to aid food-insecure Americans.

Adding supply chain disruptions to the picture made companies' food waste policies even more pertinent, setting the stage for future restructuring. Businesses have begun reconsidering their goals for stewardship, workforce and production practices.

We examined these factors earlier this quarter in our [Four Forces Inspiring Food Brands](#) perspective.

Even as the coronavirus pandemic continued to disrupt food systems, extreme weather events claimed the second spot in this quarter's ranks. The weather generally garners more attention in the third quarter with the arrival of harvest and the peak of hurricane season. This year, it was nearly enough to compete with the pandemic.

Additionally, we sifted through the presidential candidates' policies for topics relevant to food and agriculture. The accompanying piece, [Ag on the Ballot](#), can be found on [Page 3](#).

Highlights from this report:



HUNGER

The pandemic deepened the country's hunger crisis. Influential conversations focused on the role of school lunches and other federal food aid programs in reducing food insecurity.



WEATHER

Extreme weather events threatened the harvest. Natural disasters, ranging from hurricanes and a derecho to drought and wildfires, affected food producers across the nation. Worries about the weather weighed heavily on farmers as the growing season came to an end.



STEWARDSHIP

Major food brands reevaluated their supply chains. Companies all along the supply chain — including Walmart, McDonald's, General Mills and Cargill — directed efforts toward increasing regenerative agriculture practices.

PEOPLE HAVE PUSHED PAST THE EARTH'S NATURAL LIMITS. HEALTHY SOCIETIES, RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND THRIVING BUSINESSES RELY ON NATURE.

— KATHLEEN MCLAUGHLIN,
CHIEF SUSTAINABILITY
OFFICER, WALMART
(PRESS RELEASE)

The full report, which includes recaps of influential conversations about each topic, is available upon request. For a free copy of the full report, contact [Nick Praznowski](#).

Timeline: Important Events This Quarter

This snapshot highlights the biggest events that drove conversations and shaped reactions across the food industry. While these events frequently align with the Top Ten Topics, individual events don't always fall neatly into categories.

July 6	Uber buys delivery service Postmates for \$2.65 billion
July 13	FDA releases "Smarter Era of Food Safety Blueprint"
July 15	Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee publishes scientific recommendations
July 20	Black Lives Matter and Fight for \$15 organize strikes at fast-food chains
Aug. 1	Thomson International recalls onions due to <i>Salmonella</i> contamination
Aug. 7	Walmart partners with The Nature Conservancy to source sustainable beef
Aug. 10	A derecho flattens crops across the Midwest
Aug. 27	Amazon opens brick and mortar grocery store, Amazon Fresh
Sept. 1	Walmart announces Walmart+ subscription delivery service
Sept. 10	OSHA fines Smithfield Foods for COVID-19-related worker concerns
Sept. 11	OSHA fines JBS USA for COVID-19-related worker concerns
Sept. 21-25	Food companies issue sustainability commitments as part of Climate Week
Sept. 29	United Nations declares first International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste

The Intel Distillery systematically captures, analyzes and reviews important food and beverage news, trends and policy issues, filtered through the 1,500 most influential voices in the industry. Our quarterly reports serve as a bird's-eye view of food production, capturing insights from every step in the food chain: from seed to feed, farm to fork and regulations to publications. The Top Ten Topics report is a snapshot of the topics most frequently discussed by industry leaders and provides insight into these leaders' priorities.

The Intel Distillery also provides reporting and analysis on individual topics, such as labeling policies and the rising tide of alternative proteins, and can create customized reports for your needs.

For more information about how The Intel Distillery can help you be more knowledgeable about the food and beverage business, visit [TheIntelDistillery.com](https://www.theinteldistillery.com).

Although the pandemic has disrupted many things, it has not stopped the campaigns of President Donald Trump or former Vice President Joe Biden. The Biden campaign has laid out detailed policy plans while the Trump administration has pledged to extend its past efforts. Here we focus on how their agendas will affect key food and agricultural production issues.

	TRUMP	BIDEN
	<p>"I'll tell you, you can go back to Abraham Lincoln and there's no President that's treated the farmers like Trump."</p> <p>– President Donald Trump (White House)</p>	<p>"As president, Biden will ... strengthen our agriculture sector by pursuing a trade policy that works for farmers, supporting beginning farmers, fostering the development of regional food systems, promoting biofuels, and partnering with farmers to achieve net-zero emissions, giving farmers new sources of income in the process."</p> <p>– Biden Campaign</p>
Trade	<p>Used tariffs extensively in a trade war with China, resulting in lower agriculture exports from the United States</p> <p>Signed the "Phase One" trade deal with China to recover ag exports</p> <p>Has threatened to withdraw from the WTO</p>	<p>Will work with allies to pressure China</p> <p>Will reexamine tariffs</p> <p>Will remain in WTO</p>
Workers	<p>Has not increased the minimum wage</p> <p>Has restricted immigration, with exemptions for farmworkers</p>	<p>Will raise federal minimum wage to \$15/hr.</p> <p>Supports unions, including for farmworkers</p> <p>Would provide path to citizenship for immigrant farmworkers</p>
Business	<p>Has focused on deregulation, such as cutting taxes, delisting endangered species and repealing WOTUS</p>	<p>Will use antitrust laws to address consolidation in meatpacking industry</p>
Sustainability	<p>Administration committed to boosting farm production by 40% while lowering environmental footprint by 50% by 2050</p>	<p>Will expand Conservation Stewardship Program</p> <p>Will rely on farmers' ability to sequester carbon in soil as part of a plan to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions</p>
Ethanol	<p>Expanded use of waivers that allow oil refiners to blend in less ethanol</p> <p>Lifted limits on E15 blends of gasoline</p>	<p>Will increase ethanol use as part of plan to boost renewable energy sources</p>

ACRONYM KEY:

WTO: World Trade Organization | **WOTUS:** Waters of the United States rule (an update to the Clean Water Act) | **E15:** gasoline blended with 15% ethanol

Looking for more details? Check out the sources below:

American Farm Bureau Federation: [Presidential Candidate Questionnaire](#)

Trump Campaign: [Trade & Foreign Policy, Land and Agriculture](#)

Biden Campaign: [Rural America, Workers and Unions](#)

The Economist: [How would Joe Biden change America's trade policy?](#)

Politico: [Biden won't rule out new tariffs, adviser says](#)

Politico: [Trump's massive payouts to farmers will be hard to pull back](#)

Civil Eats: [Kamala Harris Brings Food Justice to the Democratic Ticket](#)

Civil Eats: [In a Year of Climate Reckoning, Where Does Joe Biden Stand on Climate and Agriculture?](#)

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