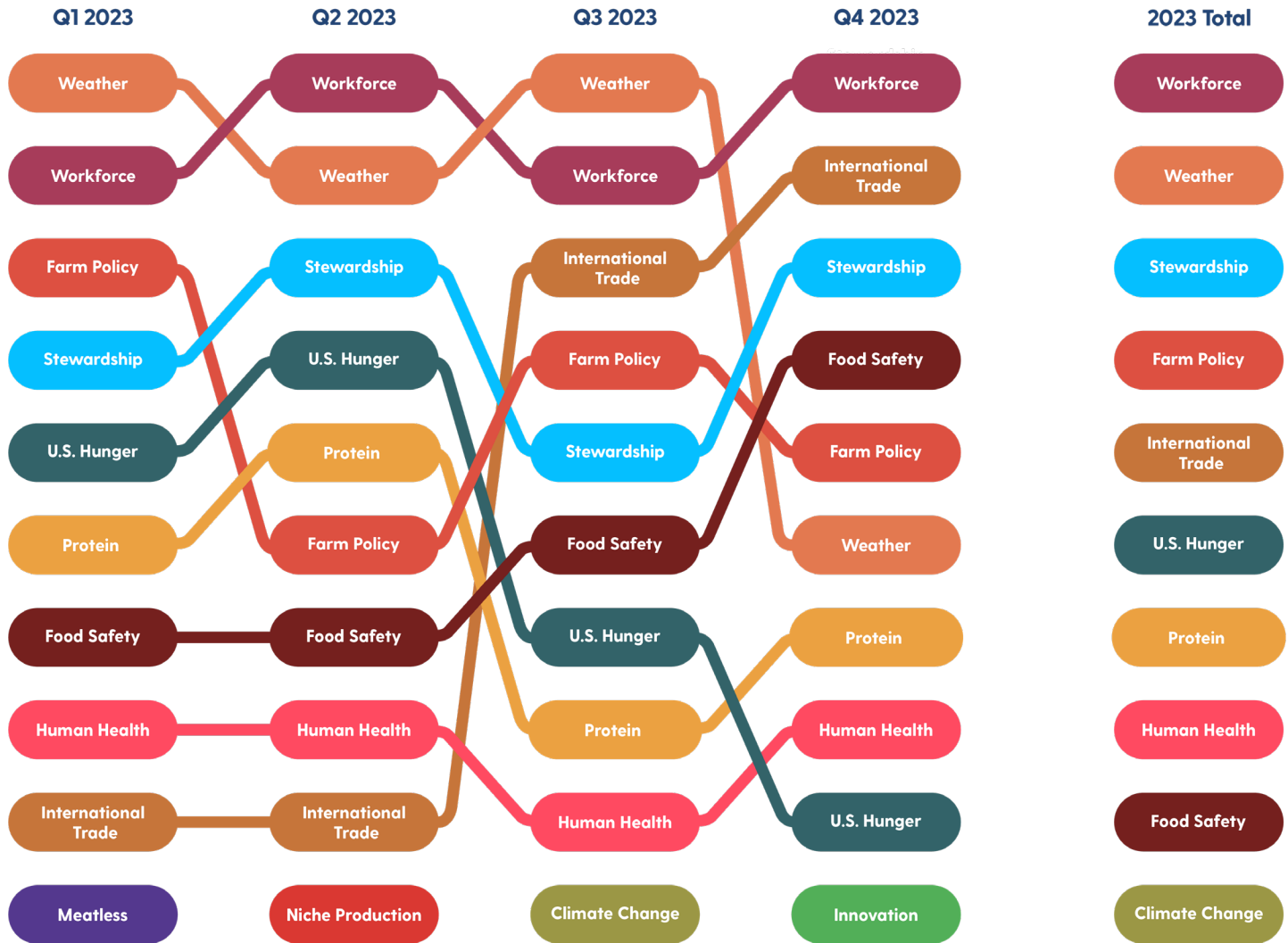


Stalls and Disruptions

The Top Ten Topics of 2023



The year was punctuated by **big** changes: Congress fought over the world’s largest national budget; Kroger and Albertsons pursued plans to form the second-largest grocer; inconsistent food price increases created uncertainty around households’ third-largest expense; and the FDA unified three departments under one leader.

For the third time in the past four years, the food production workforce drove the most conversations across the supply chain. After 13 months of negotiations, West Coast port workers [agreed](#) on a new contract in June. Starbucks [rebuffed](#) its union all year long (CBS News). On September 28, California [set](#) a \$20 per hour minimum wage for fast food workers and New York [followed suit](#) for delivery workers on July 12. Meanwhile, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack [warned](#) meatpackers about “a growing problem” of child labor used by suppliers and subcontractors.

The trifecta of climate change, stewardship and weather held steady as producers dealt with the impacts of extreme weather and brands committed to changing sourcing policies. The 12-day COP28 conference played a pivotal role in focusing the conversation and 134 countries [signed](#) the Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action at the event.

Federal budget negotiations shaped policy discussions, for better or for worse. Nutrition assistance took center stage as a potential shutdown loomed in late May and lawmakers ultimately agreed to reduce coverage (The Associated Press). The deal added to concerns from anti-hunger groups that the expiration of pandemic-era benefits would [precipitate](#) a “hunger cliff” (FRAC). And the second budget shutdown threat at the end of September [derailed](#) hopes that Congress could pass a farm bill by the end of the year (Politico).

Timeline:**Events That Shaped 2023**

Here's a look at the events that sparked the most conversations. These milestones highlight the biggest actions by corporate and regulatory groups driving change in food production.

Date	Event
Jan. 8	John Deere signs “right to repair” memo with American Farm Bureau Federation
Jan. 9	Chef René Redzepi announces closure of “world’s best restaurant” Noma in 2024
Jan. 31	FDA announces plan to reorganize, creating a unified human foods division
Feb. 3	USDA updates school meals program
Mar. 15	Kellogg Company announces split into three companies
May. 11	Supreme Court upholds California’s ability to regulate out-of-state livestock housing via Proposition 12
May. 22	Southwestern states agree to reduce water use along Colorado River
May. 25	Supreme Court strikes down revised definition of “waters of the United States” (WOTUS) under Clean Water Act
June 21	FDA approves cell-cultured chicken for sale
July 14	WHO classifies sweetener aspartame as “possibly carcinogenic to humans”
Aug. 24	Roark Capital agrees to buy Subway
Sep. 25	James Jones joins FDA as first Deputy Commissioner for Human Foods
Sep. 28	White House hosts Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health
Oct. 7	California Gov. Gavin Newsom signs bill banning food additives Red Dye No. 3, brominated vegetable oil, potassium bromate and propyl paraben
Oct. 25	USDA updates livestock standards for organic label
Nov. 17	Congress extends farm bill negotiations into 2024
Dec. 1-12	At COP28, international leaders and industry groups discuss feedback effects of food and climate policy

Quotable & Notable: Prominent and Influential Voices of 2023



On Worker Contracts:



“Big corporations have relentlessly exploited broken labor laws ... The misclassification of workers as independent contractors has reached epidemic proportions, especially in sectors like service, care, and gig work, exacerbating the problem.”

– Mary Kay Henry, President,
[Service Employees International Union](#)



On the FDA Restructuring:



“Americans deserve a food program that is transparent, effective, and accountable. The formula crisis laid bare the high level of dysfunction, breakdowns in communication and lack of clear lines of authority that characterized the agency’s response.”

– Peter Lurie, President and Executive Director,
[Center for Science in the Public Interest](#)



On Sustainable Food Manufacturing:



“It would be convenient if the perspectives and behaviors of sustainability-focused shoppers were uniform. That would enable the food industry to easily understand these consumers.”

– Rick Stein, Vice President, Fresh Foods, [FMI](#)



On Climate Change and Food Production:



“The climate and food crises are inseparable. ... At COP28, FAO will systematically highlight how agrifood systems transformation accelerates climate action to the benefit of people, prosperity and the planet.”

– QU Dongyu, Director-General,
[United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization](#)



On the Alt-Meat Slide:



“I feel good about where we are, I do not feel good about where the [plant-based meat] category is.”

– Peter McGuinness,
Impossible Foods CEO ([AgFunder News](#))



On Nutrition:



“Getting people to eat better means they nearly always have to pick foods that are less tasty, less convenient, or more expensive. That’s very hard to do.”

– Tamar Haspel, reporter, [The Washington Post](#) ([X](#))

Wrapping Up the Year

Each year, we enjoy browsing through other groups’ takes on the “greatest hits.” Here are our favorite articles that look back on 2023 and predict 2024:

Mintel	Global Food and Drink Trends for 2024
Specialty Food Association	Top 2024 Food and Beverage Trends Revealed by Trendspotter Panel
Uber Eats	The 2023 Cravings Report
ADM	2024 Flavor and Color Outlook
Innova Market Insights	From Cutting Back to Looking Forward: Positive Food and Drink Trends for 2024
Circana	2024 Food and Beverage Outlook Predicts Modest Volume Growth Following Three-Year Decline
National Restaurant Association	TikTok, International Comfort Foods, and Nashville Hot are Coming to a Restaurant Menu Near You
KeHE	2024 Macro Trends Show Consumers Want Healthier, More Convenient Options
Forbes	30 Under 30 Food & Drink 2024: Meet the Entrepreneurs Changing the Future of Food
Bacardi	2024 Cocktail Trends Report
Food & Wine	3 Food Predictions That Actually Came True in 2023, and 3 That Were Way, Way Off



1. Politics Impede Farm Bill

The farm bill is notoriously difficult to negotiate due to balancing budgets between agricultural policies and nutrition assistance programs. With multiple threatened federal shutdowns, Congress has already shifted the goalposts for passing the wide-ranging bill to 2024. While committee leaders in Congress have [committed](#) to passing the bill quickly (Agri-Pulse), a Farm Journal survey [found](#) that half of leading agricultural economists expect elections to delay the farm bill. And that's without accounting for another prolonged budget showdown.



2. Food Prices (Hopefully) Moderate

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, food price inflation has been one of the most common reasons cited for concerns about the economy. The latest figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics [show](#) that grocery prices have largely stabilized, but restaurant prices continued to rise. If that trend continues, expect to see larger shifts in the way diners go out to eat. If there's anything we've learned since 2020, it's that stable prices need stable supply chains.



3. Conflicts Besiege Supply Chains

"Supply chain disruption" may not be the everyday phrase it was during the height of the pandemic, but each year since then, geopolitical conflicts briefly bring it back. Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, scrambling wheat, vegetable oil and fertilizer supplies. In 2023, India [slashed](#) global rice supplies by 20% when it banned exports (Reuters) and war between Israel and Hamas [upset](#) the most active region for developing meat alternatives (Food Dive). Both protectionism and war undermine stable supply chains and instability is contagious.



4. Seeking Food Solutions for Health

Momentum around the concept of "food as medicine" is strengthening. Tufts University [established](#) an entire research division on the topic and advocacy groups are [lobbying](#) for vegetable purchasing subsidies in the upcoming farm bill. The push comes alongside an upswing in investigations of the health effects of processed foods. Long term, increased access to weight loss drugs could reduce appetites enough to render much of this battle moot.



5. Watching the Weather

Weather patterns have an enormous impact on food and beverage production. And it's not just at the farm. As extreme weather events become more prolonged and more frequent, low rivers are [stifling](#) transportation (CNN), indoor workers are [coping](#) with heat stress (Natural Resources Defense Council) and floods and hurricanes threaten businesses of all kinds.