

Women in aquaculture

A 2015 report from the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that 70 percent of the global aquaculture workforce is female, noting that women are essential contributors to the industry though they are often underappreciated and underpaid. In response, The Fish Site, a knowledge sharing platform with resources for the fishing industry, launched a new series called Women in Aquaculture. The series highlights female aquaculture workers around the world and aims to give women in the industry a platform to share their insights and inspire others. (The Fish Site)

Arctic vegetables

Vegetable production is on the rise in the Arctic due to increased technologies in greenhouse and hydroponic growing systems. Costly imports in Arctic regions have made it difficult for residents to eat healthfully, and fossil fuels used to ship fresh foods leave a large environmental footprint. Increased indoor vegetable farming allows for increased food production in Arctic regions, providing residents with fresh, local produce all year long. (FERN's AG Insider)

Preservatives harm guts

Researchers from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, found an impact on gut biomes from the "food safe" antimicrobial compounds added to preserve foods. The preservative compound polylysine appears to temporarily alter the gut microbial communities in mice, impacting microbial function. Researchers argue that this finding demonstrates the need for additional research on the effect of preservatives on gut microbiomes. (The Boston Globe)

Plastic-free food

The British supermarket chain, Iceland, has committed to eliminate all plastic packaging from its own branded products. The supermarket retailer specializes in frozen food and pledges to replace its plastic packaging with recyclable paper and pulp trays and paper bags within five years. The company's managing director explains, "the onus is on retailers, as leading contributors to plastic packaging pollution and waste, to take a stand and deliver meaningful change." (The Guardian)

Glyphosate ban?

Negotiations on reducing the use of glyphosate herbicides in Germany have been ongoing and a complete glyphosate ban is being discussed. German Agriculture Minister Christian Schmidt voted last fall in favor of renewing the controversial weedkiller without consulting Chancellor Angela Merkel, placing the glyphosate debate in the public spotlight. A possible ban in Germany may affect the upcoming Bayer-Monsanto megamerger, as Monsanto receives a considerable profit from the sales of Roundup, a glyphosate-based herbicide. (Sustainablepulse.com)

Algae to the rescue

A new report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) demonstrates that ocean algae could help counter some effects of climate change on the rest of the food chain. Seaweed, for example, lowers the amount of carbon dioxide in the water, reduces acidification, and improves the marine ecosystem for shellfish. The IAEA notes that though making algae a common part of more people's diets won't be easy, the traditional salmon and tuna diet isn't sustainable in our changing world. (Fisherman's News)

Ag-gag is unconstitutional

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has struck down Idaho's "ag-gag" law, confirming a lower court ruling that it is an unconstitutional violation of free speech. Eight other states have passed ag-gag laws to criminalize animal rights activism that uncovers abusive conditions on factory farms. The January decision marks the first time a federal appeals court has ruled against an ag-gag law, potentially creating a new precedent. (Food & Power)

Cold hurts wheat

January's cold snap reduced the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) projection of winter wheat production in the central plains and southern corn belt. Winter wheat — planted in the fall and harvested in late spring — is the dominant type of wheat grown in the United States. USDA projects that this year will see the smallest wheat harvest, at 45 million acres, since it began recording that data in 1921. (Fern's AG Insider)

Food is medicine

A "Food is Medicine Working Group" has been established as part of the U.S. House Hunger Caucus. The working group aims to emphasize the link between nutrition programs and health outcomes and take steps to better align agriculture and health policy. Policies the group might take up include incentives to buy fruits and vegetables, bolstering Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program education, looking at "medically tailored" meals to help fight disease, and programs that allow doctors to give their patients prescriptions for produce. (Politico)

Fighting for animal welfare

The Humane Society of the United States has announced it is suing USDA over its plan to withdraw the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices rule. Calling it "one of the most important rules ever to come out of a federal agency," the Humane Society notes the rule will affect the well-being of tens of millions of animals each year. The Organic Trade Association also has filed a lawsuit against USDA's dismissal of the rule as a misrepresentation of the organic seal. (Organic Trade Organization)

Victory for fish

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has one year to better protect salmon and their habitat, now that the National Marine Fisheries Services concluded three widely used agricultural pesticides — chlorpyrifos, diazinon and malathion — are harming dozens of species and impacting marine life up the food chain. The environmental group, Earthjustice, claims that EPA has failed to bring any of its pesticide authorizations into compliance with the Endangered Species Act for salmon and is suing EPA for not enforcing the law. (Politico)

B.C. goes organic

A new 2018 policy in British Columbia (B.C.) requires all products sold in the province that are labelled “organic” to be certified. Prior to this regulation, organic food and beverages marketed within B.C. did not need to be regulated by a third party. The certification includes both production and processing standards. (CBC Radio Canada)