

COVID-19 and Global Food Security

The world has endured many pandemics in the 21st century with the likes of Ebola, H1N1, and SARS. However, their effects have paled in comparison to the toll COVID-19 is taking on our society. This novel coronavirus has generated a lot of distress and fear due to economic and social uncertainty. It has evoked unprecedented social behavioral changes among the population, such as rushing to stockpile on essentials. While people are ensuring their families have enough food to make it through the lockdowns, the long-term ramifications of COVID-19 on global food systems have yet to be seen and could be a measure of how well our governments have responded to the virus.

In the current global food systems, there are [many different businesses](#) involved in the supply of food from the producer to the consumer. These businesses range from farmers and transporters to retailers and governments. Each plays a pivotal role to ensure that food reaches the consumer and that there is enough food to avoid food insecurity amongst the population. If there is a major disruption in any part of the supply chain, there can be serious implications on food production and distribution to consumers. For this reason, it is imperative that our global food systems can withstand the effects of a pandemic. Pandemics, if not quickly contained, can pose a great threat to the health of the world's population. This leaves the possibility of a [shortage of workers](#) in the workplace which can lead to a plethora of concerns within each level of the food supply chain.

COVID-19 has forced the world into a time of crisis and governments have tried to take the best and quickest courses of action. During the month of April, [one-third](#) of the world's population was on lockdown. However, countries have been doing all they can to keep essential business running so people can still have food on the table. Unfortunately, amidst the lockdowns, [labor shortages](#) are beginning to see their effects on all parts of the food supply chain. Farmers are facing incredible challenges as there are concerns with the availability of farm labor. Many major [meatpacking](#) facilities have shut down as a result of employees contracting the virus which could lead to meat shortages in the future. Food export restrictions have resulted in a ban on 20 different products in 14 different countries and could contribute to an increase in food prices. Furthermore, the manner in which this virus is transmitted has put the interdependent businesses in a difficult situation as [produce and packages need to be handled](#) with the utmost care to prevent food from being exposed to the coronavirus.

The virus is also affecting global food systems in an indirect manner. Increases in food prices have been observed in many countries, such as China and the United States, due to the high demand for food and disruptions in the supply chain. China has already seen its food prices [increase by more than 20%](#) above last year's prices and the United States seems to be following suit with the [overall price of groceries increasing by 2.6%](#) in the month of April. Further disruption to the food supply chains may only cause food prices to increase more, but only time will tell.

There is still much we do not know about the novel coronavirus. The gradual return from lockdowns will indicate how well the virus was handled by governments and what other measures they should have taken. Food security will remain an urgent issue as the effects of this pandemic may only be seen over a longer period of time. Though the current food supply in the world is considered [adequate](#), the World Food Program predicts that 265 million people could be facing extreme hunger by the end of this year. This is a very frightening number. The novel coronavirus has left many people vulnerable in the current economic climate, especially those who are poor. These people already have a difficult time accessing enough food which makes much of their livelihood dependent upon their local food systems. That is why it is imperative that governments take every possible precaution when reopening the economy and make food security one of their priorities. Vulnerable populations have already been hit hard by the virus and governments need to look out for them when making decisions. If governments do not act accordingly, then it may take the world a long time to recover from the present catastrophe.