

6. Let's grow more farmers' markets: Editorial

Toronto Star – September 25, 2016

The easier it is to find fresh, locally grown food the more likely it is that people will buy it. Consumers benefit, and so do the small growers who traditionally provide fresh produce.

That's why it's very much in the public interest to promote more neighbourhood farmers' markets. And Toronto's economic development committee has voted to do precisely that by chopping through the red tape that now makes setting up public markets complicated and slow.

"Information about procedures, permits, fees and regulations is often incomplete and inconsistent," Councillor Mary Fragedakis wrote in a letter to the committee. "Many markets trying to establish themselves are forced to navigate different city divisions and processes... without the reliability of a consistent streamlined process."

There are licensing requirements, corporate registration, public health sign-offs, and a host of other bureaucratic hurdles that must be dealt with. Operators of small farms, selling stuff they've grown, are often in a poor position to steer their way through such obstacles.

To help them negotiate the shoals of big city bureaucracy, Fragedakis has proposed creation of an expert working group to streamline the approval process. Her welcome initiative has won the committee's backing and is to go before city council early next month. It should get enthusiastic support.

"There is this huge movement for people to buy local (and) buy fresh," Fragedakis said. But it needs to be better served. Potential new markets are floundering in confusing paperwork.

"The demand is clear," Fragedakis stated, noting that Toronto now has 35 dedicated farmer's markets, up from just 10 a decade ago. But there could have been considerably more if the approval process wasn't so daunting.

Barcelona is frequently cited as a model by urban advocates, a city where every neighbourhood boasts its own farmers' market and some have as many as four. [...] Streamlining the process of creating markets would prepare the ground for a healthier future.

7. Green campaigners welcome Coca-Cola U-turn on bottle and can recycling scheme

Severin Carrell, Scotland editor – The Guardian – 22 February 2017

Coca-Cola has announced it supports testing a deposit return service for drinks cans and bottles, in a major coup for environment and anti-waste campaigners.

Executives told an event in Edinburgh on Tuesday evening they agreed with campaigners who were pressing the Scottish government to set up a bottle-return pilot scheme to cut waste and pollution and boost recycling.

They told the event, organised by Holyrood magazine, that the company had been examining the merits of a bottle and can deposit scheme, where consumers pay a small surcharge of about 10p per item, which is repaid when an empty can or bottle is returned to a retailer.

The company, the world's largest soft drinks manufacturer, had previously resisted a deposit return scheme, which is used in countries such as Canada, Sweden, Australia and Norway. It had claimed in 2015 it did not reduce packaging use or improve recyclability.

But in a clear switch in policy, which mirrors its attempts to cut high sugar content in its products, a Coca-Cola executive told the event in Edinburgh its thinking had changed, in part because of experience in other countries.

"The time is right to trial new interventions such as a well-designed deposit scheme for drinks containers, starting in Scotland where conversations are under way," he said.

The announcement was hailed as a "landmark moment" by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS), which is coordinating a lobbying campaign with other groups and businesses, including WWF and the Marine Conservation Society.

The Scottish parliament's environment committee has set up a subgroup to examine the proposal, adding to pressure on Roseanna Cunningham, the Scottish environment secretary, to agree to a pilot scheme.

John Mayhew, APRS's chief executive, said it was an extremely significant moment given Coca-Cola's position as the world's largest soft drinks manufacturer.

8. Elon Musk to plant computers in human brains to prevent AI robot uprising

Neural lacing could eventually lead to us gaining the ability to upload and download our thoughts to computers / Reuters

Aatif Sulleyman – The Independent Tech – 28 March 2017

Elon Musk has launched a new “medical research” company called Neuralink, according to a new report. He's created a company that will explore 'neural lace' technology, the report says.

The firm was registered in California last July, and will focus on developing “neural lace” technology, reports the Wall Street Journal.

Mr Musk tweeted that more information about Neuralink could emerge in April, but recent comments from the CEO of Tesla suggest that he's aiming to create cyborgs.

The idea is that electronic devices embedded in the brain could improve human performance in certain areas, such as memory.

According to the report, neural lacing could also enable us to communicate with machines directly, without the need for additional interfaces, and upload and download our thoughts to computers.

Earlier this year, he warned that humans risk becoming irrelevant unless they merge with machines.

“Over time I think we will probably see a closer merger of biological intelligence and digital intelligence,” Mr Musk said at the World Government Summit in Dubai.

“It's mostly about the bandwidth, the speed of the connection between your brain and the digital version of yourself – particularly output.”

Elsewhere in Silicon Valley, Facebook is reportedly working on a “computer interface” said to be capable of scanning users' brains.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg last year spoke about how people could one day “capture a thought, what you're thinking or feeling in kind of its ideal and perfect form in your head, and be able to share that with the world.”

10. Are food bloggers fuelling racist stereotypes?

Megha Mohan – BBC – 3 March 2017

"Food media is predominantly generated by white people for white people, so when the subject veers toward anything outside of the Western canon, it's not uncommon to see things generalised, exotified, or misrepresented. "

Filipino-American Celeste Noche, who is a food and travel photographer, shared her thoughts on the "exotified" depiction of certain recipes within the blogging and gourmet community on the podcast *The Racist Sandwich*.

"I think microaggressions in social media are reflective of food media as a whole in that appropriation," Noche tells BBC Trending, "These microaggressions can be as simple as a lack of research."

Whether it's taking photos of dishes with chopsticks sticking straight up into rice or noodles (which can be seen as offensive in some Asian cultures)", she says, "or dramatisation in the props used to style ethnic foods (why are Asian dishes so often styled on bamboo mats or banana leaves with chopsticks?)".

Noche added that established food blogs like that of Andrew Zimmern also fed into stereotypes.

"(His) recipe for Filipino short ribs is styled with chopsticks even though Filipinos traditionally eat with spoons and forks or their hands".

Zimmern has not responded to a request for comment at the time of writing.

Similarly the food site *Bon Appetit* received some criticism for publishing a video last year about noodles claiming "Pho is the new Ramen." Several commenters attacked the video for the "simplification of Asian culture" as "pho is from Vietnam and ramen from Japan".

The video was fronted by a white American chef who spoke on the 'correct way to eat pho'.

After a little more than 24 hours on the website *Bon Appetit* removed the video altogether, both from their Facebook and YouTube channels, and apologised for any offence they may have caused.

Noche's assertion comes at a time of much discussion about the so-called "cultural misrepresentations" of food.

12. Switching to Vegetables, Oranges and Papaya Could Help India Save Water

Reuters – April 5, 2017

India could save water and reduce planet-warming emissions if people added more vegetables and fruits like melon, oranges and papaya to their diet while reducing wheat and poultry, researchers said on Wednesday.

India's population is forecast to rise to 1.6 billion by 2050, and to ensure there is enough available freshwater, water use will have to be cut by a third, according to a study published by The Lancet Planetary Health journal.

But population growth will also lead to an increase in demand for food, putting more pressure on water through farming.

By 2050, irrigation will account for 70% of total water use in India, up from the current 50%, unless farming methods change and diets shift towards food that needs less water to grow, the study said.

"In India, the proportion of freshwater available for agricultural production may already be unsustainably high," said James Milner, the study's lead author from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

"Modest dietary changes could help meet the challenge of developing a resilient food system in the country," he said in a statement.

The study, which Milner said was the first to look at changing food habits to save water, found that freshwater use could be reduced by up to 30% by lowering consumption of wheat, dairy and poultry in favour of fruits and vegetables.

The best kind of diet would also include legumes, and swap fruits requiring more irrigation, like grapes, guava and mango with more water-efficient crops such as melon, orange and papaya, the study said.

The dietary changes would also lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases and cancer in humans, while protecting the planet by cutting greenhouse gas emissions by up to 13%.

In 2011, India was the world's fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases from farming behind China, Brazil and the United States, according to the World Resources Institute. [...]

15. UK has one of worst records for gender equality at work – report

Angela Monaghan – The Guardian – 18 May 2016

Britain has one of the worst records on gender equality at work, according to a new report that highlighted the high pay gap for working mothers.

Researchers ranked Britain 11th out of 18 countries – behind the US, France, Spain and Sweden – in a league table that took into account pay, board level representation and the gap between male and female employment, among other factors.

Andrew Chamberlain, chief economist of Glassdoor Economic Research, which compiled the report, said: “In the UK there are fewer women than men in the workplace. However, this gap is considerably narrower for those with a university education.

“By contrast, Sweden, Norway and Finland all have an almost equal balance of men and women in the labour market and can be a lesson for the UK.”

He said working mothers were paying a high price in the UK, with the gender pay gap widening among this section of the workforce. “British working mothers are significantly worse off than those without family responsibilities, and this pressure will not help the UK address its workplace diversity issues,” Chamberlain said.

While the gender pay gap for childless women in the UK is slightly more than 7%, for those with at least one child it leaps to 21%. Working mothers fare better in the UK than in Ireland and Germany, but worse than in other countries including Spain and Italy.

Overall, Sweden was ranked first for gender equality, followed by Norway and Finland. Greece was ranked bottom, just ahead of Italy and Ireland.

On a brighter note, Britain had a higher proportion of female managers than other countries at 35%, putting the UK third on that measure behind only Sweden and Norway.

About 26% of UK board members at listed companies are women, compared with 36% in Norway at the top end of the scale and Estonia at the bottom with 8%, Glassdoor said.

18. Whanganui River given legal status of a person under unique Treaty of Waitangi settlement

By Isaac Davison - Whanganui Chronicle, New Zealand Herald – March 15, 2017

Whanganui River now has the legal status of a person under a unique Treaty settlement passed into law today.

The settlement means the river, the third-longest in the country, has all the rights, duties and liabilities that come with personhood.

Among other things, the river could now be represented in court proceedings, Treaty Negotiations Minister Chris Finlayson said. "I know the initial inclination of some people will say it's pretty strange to give a natural resource a legal personality. But it's no stranger than family trusts, or companies or incorporated societies."

The river would be represented by two officials, one from the Whanganui iwi and the other from the Crown.

Labour's Te Tai Hauauro MP Adrian Rurawhe said that in Whanganui, the wellbeing of the river was directly linked to the wellbeing of the people. Therefore, the concept of treating a river as a person was not unusual for Maori. It was captured in the well-known Maori saying, "I am the river and the river is me". [...]

It is the first time legal status has been given to a natural resource in New Zealand, but a similar legal innovation was used in the Tuhoe settlement in 2013.

In that case, Te Urewera National Park in the central North Island was also recognised as a legal entity with all the rights of a person. The land was legally owned by nobody, but jointly managed by the Crown and Tuhoe.

The Whanganui Treaty settlement also included \$80m in financial redress, \$30m towards a contestable fund to improve the health of the river, and \$1m to establish the legal framework for the river.

Finlayson said the settlement brought the longest-running litigation in New Zealand history to an end. Whanganui iwi had fought for recognition of its relationship with the river since the 1870s, he said.

19. 'Disputed by multiple fact-checkers': Facebook rolls out new alert to combat fake news

Elle Hunt – The Guardian – 22 March 2017

Facebook has started rolling out its third-party fact-checking tool in the fight against fake news, alerting users to “disputed content”.

The site announced in December it would be partnering with independent fact-checkers to crack down on the spread of misinformation on its platform.

The tool was first observed by Facebook users attempting to link to a story that falsely claimed hundreds of thousands of Irish people were brought to the US as slaves.

Titled “The Irish slave trade – the slaves that time forgot”, the story published by the Rhode Island entertainment blog Newport Buzz was widely shared on the platform in the lead-up to St Patrick’s Day on 17 March.

For some users, attempting to share the story prompts a red alert stating the article has been disputed by both Snopes.com and the Associated Press. Clicking on that warning produces a second pop-up with more information “About disputed content”.

“Sometimes people share fake news without knowing it. When independent fact-checkers dispute this content, you may be able to visit their websites to find out why,” it reads. “Only fact-checkers signed up to Poynter’s non-partisan code of principles are shown.”

The Poynter code promotes excellence in non-partisan and transparent fact-checking for journalism.

The pop-up also links to Snopes.com, AP and Facebook’s official help page. Choosing to ignore the warning and click “publish” prompts another pop-up, reiterating that its accuracy was “disputed”. Clicking “post anyway” publishes the link, but it appears in others’ timelines as “Disputed by Snopes.com and Associated Press”.

Attempts by the Guardian in San Francisco to publish the Newport Buzz story triggered the tool, but not in Sydney or London. It was also possible to flag it to Facebook as a “fake news story” through the usual reporting process.

Facebook declined to comment on the roll-out of the tool, but its help centre page on how news is “marked as disputed on Facebook” confirmed “this feature isn’t available to everyone yet”.

24. Scientists Turn to Chile's Atacama Desert to Study Life on Mars

Reuters – February 23, 2017

SANTIAGO — Astrobiologists seeking to understand where life might be found on Mars, and what form it might take, are finding that the Atacama desert in Chile, the driest in the world, may hold some important clues.

Since a 2003 study that examined microbial life in the 'Mars-like soils' of the Atacama, astrobiological research – the study of life on Earth to understand how it may form elsewhere in the universe – in the desert has grown dramatically.

"It is much cheaper than traveling to Mars," said Armando Azua, a Chilean astrobiologist at the Blue Marble Space Institute in the U.S., who grew up in one of the Atacama's few populated areas.

"It is the driest and oldest desert in the world, a unique place where life had no choice but to adapt to the lack of water."

Still, even in this harsh environment, scientists have found life – usually at the microbiological level – clinging on.

"We think that even in those places on Mars where previously it was thought life would not be found, because they were too dry for anything to survive, well we've found places just like that on Earth and there are still different kinds of microorganisms," said Azua.

Scientists are currently investigating if fungi or other organisms could adapt and harvest high levels of ultraviolet radiation as an energy source, in the way that fungi found near the site of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster was apparently feeding off the area's high levels of radiation.

Azua's team identified a patch of the Atacama that was the driest of all, where centuries may pass without any rainfall.

They dug down, and found a whole host of thriving bacteria.

"If we can show that in the Atacama desert, life is capable of tolerating extreme dryness... that will open up tremendously the possibilities of finding life not only on Mars but elsewhere in the universe," he said.

25. Supermarkets must stop discounting unhealthy foods to tackle child obesity, say MPs

Sarah Boseley, Health editor – The Guardian – 27 March 2017

Tough new measures to tackle childhood obesity – including a restriction on supermarkets offering “deep discounts” on unhealthy foods – must be introduced, according to a committee of MPs.

The Commons health select committee said it was “extremely disappointed” with the government’s current plans to fight obesity, and said ministers had ignored proposals from experts and had failed to go far enough.

In a report published on Monday, there was specific criticism of there being “no mention of price promotions” despite experts recommending there should be controls on supermarkets discounting unhealthy food and drinks aimed at children.

“We are extremely disappointed that the government has rejected a number of our recommendations,” said Dr Sarah Wollaston, the Conservative MP who chairs the committee.

“These omissions mean that the current plan misses important opportunities to tackle childhood obesity.

“Vague statements about seeing how the current plan turns out are inadequate to the seriousness and urgency of this major public health challenge.

“The government must set clear goals for reducing overall levels of childhood obesity as well as goals for reducing the unacceptable and widening levels of inequality.”

The attack on the government’s plan from the influential committee was supported by a number of health bodies, which also condemned the plan as inadequate – in spite of their support for its flagship measure, the sugary drinks tax.

Prof Russell Viner of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said: “The fight against obesity is going to be long and hard – and the health committee is right: without action across a number of areas, any impact of individual policies will be minimal.”

The British Retail Consortium had told the committee that regulation was needed to ensure that all supermarkets and other shops stop promotions of high-fat and high-sugar foods, but the government ignored that recommendation. Public Health England, the government’s advisory body, also supported it.

27. Is 'ugly produce' a new trend?

'Ugly produce', it seems, is finding its way onto retail shelves around the world

*By Mike Cordes, agricultural journalist, consultant, trainer and former farmer –
Farmer's Weekly – October 12, 2016*

"The future of produce is ugly. Twisted, blemished, mutated and deformed, to be specific," says a Washington Post article featured in the PMA Smartbrief (29 July).

Previously, I've derided EU officialdom for over-regulation of fresh produce. I've also criticised supermarkets for setting unrealistic standards for fresh produce. Neither take into account the vicissitudes of nature. Everything must look exactly the same!

Now Walmart, the largest retailer in the world, seems to be setting the pace with 'ugly produce'. Apparently it has started with 'less-than-pretty apples' in 300 stores in Florida. This follows on from its UK programme, which placed 'ugly potatoes' on retail shelves earlier this year.

Some might balk at the use of the term 'ugly produce'. Only last week I wrote about value for money when buying fresh produce. One of the criteria is that the product should look good and conform to laid down specifications.

Clearly differentiated

I suppose we'll never get away from the fact that people buy 'with their eyes'. But this is precisely why the term 'ugly produce' is important.

It enables such fruit/vegetables to be clearly differentiated from 'beautiful produce' and provides the basis for initiatives emphasising their health benefits and usefulness. And this is what the retailers are doing. In doing so, they're also helping to address the appalling waste of food taking place around the world.

Taking action

For example, the Washington Post article says 40% of all food grown in the US goes uneaten, while up to 52% of fresh fruit and vegetables is 'lost' rather than consumed.

Other factors contribute to the problem, such as incorrect storage and bad handling, but the main thing is that retailers and other responsible role-players are taking action. So let's applaud all of these 'ugly' initiatives!

29. Poll: More Americans Than Ever Want Marijuana Legalized

VOA News – April 20, 2017

Marijuana enthusiasts in the United States celebrate April 20 — or 4/20 — as an informal holiday, but this year they have something else to get excited about: New polling data show support for legalization of the drug is at an all-time high.

Sixty percent of Americans say they support the legalization of marijuana, according to a poll released Thursday by Quinnipiac University. The same poll taken in December 2012 showed 51 percent of respondents supported legalization.

"From a stigmatized, dangerous drug bought in the shadows, to an accepted treatment for various ills, to a widely accepted recreational outlet, marijuana has made it to the mainstream," Tim Malloy, assistant director of the Quinnipiac University Poll, said in a statement.

According to the poll, an overwhelming 94 percent of respondents said they support the use of marijuana by adults for medicinal purposes — also the highest level of support seen in the poll's history.

Seventy-three percent of Americans said they oppose enforcement of federal laws against marijuana in states that have legalized medical or recreational marijuana.

Currently, 29 states have legalized marijuana use for medicinal purposes, and eight states and the District of Columbia have legalized recreational use.

Marijuana advocates across the country held events to observe the annual 4/20 quasi-holiday. In Washington, D.C., activists planned to distribute free joints to congressional staffers on Capitol Hill. However, Capitol Police interrupted the event, arresting two women and one man, and charging them with possession with intent to distribute pot. Four other women were charged with simple possession.

One of the organizers, Nikolas Schiller, told the Associated Press that police "decided to play politics" with the demonstration and that the people arrested committed no crimes. "We'll see them in court," Schiller said.

31. Plastic Eating Worm Could Help Ease Pollution

VOA News – April 25, 2017

The common wax worm, or *Galleria mellonella*, researchers say, can eat plastic and could help reduce the waste caused by the one trillion polyethylene plastic bags used around the world annually.

"We have found that the larva of a common insect, *Galleria mellonella*, is able to biodegrade one of the toughest, most resilient, and most used plastics: polyethylene," says Federica Bertocchini of the Institute of Biomedicine and Biotechnology of Cantabria in Spain.

The discovery about the caterpillar's hunger for plastic was accidental, said Bertocchini, adding that the plastic bags containing the wax worms "became riddled with holes."

She said the worms can "do damage to a plastic bag in less than an hour." And after 12 hours, researchers saw "an obvious reduction in plastic mass."

They also found that the worms transformed polyethylene into ethylene glycol, an organic compound used in making polyester fibers as well as antifreeze. It is unclear if the worms produce enough to be commercially viable.

Plastic is not the natural food of the wax worm, but researchers say that since they lay their eggs in beehives, the hatchlings feed on beeswax.

"Wax is a polymer, a sort of 'natural plastic,' and has a chemical structure not dissimilar to polyethylene," Bertocchini says.

Researchers say they still need to better understand how wax is digested, but that finding out could lead to a biotechnological solution to plastic waste.

"We are planning to implement this finding into a viable way to get rid of plastic waste, working towards a solution to save our oceans, rivers, and all the environment from the unavoidable consequences of plastic accumulation," Bertocchini says. "However," she adds, "we should not feel justified to dump polyethylene deliberately in our environment just because we now know how to biodegrade it."

32. Real books are back. E-book sales plunge nearly 20%

Ivana Kottasová – CNN Money – April 27, 2017

New data suggest that the reading public is ditching e-books and returning to the old fashioned printed word.

Sales of consumer e-books plunged 17% in the U.K. in 2016, according to the Publishers Association. Sales of physical books and journals went up by 7% over the same period, while children's books surged 16%.

The same trend is on display in the U.S., where e-book sales declined 18.7% over the first nine months of 2016, according to the Association of American Publishers. Paperback sales were up 7.5% over the same period, and hardback sales increased 4.1%.

"The print format is appealing to many and publishers are finding that some genres lend themselves more to print than others and are using them to drive sales of print books," said Phil Stokes, head of PwC's entertainment and media division in the U.K.

Stokes said that children's book have always been more popular in print, for example, and that many people prefer recipe books in hardback format.

"Coloring books were a big trend over the past few years... and giving a book as a gift is far less impressive if you are giving a digital version," he added.

Experts say that many people are also trying to limit their screen time.

U.K. regulator Ofcom found that one third of adults had attempted a "digital detox" in 2016 by limiting their use of smartphones, tablets and other devices.

The return to paper is also hurting device manufacturers.

Sales of e-readers declined by more than 40% between 2011 and 2016, according to consumer research group Euromonitor International.

"E-readers, which was once a promising category, saw its sales peak in 2011. Its success was short-lived, as it spiraled downwards within a year with the entry of tablets," Euromonitor said in a research note.

According to the Pew Research Center, 65% of Americans reported reading a printed book in the past year, compared to only 28% who read an e-book.

A quarter of the population hadn't read a book of any kind, whether in print, electronic or audio form.

33. Vertical future: London based start-up to launch device to tackle air pollution in major cities

Zlata Rodionova – The Independent – 1 March 2017

A London-based tech start-up is developing a secretive tool designed to limit the impact of air pollution in major cities.

Husband-and-wife team Jamie and Marie-Alexandrine Burrows this week launched Vertical Future, a company backed by HSBC, which aims to tackle the negative effects of urbanisation and make our cities a “healthier place to live”.

The company’s digital product to monitor and reduce air pollution is currently in development with a prototype expected by August 2017.

“We want to make cities better for our children,” Mr Burrows said.

“Our various urban initiatives are long-term responses to tackle the negative effects of urbanisation. To promote fast and sustainable growth, we are looking to work with research organisations, investors, government, and third sector organisations that share similar views on health and urbanisation” he added.

Vertical Future’s overall mission focuses on three themes: food, digital and living.

The company’s first step will be to launch a network of so-called vertical farms across London in disused buildings and recycled shipping containers.

Vertical farming refers to a method of growing crops, usually without soil or natural light, in beds stacked vertically inside a controlled-environment building. Each farm promises to provide year-round produce for school and local communities, create jobs and improve awareness of food sustainability as well as reducing the distance that food travels from crop to plate.

The first site in South East London will be operational from April 2017 and plans are being drawn up for a second site.

This year London reached its annual limit for pollution in just five days, according to data from the capital’s main monitoring system.

The World Health Organisation estimates air pollution annually costs the UK £62bn, and London Mayor Sadiq Khan has made tackling the problem a priority of his administration.

35. Scientists march against threat they face in post-fact age

Philip Whiteside – Sky News – 22 April 2017

Scientists have taken to the streets to protest over fears that long-standing principles underpinning centuries of progress could be at risk. Several celebrities joined the March for Science in London as it passed a series of the capital's most celebrated research institutions.

It follows the mushrooming of fake news stories and others that purport to be based on fact but are proved otherwise by the scientific community.

It also comes after the Trump administration faced accusations of attacking efforts to restrict climate change and the science on which it is based by slashing the US's Environmental Protection Agency budget.

The march in London was one of hundreds of similar events taking place around the globe, from Australia to the US, in a mass celebration of scientific endeavour.

Concerns that the comments of politicians could threaten to override academic research flared up last summer after former Cabinet minister Michael Gove claimed the public "have had enough of experts".

Organisers of the march said it was crucial to highlight "the vital role that science plays in each of our lives and the need to respect and encourage research that gives us insight into the world".

In the capital, supporters gathered outside the Science Museum before marching to Parliament Square past the headquarters of organisations like the Royal Society - the oldest society for the promotion of science still in existence.

There are also concerns that Brexit will result in an exodus of talent and funding from UK research establishments.

The Commons Science and Technology Committee this month said it was important to ensure scientists and experts can still work in the UK following Brexit.

In March, Nobel Prize winning scientist Sir Paul Nurse said: "I don't think there's anything in Brexit that helps universities, either in teaching or research, but we are where we are...we have to make the best of it."

36. Stop calling almond, soy and rice milks 'milk,' 25 members of Congress say

Associated Press -23 December 2016

Got milk? Twenty-five members of Congress say if it's from soybeans, almond or rice, it should not be labeled as milk.

Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho), leading the bipartisan charge against “fake milk,” signed a letter along with other congressional members, asking the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to investigate and take action against manufacturers of “milk” that doesn't come from cows.

They want the FDA to require plant-based products to adopt a name other than milk, which they say is deceptive.

“We strongly believe that the use of the term ‘milk’ by manufacturers of plant-based products is misleading to consumers, harmful to the dairy industry and a violation of milk's standard of identity,” the letter states.

Dairy farmers are struggling with “deep cuts in income” following a 40% drop in milk prices since 2014, the members of Congress say. The forecast is for prices to remain low. The sale of plant-based products, often labeled as milk, has jumped in recent years, the letter states.

They say milk has a clear standard of identity: “obtained by the complete milking of one or more healthy cows,” among other qualities.

The egg industry launched a secret two-year war against a vegan mayonnaise competitor

“While consumers are entitled to choose imitation products, it is misleading and illegal for manufacturers of these items to profit from the ‘milk’ name,” the letter states. “These products should be allowed on the market only when accurately labeled.”

The Soyfoods Assn. of North America said the term “soymilk” has been used on products for more than 100 years. It asked the FDA in 1997 to recognize the one-word name “soymilk” but said the FDA has not made a decision on the petition.

The FDA said Friday that it has received the Dec. 16 letter and plans to respond directly to lawmakers.

37. We must all stand up to the world's richest nation and oppose its use of modern slavery

Sharan Burrow – The Guardian – 19 March 2017

Life for a migrant worker under Qatar's *kafala* sponsorship system means living under your employer's total control over every aspect of your existence – from opening a bank account to changing jobs, and even being allowed to leave the country.

This corrupt system starts with recruitment under false pretences in their home countries and entraps them once they set foot in Qatar.

Hundreds of these workers succumb every year to the appalling living and working conditions, returning to their home countries in coffins, their deaths callously written off as the price of progress.

The world's richest country is spending £400m a week on the huge infrastructure programme for 2022, but paying the workers who are making it happen as little as £8 a day. There is no minimum wage, no unions are allowed and even basic protections at work are lacking for most.

Winning the World Cup bid could have been a catalyst for change in Qatar, but it has not been yet.

Workers still have to get their employer's permission to change jobs and even to leave the country.

The Qatari government has repeatedly failed to keep its pledge to reform in the years since it was awarded the World Cup. Each time I have spoken to government representatives, promises are made – but usually the same promises they made the last time we spoke.

Fifa, too, has a heavy burden of responsibility, by not making real reform a requirement for hosting its most prestigious and profitable event. Players and fans do care if the tournament is delivered on the basis of slavery, exploitation and death.

Fifa and other global sports bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee, are making human rights a requirement in future bids for major events but, right now, Qatar's migrant workers urgently need real backing from football's ultimate authority, as it strives to revive its battered reputation.

39. Great Barrier Reef at 'terminal stage': scientists despair at latest coral bleaching data

Christopher Knaus, Nick Evershed – The Guardian – 9 April 2017

Back-to-back severe bleaching events have affected two-thirds of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, new aerial surveys have found.

The findings have caused alarm among scientists, who say the proximity of the 2016 and 2017 bleaching events is unprecedented for the reef, and will give damaged coral little chance to recover.

Scientists with the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies last week completed aerial surveys of the world's largest living structure, scoring bleaching at 800 individual coral reefs across 8,000km.

The results show the two consecutive mass bleaching events have affected a 1,500-km stretch, leaving only the reef's southern third unscathed.

Where last year's bleaching was concentrated in the reef's northern third, the 2017 event spread further south, and was most intense in the middle section of the Great Barrier Reef. This year's mass bleaching, second in severity only to 2016, has occurred even in the absence of an El Niño event.

Mass bleaching – a phenomenon caused by global warming-induced rises to sea surface temperatures – has occurred on the reef four times in recorded history.

Prof Terry Hughes, who led the surveys, said the length of time coral needed to recover – about 10 years for fast-growing types – raised serious concerns about the increasing frequency of mass bleaching events.

“The significance of bleaching this year is that it's back to back, so there's been zero time for recovery,” Hughes told the Guardian. “It's too early yet to tell what the full death toll will be from this year's bleaching, but clearly it will extend 500 km south of last year's bleaching.”

Last year, in the worst-affected areas to the reef's north, roughly two-thirds of shallow-water corals were lost.

Hughes has warned Australia now faces a closing window to save the reef by taking decisive action on climate change.

The 2017 bleaching is likely to be compounded by other stresses on the reef, including the destructive crown-of-thorns starfish and poor water quality.

40. The power of the big four supermarkets

Observer editorial – 2 October 2016

[...] The supermarket, the invention of the 1960s, provides huge choice at relatively cheap prices for consumers who are increasingly pushed for time and money.

Now, four companies – Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda and Morrisons – dominate 75% of the market, although the German discounters Aldi and Lidl, offering far fewer products, competitive prices and stripped-down shops, are rising fast. While the price at the checkout is attractive, it fails to factor in the hidden cost to our health, the environment, to animal welfare, farming and the countryside. Furthermore, certain aspects of government policy, such as the intensive production of wheat, are exhausting the soil.

The four have enormous power. They can dictate the size of an apple grown 6,000 miles away. A change in the price they are prepared to pay can make or break farmers. A thousand dairy farms have closed in three years, beaten by the supermarket price of milk. The demand for "seasonal" produce all year round has had an impact on Britain's self-sufficiency. It has declined over 30 years from 78% to 60% – and the population is predicted to rise to 75m in 20 years.

The good news is that consumers have clout – if they choose to wield it. Learning how to use it should begin at school. Children [...] need to know more about what honest food is and why it matters. Labelling has to be tougher. "Permanently housed" on beef products tells us the cows have been kept indoors for their lifetime. We need tougher monitoring and policing of animal welfare, food fraud and the treatment of farmers and suppliers by supermarkets.

We need a healthier food chain, offering greater transparency and credible claims of "local" and "farm-fresh". Monitoring has been weakened by austerity and prosecutions are rare. The horsemeat scandal three years ago failed to shake up the system. It shouldn't require another before we begin to see real change that can begin with us, the customer.

44. Trump: The Gun Control President?

The Times, Plain English Version – January 12, 2017

It seems no other people on earth spend more time and money buying guns than Americans. When they are not buying guns, Americans are fighting for laws that protect their right to buy guns.

The election of Barack Obama scared the owners of guns. They thought he was going to change the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. That amendment protects the rights of Americans to “keep and bear arms.”

Obama was not going to do that. It did not matter. Gun owners thought he would. So, just in case he did, they went out and bought all the guns they could. Hillary Clinton scared gun owners as well. And she did so for the same reason.

Could anything change gun owners’ fears? Could anything reduce the sale of guns? It turns out there was. It was the election of Donald Trump.

Since Trump won the presidential election, gun sales have gone down. Gun owners believe that “one of their own” is coming to the White House. Everyone should be happy. Except for advocates of gun control.

States and cities can pass their own gun laws. The pro-gun states are a problem. Firearms make their way from pro-gun states to buyers in the anti-gun states. Most of the buyers are criminals. Trump’s election will not change that.

The companies that make guns are also unhappy with Trump’s election. Their sales are way down. They were a growth industry. Now, they have less value in the stock market.. Wall Street is reviewing some mergers between companies.

The F.B.I. does arrest record checks on people when they buy arms. The number of checks has gone down. A gun business analyst said, “There is no question gun sales have fallen because of the election.”

There is a certain irony here. The pro-business, pro-gun president-elect is hurting the gun industry. And at the same time, he is making America safer: fewer guns in the hands of people should mean fewer guns fired.

Source: [The New York Post](#) January 9, 2017

45. Deer numbers 'being badly managed'

Kevin Keane, BBC Scotland's environment correspondent – 3 April 2017

In a report, the committee criticised Scottish Natural Heritage for failing to provide leadership in controlling the deer population.

The animals are culled to keep their numbers down and protect the landscape from over-grazing. But efforts to manage those numbers have been failing. The report acknowledges that the overall deer population has been declining over the past decade but says the animals are still having a significant impact on the natural heritage.

The committee calls for greater focus and urgency to address the challenges of deer management across Scotland.

Convener Graeme Dey MSP said: "The Committee welcomes the fact that some progress has been made but it's clear that some Deer Management Groups and the Scottish Natural Heritage need to raise their game to deliver the step change needed.

"Habitats damaged by deer take a long time to recover. We simply can't go on like this if we're to achieve the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy targets.

"That's why we've outlined recommendations for Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Government to act to protect and hopefully restore these habitats as a matter of urgency."

The key findings are:

- The legislation which aims to protect the natural environment from deer impacts is not fit for purpose.
- 50% of Deer Management Groups are not delivering an effective plan on the ground.
- Scottish Natural Heritage, the organisation charged with protecting Scotland's natural environment, is failing to provide leadership in managing the damaging impact of deer.

Sue Walker, SNH's acting chairwoman, said: "Scotland's deer populations are a key part of our outstanding natural heritage.

"At this point, SNH hasn't seen the report, but we are grateful to the committee for the care and time it has spent considering the challenges of deer management across both the Scottish lowlands and uplands.

"We will of course be considering the conclusions carefully and look forward to the Cabinet Secretary's response to the report."



49. Farms could slash pesticide use without losses, research reveals

Damian Carrington, Environment editor – The Guardian – 6 April 2017

Virtually all farms could significantly cut their pesticide use while still producing as much food, according to a major new study. The research also shows chemical treatments could be cut without affecting farm profits on over three-quarters of farms.

The scientists said that many farmers wanted to reduce pesticide use, partly due to concerns for their own health. But farmers do not have good access to information on alternatives, the researchers said, because much of their advice comes from representatives of companies that sell both seeds and pesticides.

The work presents a serious challenge to the billion-dollar pesticide industry, which has long argued its products are vital to food production, especially with the world population set to grow to nine billion people by 2050.

However, this was dismissed as a “myth” in March by UN food and pollution experts, who said pesticides cause “catastrophic impacts on the environment and human health” and accused pesticide manufacturers of a “systematic denial of harms”. In a further blow, the Guardian revealed in March that Europe is poised to ban the world’s most widely used insecticides from all fields.

The new research, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Nature Plants*, analysed the pesticide use, productivity and profitability of almost 1,000 farms of all types across France. By comparing similar farms using high or low levels of pesticides, the scientists found that 94% of farms would lose no production if they cut pesticides and two-fifths of these would actually produce more.

The results were most startling for insecticides: lower levels would result in more production in 86% of farms and no farms at all would lose production.

The research also indicated that 78% of farms would be equally or more profitable when using less pesticide of all types.

50. What Does America Owe Black Americans?

The Times – Plain English Version – September 30, 2016

A new report by the United Nations says America owes black Americans a lot. It took a U.N. committee more than a decade to make its findings.

To begin with, the report says that the slave trade was a crime against humanity. It goes on to say the U.S. should pay reparations. The report also says the recent deaths of blacks at the hands of police are like the lynchings of the past.

One purpose of the report is to highlight the status of black Americans. Black poverty is higher than white poverty. The same is true for most other indicators of well-being. In general, blacks are worse off than whites.

Many Americans are skeptical about their role in the lives of black people. It is part of current life that many issues divide the American people: Americans do not agree about climate change. Many still even do not believe that President Obama was born in the U.S.

What should the nation do about the idea of reparations? Most likely it will not do anything. Some of the ideas about what can happen are of interest. The committee said America might just apologize to blacks. It can also promote health and education programs aimed at blacks. It suggests mental health programs, training in new skills and loan or debt forgiveness.

The report also includes some positive findings. It says the Affordable Care Act is helpful to American blacks. It also reports that the number of blacks in jail has gone down.

America tries to maintain that it is a color-blind country. It is not. Rather, it is “color conscious.” It has supported the idea of large-scale programs designed for blacks. Except programs and laws intended to end discrimination.

Most Americans agree there should be no discrimination, but that is as far as most will go. This report may start a discussion.

Source: [The Christian Science Monitor](#) September 28, 2016

51. Can we have too many trees?

Patrick Barkham – The Guardian – 20 February 2017

A couple of summers ago, I strolled through Glen Feshie [...]: little Scots pines poked through the heather alongside baby willows, dog rose, black grouse and other burgeoning signs of life.

I grew up enjoying the bare majesty of the Lake District. Our treeless uplands are, to me and most other people, completely normal. In times of bewildering change, in everything from politics to the climate, we cling to normality. This must be why Mountaineering Scotland has allied with its normal foe, the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, to criticise the Scottish government's plan to increase the country's forest cover from 17% to 25% by 2050.

The gamekeepers fear losing their normal business of deer stalking and grouse shooting. The mountaineers fret that tourists enjoy Scotland's normal landscape and not "miles-long wanders through woods", as Neil Reid from Mountaineering Scotland put it.

Following an outcry from members about this apparent opposition to trees, Mountaineering Scotland has acknowledged that allowing native forests to return is a positive move.

Trees aren't intrinsically good: covering another 8% of Scotland with lifeless industrial blocks of non-native plantations won't meet government goals of enhanced landscapes, richer wildlife or more jobs. Modern mechanised forestry is not a big employer. Arguments about relative tree cover – Norway, the most comparable northern European country, has 33% tree cover; Finland 73% – aren't totally convincing [...]. Perhaps the treeless, denuded Scottish landscape is a unique selling point.

But people fearing the extinction of normality should go for a walk through Glen Feshie [...] or visit Trees for Life, recreating native Caledonian forest in the Highlands. These are landscapes bursting with life.

The mountaineers will still have their views (magnificent peaks tower above any natural tree line), and hunters will have more wildlife to kill, if they really must (Finland's forests support 300,000 hunters; Norway shoots more grouse than Scotland). This new normal will be better for everyone.

54. Montana Tribe Sues Trump Administration Over Coal Decision

Reuters – VOA News – March 30, 2017

WASHINGTON — A Native American tribe in Montana filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration Wednesday, challenging its decision to lift a moratorium on coal leases on public land without first consulting with tribal leaders.

The Northern Cheyenne Tribe, located in southern Montana, said the administration lifted the moratorium without hearing the tribe's concerns about the impact the coal-leasing program has on the tribe, its members and lands.

Earlier this month, the tribe sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who signed the order lifting the moratorium Tuesday, asking to meet with him to discuss the issue. Zinke did not respond to the letter.

"It is alarming and unacceptable for the United States, which has a solemn obligation as the Northern Cheyenne's trustee, to sign up for many decades of harmful coal mining near and around our homeland without first consulting with our Nation," Tribal Chairman Jace Killsback said.

Although coal leasing can resume on federal lands, Killsback said the tribe, which filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Great Falls, Montana, will bear the brunt of the impact.

"The Northern Cheyenne rarely shares in the economic benefits to the region generated by coal industry and other energy development projects," he said.

Approximately 426 million tons of federal coal are located near the Northern Cheyenne Reservation at the Decker and Spring Creek mines in Montana, the tribe said.

A neighboring tribe, the Crow, rely on coal production to support their local economy and have called for the relaxation of coal regulations for years.

In a press call Wednesday, Zinke said the new executive orders are a boon for the Crow people, who rely on coal as their predominant industry.

"A war on coal is a war on the Crow people," he said. He did not respond to a query about the Northern Cheyenne lawsuit. [...]

57. India makes Ganges a person, praises Whanganui River laws

By Simon Waters – Wanganui Chronicle – NZ Herald – March 24, 2017

Whanganui Mayor Hamish McDouall has labelled as “just extraordinary” Whanganui's part in the iconic Ganges River in India being accorded the rights of a human being.

An Indian court ordered on Monday that the Ganges and its main tributary, the Yamuna, be accorded the status of living human entities.

The judges heralded legislation passed in New Zealand last week that extends human rights to the Whanganui River as the inspiration for the decision.

The Ganges river is considered sacred by more than a billion Indians and is the first non-human entity in India to be granted the same legal rights as people.

The decision means that polluting or damaging the rivers will be legally equivalent to harming a person, Britain's Guardian newspaper reported.

Mr McDouall welcomed the development describing the Whanganui River legislation as world-leading. "What we're seeing is a significant step in enhancing the environment in which we live." [...]

Mr McDouall said it was "amazing" to have the Ganges and the Whanganui rivers linked. "There's a very deep-centred connection from the people to the rivers both here and in India. We wait with baited breath to see when the Nile and Yangtze catch up."

Mr McDouall, a lawyer, said he was eager to read the High Court decision. He recalled reading the writings of a philosopher who wrote some 40 years ago of the intrinsic rights of natural features to have rights and to have them respected and observed. [...]

Judges Rajeev Sharma and Alok Singh said the Ganges and Yamuna rivers and their tributaries would be "legal and living entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities. "All of this will (take) immediate effect, but you can't stop the discharge immediately. So how this decision pans out in terms of practical reality is very unclear."

58. Classrooms in Boston to Get Different Kind of World Map

Ashley Thompson – VOA - April 05, 2017

Walk into most any classroom, and you will see a large world map hanging somewhere on the wall. Teachers use maps for subjects like geography and social studies.

In the United States and other countries, schoolchildren have long learned from one kind of world map. It is called the Mercator projection. This version of map is more than 400 years old. Gerardus Mercator, a European mapmaker, designed it for the purpose of helping sailors and ships on the high seas.

Today, the Mercator projection is the map of choice for modern-day direction-finding services like Apple Maps and Google Maps. It is also the map of choice in school classrooms and textbooks. But map experts and other people say the Mercator projection should not be used in schools. They say it does not correctly show the sizes of countries and continents.

It is not an easy thing to show our three-dimensional planet in just two dimensions – length and width. Gerardus Mercator’s 16th-century method made countries far from Earth’s equator appear larger than they are. Countries close to the equator appear small in comparison.

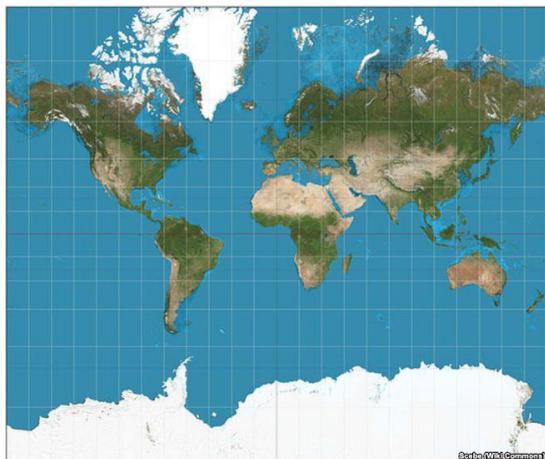
On Mercator maps, for example, Africa appears smaller than North America. In reality, the African continent is larger than all of North America. Mercator maps also make Greenland appear bigger than China. In fact, China is about four times larger than Greenland.

Now, school officials in the U.S. state of Massachusetts are replacing the Mercator map with one that presents a different view of the world.

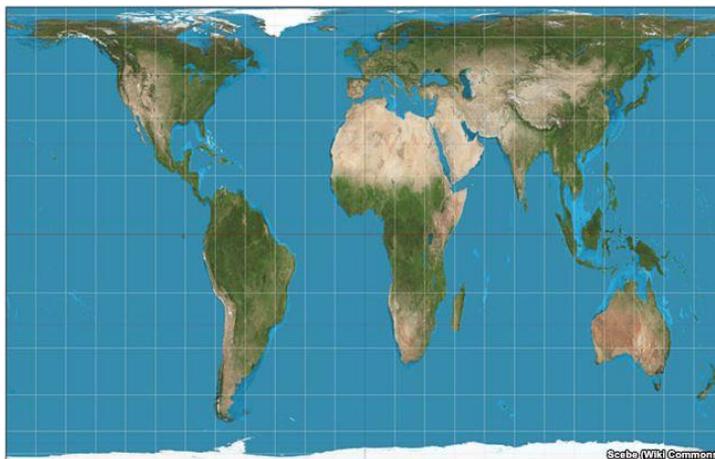
Boston Public Schools is America’s oldest public school system. It is also the first-known American school system to use the Gall-Peters projection world map.

German historian Arno Peters worked on the projection in the 1970s. James Gall of Scotland first developed it in the middle 1800s. Peters’ aim was to fix Mercator’s problems with sizes. He believed that map showed what critics called a “Eurocentric” world view.

The change from Mercator to Peters is part of the school system’s efforts to “decolonize the curriculum,” said Colin Rose, an official with Boston Public Schools.



The Mercator projection world map



The Gall-Peters world map

60. Time to celebrate and protect Toronto's trees: Editorial

Toronto Star – January 8, 2017

It can be hard to tell in the bleak mid-winter, but one of the glories of Toronto is the millions of mature trees that cover almost a fifth of the city's area.

A new international project has now confirmed that when it comes to trees we are indeed wealthy. Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum, compared the tree coverage in a dozen cities and found that Toronto ranks fourth – behind only Vancouver, Geneva and Seattle.

Using Google Street View, they measured the amount of each city covered by trees – the so-called tree canopy. Toronto's score is 19.5%; super-green Vancouver comes out top at 25.9%.

Trees are an under-appreciated asset, vital to our psychological, physical and economic health.

But it's not something we can take for granted. Toronto's magnificent heritage of maples, cedar, ash, buckthorn, pine and others face a host of threats – from poor soil, "heat island" effects, salt and pests like the Emerald Ash Borer beetle that could kill off as many as 3.2 million ash trees in the Greater Toronto Area alone.

Aside from the beauty of Toronto's mature trees, they provide services that are conservatively estimated to have an annual value of some \$125 million – including improved air quality, storing carbon to fight climate change, and saving energy through shade and cooling. [...]

A study published in the journal Science Reports in 2015 found the health benefits of having 10 or more trees on your street is equivalent to moving to a neighbourhood with a \$10,000 higher median income, or being seven years younger.

All the more reason to support the city's long-term goal of increasing Toronto's tree canopy to cover fully 40% of its area by 2050. The city already plants more than 100,000 trees a year on public land and along roads, but it could do more to encourage planting on private property. [...]

61. Potatoes Could Be Grown on Mars

VOA News – April 03, 2017

In the 2015 film “The Martian,” Matt Damon’s character is a scientist left behind on Mars. He has limited food supplies and not much water. He tries to figure out how to survive so he can be rescued. Luckily, he knows how to grow things. And one of the things he grows is a potato plant.

A year later, scientists in Peru and NASA scientists in California started working together on growing potatoes in a harsh location similar to Mars. They built a container where they could simulate the conditions on Mars. The salty soil came from the southern coast of Peru, where there is very little rain.

Inside the “Mars-in-a-box,” the scientists made the air pressure similar to what it is like at 6,000-meters, decreased the temperature below zero, and added carbon monoxide to the air. They made a lighting system that followed Mars’ daytime and nighttime. They planted 65 types of potato plants, and waited. After a while, four of them grew.

Later, the scientists took the strongest of the four plants and tried again. This time, they used crushed rocks instead of soil. The plant still grew.

Why is the research being done in Peru? You may not know that Peru is known as the birthplace of potato farming. People grew potatoes there about 7,000 years ago. Even in cold, barren parts of Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, potatoes still grow. There is also a potato research center, called the International Potato Center, in the capital city, Lima.

The surviving potato in the Mars-in-a box is known as Unique. It can still grow in freezing climates with high amounts of carbon dioxide.

The research is not only for a trip to Mars one day. It is going to help feed people in parts of the world that are already having trouble planting traditional crops due to climate change.

The work is not yet done. The scientists in Peru and California will try to grow more plants in even more difficult conditions.

66. British farmers will have access to migrant workers after Brexit, Andrea Leadsom pledges

Laura Hughes, Political Correspondent – The Telegraph – 4 January 2017

British farmers will have access to migrant workers after Britain leaves the EU, the Environment Secretary has pledged.

Andrea Leadsom said she was "absolutely committed" to ensuring farmers will be allowed to retain seasonal migrant labour, as she promised Brexit would allow the Government to slash "ridiculous" red tape.

The Government are committed to introducing tougher immigration rules, but farmers hope that tens of thousands of foreign workers could be granted temporary visas to pick fruit and vegetables.

Britain's food industry relies heavily on EU migrant labour and an estimated 95 per cent of berries grown commercially are picked by non UK workers.

Speaking at the Oxford Farming Conference yesterday, Ms Leadsom said: "I've heard this loud and clear around the country, [...] and I want to pay tribute to the many workers from Europe who contribute so much to our farming industry and rural communities. Access to labour is very much an important part of our current discussions - and we're committed to working with you to make sure you have the right people with the right skills."

She said she has spoken "very directly" to the Home Office and that there would be "announcements in due course".

Ms Leadsom said [...] that dealing with "red tape" and farm inspections is estimated to cost £5 million a year to the industry and takes up 300,000 hours.

Phil Wilson MP, leading supporter of the Open Britain campaign, said: "People like Andrea Leadsom campaigned to leave the EU by focusing on immigration. They are now faced with the harsh reality of the responsibility for the decision that has been made. This underlines the lack of strategy amongst Leave campaigners. [...] We must protect the economy but we must also listen to the issues that people have regarding immigration. We need a clear plan from Ministers, no more empty rhetoric."

67. If you wear fake fur, you are dressing up as an animal killer

Chas Newkey-Burden – The Guardian – 12 April 2017

Progress has been made – fur farms were banned in the UK in 2003, and selling cat, dog and seal products is also illegal. But imported fur from other species, including fox, rabbit, mink, coyote, raccoon dog and chinchilla, is still allowed. And this week an investigation by Sky News found that supposedly “fake fur” products, including gloves, hats and shoes, at leading retailers actually contain real fur from cats, raccoon dogs, rabbits, mink and fox.

This discovery has upset shoppers who thought the fur they were buying was synthetic. Never mind the labels, they assumed the cheap price tags alone meant the fur couldn't be real.

But why would anyone who cares about animals want to wear fake fur? True, its fluffiness can have a certain sensual appeal, but the cruelty involved in producing the real thing is such a horrifying business, I wonder why an animal lover would want to be associated with it. Why connect yourself, even symbolically, to such barbarity?

Commercial fur often comes from China, where it's produced very cheaply, frequently due to ghastly conditions. The animals, who spend their whole lives in wire cages, often succumb to anxiety-induced psychosis, gnawing away at their own limbs and hurling themselves repeatedly against the cage bars. It's a horrific life all the way to the end.

But it's not just in China that horrors occur. An undercover investigation into a farm in the United States produced a video nasty of its own. Animals bred for their fur there often spend their entire lives in cages too, before being slaughtered by gassing, neck-breaking, or electrocution of the genitals.

It's time we consigned this peculiar trend to the history books, allowing future generations to read with disgust and bewilderment at how badly their predecessors treated animals.

So leave fur, real or imagined, on the shelf and build your look on something other than animal cruelty. There's nothing beautiful about pretending to be wearing an abused animal.

69. Study: Protection of Amazon's Biodiversity Could Fuel 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'

Reuters – September 16, 2016

RIO DE JANEIRO — The Amazon rainforest holds the biological keys to kick-start a "fourth industrial revolution" if its biodiversity is protected, said a study published on Friday.

New digital technologies such as 3-D printing and quantum computing create the potential for the Amazon's unique plants to drive major advances in medicine and engineering, said the study by Brazilian scientists.

"Leveraging the Amazon's vast biomimetic and biodiversity assets, we can aspire to develop revolutionary innovations in multiple fields," said Juan Carlos Castilla-Rubio, one of the study's authors and chairman of Space Time Ventures, a Brazilian technology company.

"For example, a long-lasting foam produced by a species of frog has inspired the creation of new technologies for capturing CO₂ from the atmosphere."

Amazon plants could also lead to breakthroughs in antiseptics, anti-wrinkle creams, gynecological medicines and anti-inflammatory drugs if they are coupled with new technologies, said the study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Deforestation and climate change are threatening to turn the world's largest tropical forest into dry savannah land, destroying its biological promise, said the study.

If more than 40% of the forest is cleared, the resulting "savannization" process could become irreversible, said the study.

Currently about 20% of the Amazon basin rainforest has been cut down. "Transforming the Amazon into savannah... has massive consequences," Castilla-Rubio told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Brazil has reduced the rate of illegal deforestation by nearly 80% in the last decade, the study said, meaning there is still time to stop the rainforest from becoming savannah land.

Protecting indigenous land rights, combating climate change and providing the right incentives for businesses to move away from extracting natural resources are crucial for further reducing the deforestation rate, Castilla-Rubio said.

Much of the forest was cleared for economic activities such as mining, cattle ranching, agriculture or logging, but the study shows the Amazon has more value if left standing, he said.

73. Women's Institute urges supermarkets to do more to cut food waste

Rebecca Smithers, consumer affairs correspondent – The Guardian – 13 April 2017

The Women's Institute is urging supermarkets to do more to help consumers reduce their domestic food waste, after a survey of its own membership revealed widespread confusion about "best before" and "use by" labelling on packaging.

Its new analysis of products on supermarket shelves found that "once-opened" instructions were often contradictory and often failed to make clear whether they were a guide to food safety or quality.

Only 45% of 5,000 WI members surveyed understood that best before dates were a marker of food quality, while 26% did not understand that the more important use-by dates were a crucial guide to food safety.

In its first ever report on food waste, the WI said supermarkets were "potentially contributing to food waste in the home by leading customers to buy more food than they need, and giving conflicting and confusing on-pack information that leaves customers unsure as to how long a product remains safe to eat in the home setting".

The 42-page report is part of the WI's ongoing campaign to reduce food waste, which follows the passing of a 2016 resolution overwhelmingly calling on all supermarkets to sign up to a voluntary agreement to avoid food waste.

To underline the point about conflicting information, it cites a can of Sainsbury's own-brand sweetcorn advising consumers to eat it within one day of opening, while an equivalent tin from Waitrose gave consumers two days to finish it. Green Giant sweetcorn, however, has no specified date for eating once opened. The government's waste advisory body Wrap estimates that extending the life of a product by just one day could result in 250,000 tonnes of food waste being avoided.

Marylyn Haines Evans, chair of the National Federation of Women's Institute's public affairs said: "WI members are some of the more informed members of society about food and cookery, so the fact that they are still confused about food labelling and 'once-opened' information is a damning indication that supermarkets must do more to help all consumers reduce their food waste and ultimately save money."

74. Read Elizabeth Warren's full statements to the Globe

By Victoria McGrane, Globe Staff – The Boston Globe – February 08, 2017

Senator Elizabeth Warren spoke to The Boston Globe shortly after she was ruled in violation of Senate rules late Tuesday night following her quoting from a decades-old letter written by Martin Luther King Jr.'s widow. [...]

"I've been red carded; I've been thrown out of the game," Warren said in a phone interview with the Globe, stepping off briefly from the Senate floor where she continued to sit although she was no longer allowed to speak.

She said she did not expect to get censured for her speech.

"I thought what Senator Kennedy said back then would be fair game," she said of her reading of Kennedy's 1986 statement. "At that time it got both Republican and Democratic votes against Jeff Sessions.

"And I read Coretta Scott King's letter that described what Jeff Sessions had done as US attorney and the impact it had had on voting rights for people in Alabama," Warren continued. "I thought that letter was moving and entirely appropriate to be read on the floor of the United States Senate."

Warren said she was warned that she was "out of line... then I was gaveled down and forced to shut up when I read Coretta Scott King's letter. No, I did not go into tonight expecting that."

Warren said she had "no idea" why McConnell chose to shut her down "except to make clear that the Republicans do not want the public talking about Jeff Sessions's record. That's the only possible reason. Just shut up and don't talk about him," she said.

Warren said she hopes that everyone will read the letter she was cut off from reading. "It's a powerful letter and it describes a moment in our history that is important to every one of us today."

She then excused herself so she could return to the Senate floor [...] even though she can't speak, Warren said.

76. Why 'engineering Barbie's' pink washing machine defeats the point

Laura Bates – The Guardian – 26 January 2017

“Math class is tough,” declared Barbie in 1992, prompting a backlash from the American Association of University Women and a swift adjustment to the toy’s verbal repertoire. It wasn’t the first time the unrealistically proportioned doll had attracted criticisms of sexism, and it wouldn’t be the last. “Barbie babysitter” came with a book entitled *How to Lose Weight*, which contained the helpful advice: “Don’t eat.”

In 2010, a Barbie book titled *I Can Be a Computer Engineer* clearly had good intentions, but attracted derision after suggesting that Barbie couldn’t achieve technological success without the help of male friends.

So you might think that by 2017, following a recent relaunch supposedly aimed at bringing Barbie into the 21st century with more varied body sizes and skin tones, important lessons about stereotyping and sexism might finally have been learned. Apparently not.

Step forward “engineering Barbie”, a doll designed to encourage girls into a field in which women are enormously underrepresented. So far, so good. Except the products that engineering Barbie encourages girls to build are limited almost entirely to the realm of fashion and household chores: dresses, a moving clothes rack and a washing machine. And, yes, they are all pink.

Who has enough awareness of these issues to sit in a production meeting and discuss the need for more progressive toys, but then *doesn’t* have the awareness to add: “Maybe it shouldn’t be pink and deal solely with domestic chores because that defeats the entire point”?

There’s really only one conceivable explanation: there remains a widespread consensus that the way to attract girls to a male-dominated field is to focus on hearts, cupcakes and high heels. While recent attempts, such as engineering Barbie, represent a major step forward in recognising that action is needed to tackle the underrepresentation of girls in science, technology and engineering, it’s ridiculous to think that the solution lies in perpetuating the very stereotypes that are partially responsible for the problem in the first place.

77. 'Fearless Girl' statue stares down bronze Wall Street bull

By Aimee Ortiz, Globe staff – The Boston Globe – March 08, 2017

Move over bronze bull, there's a new statue drawing attention on Wall Street in time for International Women's Day.

On Tuesday, New Yorkers and tourists in lower Manhattan found themselves staring at a bronze little girl, with hands on her hips, staring down her famed Bovine counterpart.

Installed by State Street Global Advisors, a branch of Boston-based State Street Corp., the "Fearless Girl" statue was placed in the financial heart of NYC as a call for more women to serve on corporate boards.

The work is by artist Kristen Visbal, a Lewes, Del., artist who has created many bronze sculptures, ranging from sports figures to children and animals.

The girl appears to be staring down the bull. Her head is held high. Her hands are firmly planted on her waist. Her pony-tail looks as if it's in motion.

A plaque at her feet says: "Know the power of women in leadership. SHE makes a difference."

The new statue faces off the 7,000 pound "Charging Bull," an 11-foot-tall bronze statue that has been displayed since 1989, according to The New York Times.

Sculptor Arturo Di Modica installed the bull without permits one night near the New York Stock Exchange as a tribute to the country's recovery from the 1987 stock market crash, the Times reported. It was moved to its current location a few days later.

State Street also announced that it had adopted new guidelines to press 3,500 public companies in which it invests to increase the number of women on their boards.

"We believe good corporate governance is a function of strong, effective and independent board leadership," Ron O'Hanley, chief executive officer of SSGA, said in a statement.



Mark Lennihan/Associated Press
The "Fearless Girl" statue faced Wall Street's charging bull statue.

81. Meet meatless meat

EDITORIAL – The Globe and Mail – April 03, 2016

Transformative social change can sometimes spring from unexpected quarters. What if the solution to one of humankind's most pressing food challenges – our mounting appetite for animal protein – lies in a test tube?

In 2013, science gave us the first synthetic hamburger. It cost a mere \$350,000 and had a taste many described as, well, unappetizing. In the intervening years, the product has become more refined and a patty will now set you back about \$15; still not cheap, but getting there.

Biotechnology and food science firms have also succeeded in developing lab-grown milk and egg whites, among other things. They could be available for sale in a decade or so.

All of this is a big deal on several different levels. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization estimates the planet's annual consumption of meat will grow 10% between now and 2030; by then it is forecast to reach 45.3 kilograms per person, or double what it was in the 1970s.

That kind of increasing consumption may not be sustainable. The world's livestock herds emit billions of tonnes annually of greenhouse gases, while consuming vast amounts of feed and land. Deforestation for pasture land and the transportation of food are also major sources of emissions.

The rush to feed a hungry planet – a massively successful effort over the past half-century – resulted in many leaps in food technology and changes in techniques of animal husbandry. However, among the costs has been greater cruelty to animals. Laboratory meat – no animal required – promises to be less morally fraught.

It has its critics, who highlight the energy required to produce it. Even if the planet switched to a vegetarian diet overnight, we'll still have billions to feed, and we'll still need industrial-scale agriculture. But it's possible that the protein factories won't occupy millions of acres of arable land or require billions of litres of water and fertilizer and the razing of forests. [...]

84. Tidal Energy Taking Hold In England

Kevin Enochs – VOA News – March 27, 2017

A massive renewable energy project could change the seascape of the Welsh city of Swansea in coming years.

The plan is to encase the city's lagoon in a horseshoe-shaped causeway that will serve as a giant tidal generator. The four-year project is massive, but if it is approved, it would create a long-term reliable source of clean energy.

The 9.5 kilometer horseshoe would literally ring the harbor of Swansea. Once in place, the huge tides on the English coast will be spinning turbines and creating huge amounts of energy.

"We open the gates in the tidal lagoon, let the water through the turbines, and we generate electricity. It's five Olympic swimming pools worth of electricity every second, and that generates enough electricity for 155,000 homes per year," Mark Shorrocks, chief executive of Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon Power, said.

The core of the project is this massive generator that is equipped with more than 20, six-meter-high turbines that spin when the tide goes in and the tide goes out, four times a day.

That is energy the designers say residents can count on, unlike wind and solar which can be weather dependent.

"So that's the biggest difference between tidal power and, say, wind and solar power, is that the wind is intermittent and you get the sun during the day," Shorrocks said. "With the tides, you always have certain electricity at certain times of the day and then that's staggered at shifts by 40 minutes every day."

The causeway will be created by slowly building it up with giant sandbags. On top of that, it will provide a 9-kilometer causeway for running, biking and sightseeing that proponents say will last 120 years. [...]

The project will cost an estimated 1.6 billion dollars, and take four years to build. But it will go a long way to replace aging nuclear plants and help the United Kingdom meet its clean energy goals.

88. India's Largest Dairy Brand Prepares To Market An Acquired Taste: Camel Milk

Shaina Shealy – NPR News – February 15, 2017

Few Indians outside the district of Kutch in the western Indian state of Gujarat and its community of camel herders drink camel milk. But that's about to change as one of India's largest dairy brands is set to mass market it. The milk will be sourced from this community of nomadic camel herders called Maldharis.

Maldharis have herded camels and consumed the animal's milk for centuries. They drink camel milk tea and serve it plain with breakfast, lunch and dinner. And they consider the milk a cure-all – they tell stories about camel milk curing everything from acid reflux to fever and pregnancy ailments. They also believe it can help manage diabetes. A few studies suggest there may be some scientific merit to these claims – camel milk seems to help regulate insulin secretion and blood sugar levels in patients with Type1 diabetes – suggesting it could potentially be used alongside other medical treatments to manage diabetes. However, scientists are still investigating the therapeutic potential of camel milk.

Meanwhile, Amul plans to market camel milk primarily to people with Type1 diabetes. And the company's managing director, R.S. Sodhi, is confident the product will succeed, especially given the growing number of diabetics in the country. But he acknowledges that the fatty, sour and salty taste will be a challenge. Indians may not take to the unusual taste of camel milk. Even Kutch natives used to camel milk can only stomach the sour milk if it's boiled with sugar or concealed as ice cream.

[The NGO] Sahjeevan is working with the local Kutch Camel Breeder's Association to market creative camel products, including camel milk soap and camel milk chocolate. A few years ago, they even brought a European expert to teach herders how to make camel milk cheese. Amed Taju says the chocolate was a hit among the herders, but the cheese didn't take off. [...]

89. New gluten-free barley trials a 'game-changer' for beer

An Edinburgh micro-brewery is trialing new gluten-free barley from Australia which it claims could be a game-changer for the free-from beer market.

Arabella Mileham – The Drinks Business – 19th October 2016

Bellfield Brewery, which was set up by two Coeliacs and launched its first two free-from beers on the market in March, has been licensed to use the new Kebari barley in small-scale non-commercial trials by the Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). It is hoping this will lead to the development of a wider range of more interesting, naturally gluten-free beers in different styles, and is particularly keen to develop darker and heavy beers and stouts that are rarer to find in the free-from aisles.

The new barley has taken thirteen years to be developed through selective breeding, which has resulted in a barley with 10,000 times less gluten than regular barley. At 5 parts per million (ppm) gluten, it also falls well within the WHO's recommended limit (for gluten-free) of 20ppm.

The brewery is dedicated to producing gluten-free beers, having been set up by two Coeliacs. It is using the trial to discover the range of the barley and see what beers the gluten-free barley can produce.

Owner and co-founder Giselle Dye said gluten-free beers were primarily produced using added enzymes to clarify and remove the gluten, or through a filtration process, but that this would provide more choice for customers and was an issue of "trust and provenance". [...]

Brewer and brewery Manager, Kieran Middleton, added that the new trials continued the new brewery's strong commitment to R&D and innovation in brewing. "Last year we completed a research programme with Heriot-Watt's Institute of Brewing and Distilling and we will soon be starting another round of research and recipe development so that we have a pipeline of tasty gluten-free beers," he said. [...]