

Bringing scientific evidence into any beat: food, restaurants, and agriculture

Science reporting quick tips from [SciLine](#) and [The Open Notebook](#)

While some might view the food beat as only recipes and reviews, there are plenty of opportunities to flavor these stories with scientific evidence and voices.

Five ideas for adding science to food, restaurants, and agriculture stories

If you're reporting on...	Search for relevant research on...
Agriculture	■ Effects of climate change on crop yields and disease resistance ■ Soil, water, and resource management ■ Agricultural waste management
Restaurants	■ Supply chain operations ■ Environmental impacts of food waste ■ Practices to prevent infectious disease spread
Food insecurity	■ Interventions for food deserts ■ Evidence backing community health and nutrition programs ■ Effects of cuts to federal and state programs
Grocery stores	■ Commodity pricing and inflation ■ Evidence behind soda taxes and other regulations ■ Effects of climate change on produce availability
Labor practices	■ Employee wages and worker unionization ■ Technology and labor automation ■ Health and safety in the food and restaurant industry

Inform your food reporting with data

Here are some data sources you can use to bolster your reporting with evidence. Whenever you're using data, [ask experts](#) how those data are gathered and what their limitations are.

- [National Agriculture Statistics Service](#) (U.S. Department of Agriculture): Publishes regular reports on nearly every aspect of the agricultural industry, such as [egg production](#), [farm labor](#), and [chemical use](#).
 - ▶ [The Census of Agriculture](#) (every 5 years) features detailed data on farm size, livestock inventory, producer demographics, and more for every U.S. state and county.
 - ▶ [Quick Stats](#) allows you to search for data by year, region, and commodity, such as specific fruits and vegetables or livestock.
- [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) data: Databases of workplace inspections, injuries, fatalities, and chemical exposures in every U.S. state and territory. Search for data from agriculture or food service industries.

- [Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap study](#): Estimates U.S. county-level food insecurity rates, eligibility for assistance programs, and average meal costs.
- [Sustainable Management of Food Dashboard](#) (EPA): Publishes data and reports on food waste, such as [consumer costs](#), [methane emissions](#) from food in landfills, and [sources of excess food](#).
- [The Consumer Price Index](#) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics): Tracks fluctuations in the price of services and goods, including specific foods, over time.
- [National Restaurant Association's Research and Statistics](#): Publishes state-level and national statistics using data from federal agencies. It also releases [annual reports and economic analysis](#) on the state of the restaurant industry.

Common pitfalls to avoid

- 1. Using the wrong data points:** Make sure you understand the data and how it relates to your story. For example, the retail price for eggs is not the same as the wholesale price.
- 2. Repeating others’ talking points:** Watch out for [science-related claims](#) from lobbying organizations, including the American Farm Bureau Federation and Consumer Brands Association. State-level farm bureau leaders will often just repeat the national platform. Vet claims from elected officials and organization leaders with relevant experts.
- 3. Extrapolating research:** Agricultural research is place- and crop-specific, so avoid generalizing study findings. To find research relevant to your area, contact experts at your state’s agricultural extension service or regional [USDA Agricultural Research Service](#).

Types of experts to contact and questions to ask.

Ask agricultural researchers about: ■ Seed genetics ■ Water and resource management ■ Drones and emerging technology ■ Farm labor ■ Chemical runoff	Ask food scientists about: ■ Forever chemicals ■ Labeling and additives ■ Food processing technologies ■ Nutrition and micronutrients ■ How “new foods” come to be
Ask hospitality researchers about: ■ Supply chains and ingredient sourcing ■ Health and safety regulations ■ Delivery apps and automation ■ Waste reduction ■ Trends such as plant-based menus and mocktails	Ask economists about: ■ Consumer spending trends ■ Tariffs and trade disputes ■ Labor demand & shortages ■ Farm profitability & bankruptcies ■ Crop prices and impact on local/regional economies

Real stories including scientific evidence and experts

- [Can grocery stores keep rural Kansas communities vibrant?](#) (The Beacon News, 2025)
- [Ranches Cover A Fifth Of Hawai'i. Extreme Drought Is Clouding Their Future](#) (Honolulu Civil Beat, 2025)
- [Bay Area restaurants call this cooking style a 'secret ingredient.' Neighbors say it's a health risk](#) (San Francisco Chronicle, 2025)

Special thanks to Missouri School of Journalism graduate student Héctor Alejandro Arzate for research and food and ag journalist Amy Mayer for consulting on this tip sheet.