



Food and the Future of Work

Powerful driving forces are changing the world of work, and there are a variety of ways in which the global futures of work may unfold. **For the food industry this will mean changes in the way food is acquired, prepared, and consumed; changes to consumers' economic security; and changes in supply chains, markets, and expectations for social responsibility.**



Flexible Work

Employers are opting for more flexible work arrangements including part-time work, contingent work, contract work, and freelance work. These trends may make livelihoods less secure.
For the food industry this will mean changes in eating patterns:

Disrupting the time, place, and rhythm of work will **restructure the time and place for meals and snacks**, e.g., driving more at-home and on-the-run eating.

Irregular income could cause **"feast or famine" eating patterns**, e.g., frequent switching between premium and value-priced products.

Intermittent or chronic economic stress could have **long-term effects on food purchase behavior**.

The social isolation of working at home could make **eating together** even more popular.

Automated Work

Machine intelligence, ubiquitous connectivity, and advanced robotics are enabling automation of routine, rule-based physical and cognitive work. For the food industry this will mean changes in the way food is acquired and prepared:

Robots and machines will become the food preparers in fast food and quick-service restaurants, sophisticated new vending machines, and sometimes even the home.

Self-driving vehicles will deliver groceries and prepared meals.

Automation will enable the **customization and personalization of food** in both restaurant and grocery channels, e.g., via 3D printing of food.

The human touch could be associated with artisanal, high-end food in some contexts and with unsanitary conditions in others.

Impact on Lower-Income Countries

Shifts in the global economy, demography, technology, and business structures are reshaping work in lower-income nations. For the food industry this will mean new markets, new sources of supply, and new social responsibility concerns:

New infrastructure will **link now-isolated parts of emerging markets to global supply chains**, enabling a bidirectional flow of raw materials and finished goods.

Ever-more branded and packaged products and restaurant franchises will **arrive on the global stage from emerging markets**.

Ethically grown food and fair labor standards may become expected practice, so that agricultural expansion doesn't exploit the vulnerable.

Growing water scarcity could create conflict and become an important factor in the sourcing of ingredients and siting of processing facilities.

Transforming Work

The drive for workforce efficiency, automation, and the economics of global trade augur profound, even transformative structural changes for the world of work. For the food industry this will mean an even further bifurcated market:

Though transformative economic changes could benefit the poor and vulnerable, the shift to a new economic equilibrium could be chaotic. In the near to medium term **income disparity could widen**.

Similarly, transformative economic changes will **impact the food industry workforce**. For example, one way to create a more inclusive economy might be to restructure jobs by reducing the workweek.

One form of social safety net could be government support for a **guaranteed baseline diet**, most likely in emerging markets.