

Theme Overview: The Challenge of Providing Safe and Accessible Food for a Healthy Life

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JEL Classifications: Q19, D10, D13

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In late 2021, a committee appointed by the leadership of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association developed a white paper on the grand challenge of ensuring that all people have safe, affordable, accessible, and acceptable food for leading a healthy and active life. To meet this grand challenge, we need to predict, identify, and explain causal relationships among policies and market conditions in the food system. Norbert Wilson led this effort, and the white paper is included as part of this theme of *Choices*. Collaborators included Lauren Chenarides, Jane Kolodinsky, and Kathryn Boys.

This theme includes papers based on presentations made during the June 2023 Council on Food, Agriculture and Resource Economics (C-FARE) webinar titled, “The Challenge of Providing Safe and Accessible Food for a Healthy Life.” Linlin Fan presented a paper on food waste co-authored with Eliot Martin, Eliza Hallett, Brenna Ellison, and Norbert Wilson. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency have set a goal to reduce food waste by half by 2030. Various solutions have been proposed, including making donations easier, standardizing date labels, feeding food waste to animals, and implementing consumer education campaigns. However, Fan’s study found a gap between support for these food waste policies and their perceived effectiveness, indicating that people may vote in favor of certain policies but not necessarily change their behavior after the policies are implemented.

Joel Cuffey presented a paper on consumer spending on plant-based meat alternatives. The paper is co-authored with Lauren Chenarides, Wenying Li, Shuoli Zhao, and Brianna Adamo. Plant-based meat products use plant-based proteins to mimic the look, taste, and texture of animal-based meat, and they are often considered more environmentally friendly. However, the healthfulness of plant-based meat alternatives is less clear due to its higher processing, sodium content, and preservatives compared to animal-based meat. Cuffey and his co-authors find that although some consumers—particularly

Articles in this Theme:

- **Grand Challenge: To Ensure That All People Have Safe, Affordable, Accessible, and Acceptable Food for Leading a Healthy and Active Life**
Norbert Wilson, Lauren Chenarides, Jane Kolodinsky, and Kathryn Boys
- **Who Being Blamed for Food Waste**
Eliot M. Martin, Eliza M. Hallett, Linlin Fan, Brenna Ellison, Norbert L. W. Wilson
- **Consumer Spending on Plant-Based Meat Alternatives**
Lauren Chenarides, Joel Cuffey, Wenying Li, Shuoli Zhao, and Brianna Adamo
- **From Contamination to Climate Change: Emerging Risks at the Nexus of Food Safety and Nutrition, and their Implications for Public Health**
Kathryn A. Boys

younger and wealthier individuals—may be receptive to adopting plant-based meat alternatives, the majority of households do not regularly purchase it. Price, taste, and existing habits of animal-based meat consumption remain significant factors limiting the demand and regular incorporation of plant-based meat alternatives into diets.

Kathryn Boys includes an article about the intersection of food safety and quality. Food safety refers to ensuring that food is safe for human consumption, while food quality refers to the nutritional value and visual appeal of food. The economic cost and public health burden of foodborne illnesses in the United States are significant, with an estimated annual cost of \$78 billion. Boys discusses individual food safety concerns (e.g., food allergens, special dietary needs) that can have serious

health consequences as well as food fraud, where fraudulent ingredients or products are introduced into the food system, posing health risks and economic losses.

A recording of the original webinar can be found on the C-FARE website at <https://www.cfare.org/items/challenge-of-providing>.

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