

# Trends We're Watching in 2018

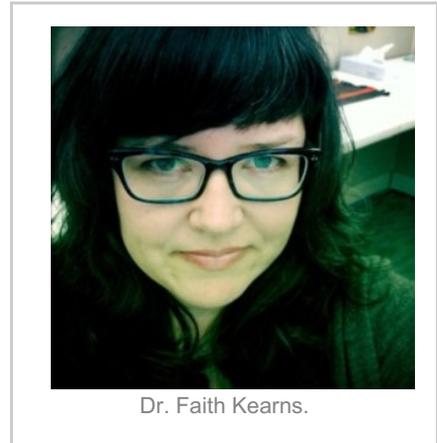
 [ucfoodobserver.com/2018/01/08/trends-were-watching-in-2018/](http://ucfoodobserver.com/2018/01/08/trends-were-watching-in-2018/)

January 8, 2018

As we settle into 2018, it's natural to wonder what the New Year may bring. There have been dozens of "trend pieces" discussing what's in store. In this wrap, we consider possible 2018 trends in water, the GM debate, science communication, and food and nutrition.

## Water

After one of the driest Decembers on record, many Californians continue to worry about water supply. I turned to UC ANR water expert [Faith Kearns](#). Faith is a scientist and communicator at the [California Institute for Water Resources](#), a UC ANR-based "think-tank" that integrates California's research, extension, and education programs to develop research-based solutions to water resource challenges. Faith writes about water issues for a number of publications, including UC's [Confluence](#) blog. She was recently quoted in a [Rolling Stone](#) article about California's "climate emergency", penned by meteorologist/writer [Eric Holthaus](#).



Dr. Faith Kearns.

Faith told me this:

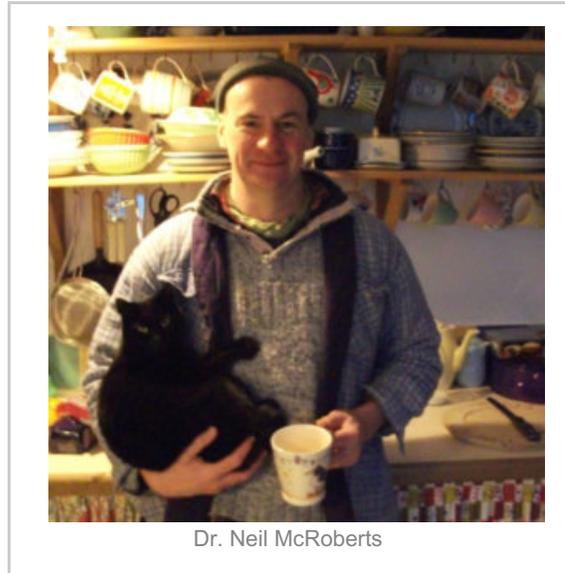
*"Water quantity and human use tend to be the dominant lenses that we use to talk about water in California, but they're not the only thing we need to be paying attention to. For example, water quality issues loom equally as large, and are of course related. But, even beyond that, there are also many non-use oriented ways that water impacts our lives – through recreation, aesthetics, and culture, just to name a few. A trend that I hope to see in 2018 is a broadening of the conversation on water, and an expansion of the kinds of knowledge that are brought to bear on water issues."*

**Editor's Note:** *The quality of American drinking water continues to be a point of local and national concern; it will undoubtedly be an important topic in the 2018 midterm elections in certain congressional districts. Learn more about this vital public health and social justice issue by visiting the [National Drinking Water Alliance](#) website (NDWA). NDWA is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and coordinated by UC ANR's [Nutrition Policy Institute](#).*

## GM Debate: Entering a New Era?

UC Davis associate professor and plant pathologist [Neil McRoberts](#) – who was recently named co-leader of UC ANR's Strategic Initiative in [Sustainable Food Systems](#) – shared his ideas about where we might be headed in terms of framing the GM discussion.

“...The GM debate is entering a new era with the growing use of gene editing – [CRISPR-Cas9](#) – technology. Interestingly, this time around the ethics and socio-economics debate seems to be keeping pace with the science, as witnessed by the [latest issue](#) of the *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, which focuses on gene drive technologies and their uses. The special issue grew out of a workshop hosted at NCSU last year. The use of CRISPR has re-opened debates about how genetic modification should be regulated and labeled.”



Dr. Neil McRoberts

**Editor’s Note:** You can learn more about Neil’s work [here](#). He recently wrote a [guest blog post](#) for UC Food Observer about the importance of cash crops to smallholder farmers in Uganda and Malaysia. For more about the GM debate, read the [text](#) of Mark Lynas’ speech to the Oxford Farming Conference, in which he tries to “map out the contours of a potential peace treaty” between GM proponents and the technology’s opponents. h/t [Nathanael Johnson](#).

### **Will 2018 usher in an era of more civil communication around science-based topics?**

\*It depends on us.

Across the board, our public discourse took a dive in 2017...and that’s a shame. Here’s to a New Year...and resolving to do a better job at communicating with clarity, integrity and with less judgment. The advancement of science (and perhaps the preservation of our sanity) depend upon it.

I loved [this piece](#) by [Tamar Haspel](#), which recently appeared in the *Washington Post* and specifically addresses science communication and agriculture/food issues. Shorter: If we want to persuade people, we have to be respectful. She writes:

“Rudeness can increase polarization and entrench disagreements even further. Nasty begets nasty; it’s regression toward the mean...”

As both a scientist and a communicator, UC ANR’s Faith Kearns also informed my thinking on where the communications trend line ought to go for 2018, telling me that:

“One of the bigger challenges, and opportunities, facing the science communication community is how to really push ourselves to better incorporate more perspectives from the social sciences and humanities. This is particularly true on issues like food, agriculture, and the environment where so much of what is truly challenging is related to human behavior, decision-making, and psychology. It’s not just a matter of using research on science communication to inform practice, but also of responsibly integrating different forms of knowledge into communication efforts.”

## Food and Nutrition Trends

There are an overwhelming number of food trend pieces out right now. The [Hartman Group](#) is a good account to follow to stay apprised of food trends throughout the year. Their Year in Review [blog post](#) is definitely worth a read. It identifies some trends from last year that will likely carry forward, including consumer demands for transparency, “conscious” consumerism, customized health and wellness, and the ways in which snacking is disrupting food culture. Bonus: you can access some of Hartman’s industry reports via links included in the blog post.

For a largely *culinary* perspective of 2018 trends, check out the BBC’s Good Food [piece](#).

Nationally-known dietitian [Christy Brissette](#) has written an [interesting piece](#) about *nutrition* trends (think algae, Stevia, chicory root fiber and eating for “Diabetes 3” – aka Alzheimer’s).

And if you’re having trouble keeping that New Year’s resolution to exercise more, consider reading [this piece](#), which reports on a study indicating that exercise alters our microbiome. – which could improve our health and metabolism. [Gretchen Reynolds](#) for the [New York Times](#).



***Have a great week!***