Food products over the past year showed widespread economic fraud and misrepresentation, and reliance on a complex web of food providers and difficulties in traceability posed strong challenges to the stability and resiliency of the supply chain.

As investors increasingly engage with publicly traded companies on sustainability, food and restaurant businesses need to be especially responsive to and aware of a widening, often bundled set of concerns, including human rights policies and risks, plastic waste, and climate change.

Many operators remain committed to local and regional sourcing of produce and perishables, including for globally inspired dishes. While some chefs forge ahead with innovative and exclusively local concepts with onsite gardens, others still have room for improvement in supporting local and regional farms.

The need for increased crop diversity and regenerative agricultural practices is just starting to gain traction in the foodservice sector, but there continues to be little substantial effort in changing how farms and rangelands are used in the U.S. on a large scale.

Antibiotic use in industrial food animal production is declining rapidly in the poultry industry but remains a problem in swine, beef, and dairy production. Consumer and regulatory pressures continue to push operators to reduce inappropriate use of antibiotics and to improve overall animal welfare standards.

The foodservice industry is increasing its range of healthier plant-forward menu options. Chefs are also driving change in meals for children, in schools and in restaurants, though more work needs to be done in improving nutritional quality of meals and food literacy among children through hands-on cooking.

The calorie menu labeling legislation, now in effect, has encouraged recipe and portion size reformulation, but strategic calorie reduction and a focus on nutrient density, quality, and flavor across all foodservice meals is still needed.

The foodservice industry continues to offer more plant-forward menu options highlighting plant-based protein, with alternative meat products becoming mainstream and lab-grown cultured meats arriving on the horizon.

Interest among trend-leading chefs, large non-commercial foodservice operators, and their customers in plant-forward menus—including fruits and vegetables—is surging. With younger generations accelerating this trend, we hope to see measurable increased consumption data around fruits and vegetables in future years.

Americans eat most of their fish and seafood away from home but only eat half as much as they should. Transformation of U.S. fisheries makes eating locally also generally more sustainable. Chefs and the restaurant industry can play a lead role in helping Americans eat more fish and do so responsibly.

From recipe design to equipment to food sourcing (including a greater emphasis on plant-based ingredients), the foodservice industry has many opportunities to adopt innovative solutions to reduce the water footprint of its menus and within its operations.

The restaurant industry and culinary professionals are driving important trends in plant-forward menu innovation but much more needs to be done more quickly and on a larger scale to set targets and track progress toward reduced GHG emissions within operations and across the entire food supply chain.