

Implications of global home food delivery revolution

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Credit: Joshua Fernandez on Unsplash

What's on the menu for today's consumers? Eating in. Globally, people have increasingly been getting their meals delivered by third parties such as DoorDash, Grubhub or Uber Eats. Global revenues for the online

food delivery sector have increased dramatically—from \$90 billion in 2018 to \$294 billion in 2021—and are expected to exceed \$466 billion by 2026.

According to a paper published today in *Science*, this revolution in food delivery has considerable implications for nutrition, the environment, job creation, work and public policy options.

The paper's authors, including the University of Minnesota's Marc Bellemare, Distinguished McKnight University Professor in the Department of Applied Economics, outline the drivers of this food delivery revolution and its context within a broader transformation of the entire food system, noting that the consequences and [policy implications](#) remain poorly understood and deserve greater attention.

The authors found:

- The food delivery revolution created new jobs, with understudied implications for migrant workers, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Delivery jobs are often precarious, even in high-income countries, with poor [safety standards](#), unpredictable schedules and frequent traffic accidents.
- The dramatic growth of food delivery is both a cause and consequence of the [nutrition](#) transition—a growing desire for higher quality and more convenient foods—exacerbating challenges to promoting healthy diets and food environments to reduce obesity and related noncommunicable diseases. According to Bellemare, an important question in this context is whether people eat more, or differently, when they get food delivered versus eating in restaurants.
- Delivery likely causes more [packaging](#) waste than home preparation and presents other environmental challenges, such as single-use packaging, food waste and transportation and energy

consumption. The use of single-use packaging has soared with the rise of food delivery, creating additional solid waste pollution, especially in low-income countries where solid waste and recycling systems are often of poor quality.

Though the increased demand for food delivery can be attributed in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, experts predict the trend will continue and hope policies addressing potential consequences will follow.

"COVID-19 shifted much of the demand for food consumed away from home to food prepared away from home," said Bellemare. "With lockdowns and other COVID-19 measures being lifted in many countries, this trend is reversing somewhat, but we have good reason to believe that newly acquired food habits are here to stay."

Several countries have already implemented new policies related to the food delivery sector, potentially advancing progress toward the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. However, more research is still needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these policies.

More information: Eva-Marie Meemken et al, Research and policy for the food-delivery revolution, *Science* (2022). [DOI: 10.1126/science.abo2182](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abo2182)

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