Food Policy at 50 Years

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Abstract: The world's food systems have changed considerably since the journal *Food Policy* launched 50 years ago. The journal has evolved along with both the issues most active in prevailing food policy discussions as well as with advances in the theories, methods, data, and evidentiary standards of the policy research community. This article introduces a 50th anniversary special issue, reviews the half-century-long evolution of the journal, and discusses what the patterns apparent therein signal about food policy issues more broadly.

1. Introduction

The journal *Food Policy* launched in 1975, in the wake of the 1974 global food crisis, to provide a multidisciplinary platform for research on the world's most pressing food challenges. The journal's first editorial highlighted the international community's "serious unpreparedness" for agricultural shocks and called for policy-relevant scholarship to inform better responses (*Food Policy*, 1975). At a time when the world faced major challenges of food insecurity, agricultural modernization, and shifting trade geopolitics, *Food Policy* was launched to provide a timely platform for applied and policy-relevant scholarship. Its aim to bridge research and policymaking with scientifically robust work has remained its core mission ever since.

Over the past five decades, *Food Policy* has evolved in both topics covered and the study styles, along with the shifting global food landscape. Early issues centered on pressing concerns of the mid-to-late-1970s and 1980s, such as the Green Revolution and agricultural development, food aid, and trade policy, especially as they applied to low- and middle-income countries. As the food policy agenda evolved over the 1990s and 2000s, the journal expanded its scope to encompass nutrition, food safety, consumer behavior, and market-based interventions. As the evidentiary standards of social sciences steadily rose, contributions also became more methodologically rigorous, with increasing use of applied econometrics and emerging experimental approaches. By the 2010s, *Food Policy* regularly featured work on sustainability, biotechnology, climate change, and diet-related health issues, increasingly grounded in causal inference methods. In recent years, the journal has continued to diversify both thematically and geographically, publishing work on climate adaptation, dietary transitions, resilience, and food systems governance. Published research articles increasingly employ tools from behavioral economics, geospatial analysis, and large-scale administrative data. The ever-evolving analytical scope and steadily-increasing empirical rigor reflect the journal's responsiveness to an evolving policy environment, while steadfastly adhering to its founding commitment to produce research that informs real-world decision-making.

Food Policy has attracted increasing attention from scholars as a premier outlet for research in its space. Figure 1 (grey bars) shows that the annual submission number increases from 754 in 2016 to 1,487 in 2024, nearly doubling over eight years (Figure 1). Especially after steady increases through 2021 (reaching 1,199), submissions plateaued briefly before surging to a record high in 2024, reflecting the journal's increasing visibility in the field. Through just the first 325 days of 2025, the journal had already received 1,572 new submissions, more than in any prior full year.
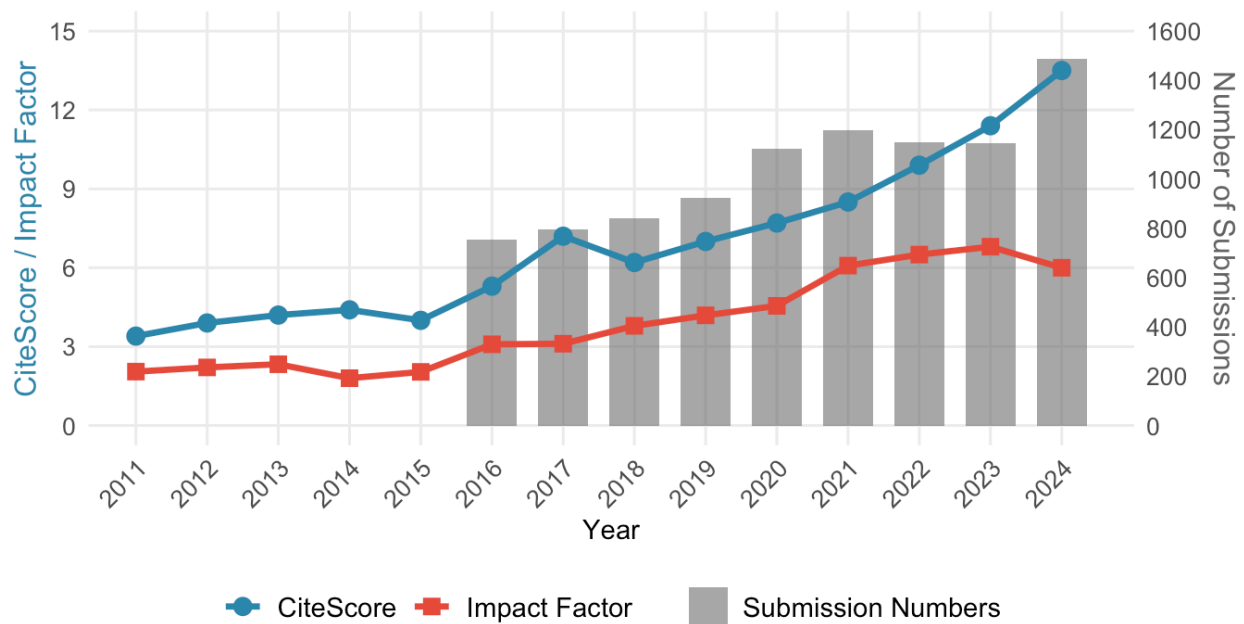
Figure 1：Journal Cite Score, Impact Factor, and Number of Submissions 2011-2024

Data source: CiteScore and submission data are from Elsevier's Scopus database and internal records, respectively. Impact Factors are from Clarivate's Journal Citation Reports.

Meanwhile, the scholarly influence of *Food Policy* has expended steadily and significantly, as reflected in steadily rising CiteScores - growing from 3.4 in 2011 to 13.5 in 2024 - and impact factors - rising from 3.0 in 2011 to 6.0 in 2024 (Figure 1). By all bibliometric indicators, *Food Policy* consistently ranks among the top two or three journals in agricultural economics and in the top quintile in development studies, economics, and food science. This sustained growth reflects the journal's ability to attract high-quality submissions addressing contemporary food challenges while maintaining methodological rigor.

As *Food Policy*'s breadth and reputation have expanded, its editorial leadership mirrors its geographic and intellectual expansion has likewise evolved. Founded under the auspices of Butterworths Scientific, a UK-based commercial publisher that was a subsidiary of Reed International, the journal underwent a fundamental shift when Reed merged with Elsevier in 1992. Elsevier transitioned editorial control from full-time professional editors to part-time academics. With the appointment of Jonathan Kydd as the journal's first academic Editor-in-Chief (2000–2008), *Food Policy* fully transitioned to academic leadership while remaining under a commercial scientific publisher. Editorial representation expanded to include scholars from Asia alongside the journal's traditional base in Europe and North America.

As the volume and breadth of manuscript submissions grew, the journal transitioned from a single-editor model to a collaborative structure, with Co-Editors-in-Chief supported by a team of Co-Editors (previously called Associate Editors) across multiple continents and disciplines. The journal's editorial team reached gender parity a few years ago, a notable achievement given that women comprised only one-third of doctorates in 2019 and 20% of full professors in agricultural economics based on US institutions (Offutt and McCluskey, 2022), and the main competitor journals have yet to come close to such parity in their editorial teams. Currently, the editorial team represents a diverse range of institutions across North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives.

Beyond the regular research articles that comprise the bulk of the papers *Food Policy* publishes in its eight issues each year, the journal also provides other article types that have evolved over time to reflect changing editorial priorities and scholarly needs. The current article types include:

- ***Viewpoints and Reviews:*** Review and Viewpoint articles are considered only when invited by the Co-Editors-in-Chief. These offer authoritative summaries of the current state of the literature and key unexplored research frontiers related to critically important food policy issues. Reviews summarize the existing literature, while Viewpoints more highlight key open research questions or contested positions supported by credible research.
- ***Special issues:*** Special issues are purposefully themed issues curated by Guest Editors under the supervision of a Co-Editor-in-Chief. Special issues launch with a dedicated open Call for Papers - so as to cast as broad a net as possible for the best contributions to the special issue – and typically commence with an introductory editorial written by the Guest Editors, outlining the theme and highlighting the contributions of the papers.[1]
- ***Virtual Special Collections:*** In 2022, *Food Policy* introduced a new format in collaboration with the editors of sibling Elsevier journals (Barrett and Mazzocchi 2022). Virtual special collections bring together previously published articles on key themes, a plurality of them from *Food Policy* supplemented with papers published in other Elsevier journals, offering a curated collection of seminal articles on a topic introduced with a new Review or Viewpoint commissioned from leading scholars. Virtual special collections are designed to support teaching, research, and policy engagement, especially to provide early-career scholars and practitioners with an accessible synthesis of the field's landmark papers.

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[1] See https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/food-policy/about/policies for details on special issue proposals.

- ***Policy Comments:*** Launched in 2024, Policy Comments serve as a rapid-response forum for brief, evidence-informed commentary on urgent or emerging food policy issues (Barrett and Wang 2024). They are short (≤600 words) pieces designed to foster timely and thoughtful discourse without requiring original data, methods, or theory.

With the lone exception of editorials, all papers published in *Food Policy* are fully peer reviewed.

Food Policy's editors could not handle the sharply increased submission volume while maintaining, indeed boosting, the quality and impact of the papers the journal publishes without dedicated service from many scholars who serve as volunteer peer reviewers. All *Food Policy* papers undergo rigorous review by at least two subject matter experts without a conflict of interest. In calendar year 2024, 1,596 scholars completed reviews in response to editors' invitations. To recognize the essential quality control role they play, in 2025, the journal introduced annual *Outstanding Reviewer* Appreciation Recognition of the most exceptional reviewers - 156 individuals, or 9.8% of those who returned reviews - who provided multiple, high-quality, and timely reviews during calendar year 2024. These recognitions celebrate the crucial role of peer reviewers in upholding the journal's scholarly standards and advancing the field.

This 50th anniversary special issue celebrates the accomplishments of five decades of outstanding and high-impact scholarship of authors, editorial teams, and reviewers. It also affords a moment of reflection about the current and prospective state of food policy scholarship. In the pages that follow, we briefly review the journal's evolution, drawing on bibliometric and text analyses. We then briefly summarize the nine Policy Comments and 13 Review papers accepted following peer review in response to open calls for papers for this 50th anniversary special issue of *Food Policy*. We conclude by looking ahead to the next decade, identifying emerging topics, methods, and editorial practices that will shape the future of food policy research.

2. The evolution of *Food Policy* content

Food Policy has witnessed considerable evolution in author composition, geographic coverage, topical coverage, data types, and research methods over these five decades. In the following, we present analyses based on 3,032 published articles retrieved from Scopus by July 4th, 2025.[2]

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[2] In total, 3,351 articles were initially accessed, while 319 published items were excluded as they are either editorials, errata, short surveys, notes, letters, conference papers, or regular research articles without any authors' affiliation information.

2.1 Author composition

The journal constantly benefits from insightful works contributed by distinguished authors (see Appendix for a list), while the profile of authors publishing in *Food Policy* has changed dramatically over the 50 years. Growth in public interest in food policies has expanded the number of publishing authors each year, from 38 in the first full year in 1976 with four issues to 457 in eight issues in 2024. Meanwhile, authorship patterns show a steady shift: the share of co-authored papers increased continuously from 28.0% in 1975–1985 to 92.9% in 2016–2025, and the average number of authors per article also rose steadily from 1.4 to 3.6 over the five decades (Table 1). This pattern reflects a sharp increase in collaborative food policy research, which resembles the trend in agricultural economics (Lybbert et al, 2018). Growth in submissions and in the number and pattern of authors have increased especially quickly since the 2007-9 global food crisis, which again put food policy issues into the center of public policy discourse.

Table 1: Number of Published Articles and Number of Authors per Article, 1975 - 2025

Decade	Num of Articles	Authors per Article		Share of Articles with 1, 2, 3, or more authors			
		Mean	Median	1 author	2 authors	3 authors	3+ authors
1975-1985	343	1.4	1	72.0%	21.6%	5.2%	1.2%
1986-1995	417	1.5	1	65.0%	24.7%	8.4%	1.9%
1996-2005	343	2.2	2	32.9%	34.7%	18.1%	14.3%
2006-2015	786	2.9	3	14.0%	34.9%	26.3%	24.8%
2016-2025	1143	3.6	3	7.1%	21.9%	29.7%	41.3%

The journal has consistently emphasized inclusion. Not only do the journal's editorial guidelines require the use of inclusive language under our published Sex and Gender Equity in Research guidelines (Anonymous, 2022), the journal has also actively strived for increased inclusion by gender and geography among editors and authors. Consequently, against the background of extreme underrepresentation of women in agricultural economics (Offutt and McCluskey, 2022), *Food Policy* has more than doubled the share of female authors, from just 18% in its initial two decades to now nearly 40% female contributing authors (Figure 2). Food is arguably a topic that naturally interests females because of their lead roles within most households in grocery shopping, cooking, and overseeing children's food intake, regardless of culture or geography. Especially as food policy issues have increasingly moved downstream, to focus more on topics related to food consumption, the rising prominence of female voices is important not only for equity in career development but also to ensure balanced representation in well-informed viewpoints.
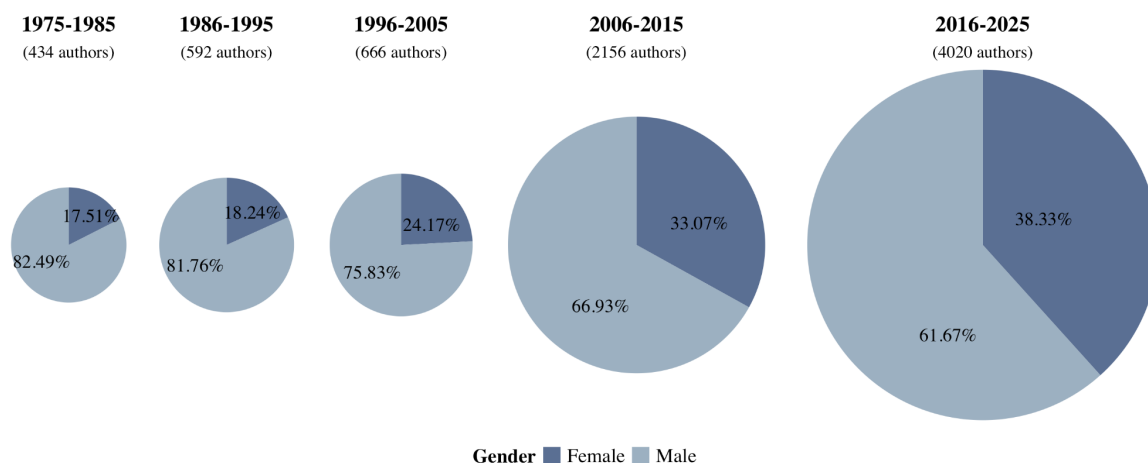
1975-1985
(434 authors)

17.51%
82.49%

1986-1995
(592 authors)

18.24%
81.76%

1996-2005
(666 authors)

24.17%
75.83%

2006-2015
(2156 authors)

33.07%
66.93%

2016-2025
(4020 authors)

38.33%
61.67%

Gender ■ Female ■ Male

Figure 2: Author Gender Composition by decade, 1975–2025 (each pie scales proportionally to the number of authors)

Author diversity is also reflected in their geographic and country distribution, especially across the traditionally under-represented low- and mid-income countries (LMICs), as reflected in authors' affiliated institutions (Figure 3). Although the journal's authors remain predominantly from North America and Europe, the number of authors from East Asia, South Asia, and Africa has grown much faster. Food policies are especially important for these countries because a greater share of people there earn a living in the food system, and LMIC residents spend a larger share of their income on food. Having scholars contribute to the publication by generating authoritative research on issues of their own countries and regions is critical to well-informed research and to research influencing policies so as to have real-world impact. The journal has therefore made concerted efforts to encourage submissions from authors from these countries. For example, starting in 2021, Elsevier began providing professional English editing service for conditionally accepted papers by non-English-speaking authors from LMICs. The Co-Editors-in-Chief routinely give professional development talks to early career scholars in LMICs and at international conferences on how to write papers suitable for publication in *Food Policy* and its peer international journals, and on how to navigate the peer review system as an author or reviewer.
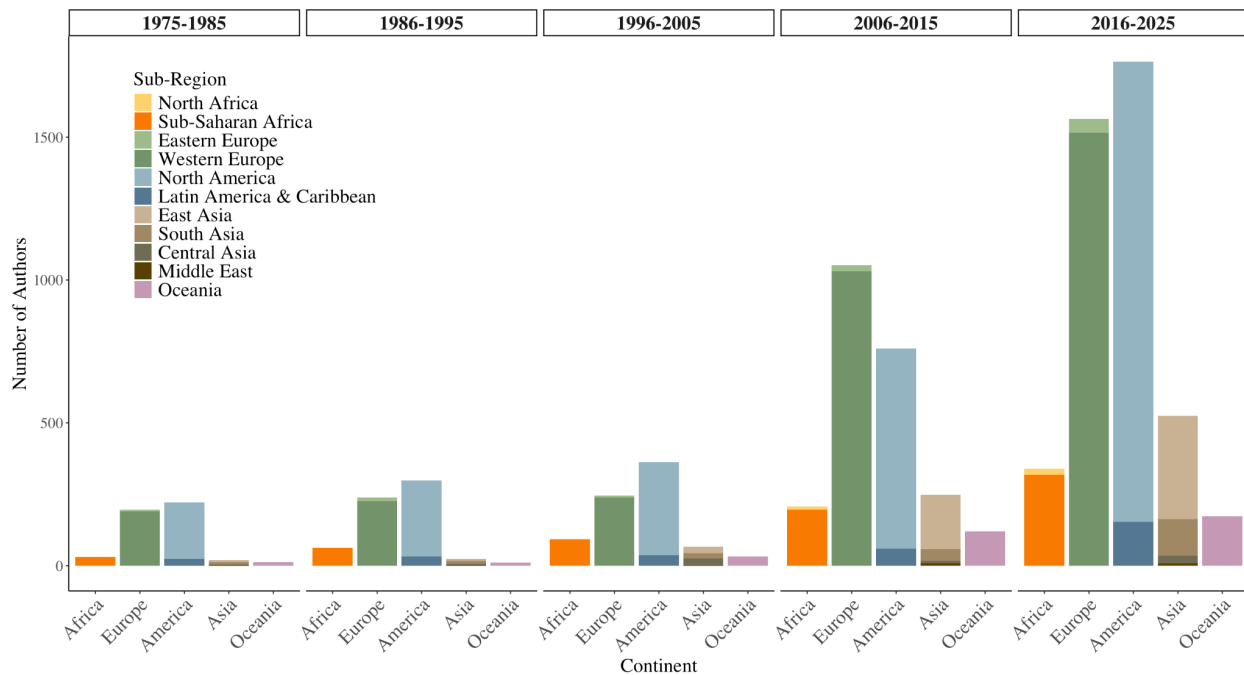
Figure 3: Geographic distribution of authors, 1975–2025

2.2 Topic evolution

The topics published in *Food Policy* have likewise evolved significantly over time. Food Policy publishes studies on topics related to food policies across the entire food value chain, from technology development and agricultural inputs, through farm production, processing, manufacturing, and marketing, to consumption, nutrition, and health-related outcomes associated with food, encompassing cross-cutting issues of gender, environmental sustainability, and economic welfare.

Over the past 50 years, not only have policies shifted, but also the technologies that underpin food systems, with especially rapid changes in biological and digital technologies that have brought new topics into the center of food policy: genetic modification, alternative proteins, digital platforms, precision agriculture, online shopping, etc. These innovations have been duly reflected in the journal's pages.

Key themes have emerged over the past five decades, as identified in text analysis, as illustrated in word clouds (Figure 4)[3]. One clear pattern is the steady reduction in the prominence of Agricultural/Agriculture-themed studies and a corresponding increase in studies about Consumption/Household(s). This reflects the structural transformation of

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[3] Figure 4 reflects text analysis using the "Phrases" and "Collocates" tools in Voyant based on titles, abstracts, and keywords of articles from Scopus. We exclude common words and characters that are used in almost all articles. A complete set of excluded words are listed in the Appendix.

economies, as agriculture's share of employment and income steadily shrinks as incomes rise, so that over time, far more people engage with food systems as consumers than as farmers or farm workers in agricultural primary production.
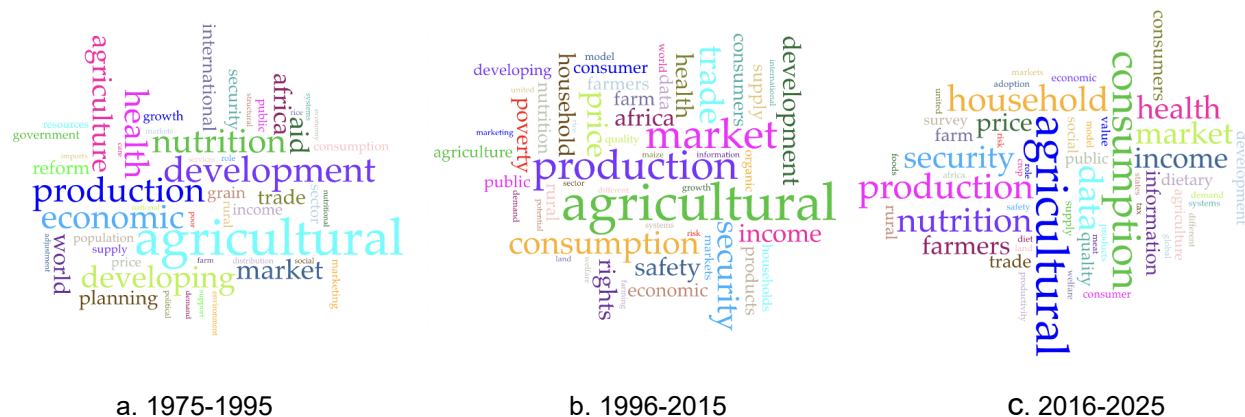

a. 1975-1995	b. 1996-2015	c. 2016-2025

Figure 4. World clouds from published articles in three periods over the fifty years.

In the journal's first two decades, 1975-1995 (Figure 4, panel a), there was a clear concentration of studies on farm production and agriculture. Expressions such as agricultural/agriculture, production, trade, technology, and natural resources appeared relatively frequently. The main policies addressed in *Food Policy* papers of that era mostly concerned poverty alleviation, land reform, agricultural diversification, price stabilization, food security, and market liberalization. There were also many papers focused more downstream, on topics like food aid, food crisis, global hunger, food distribution, nutrition programs, health, and food consumption. But these were decidedly less common than production-oriented papers. The focus of food policy research in the 1970s-80s was primarily around boosting food availability, as a necessary condition to ensure a basic level of food security and a source of income and employment.

Over the next two decades, with the turn of the new millennium, new topics emerged, such as sustainability, agri-environmental policy, biotechnology, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), organic farming, labeling, anti-obesity measures, food safety, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), while food security, food supply, and consumption behavior remained central concerns. During this period, following the creation of the WTO in 1995, researchers focused increasingly on issues related to agricultural trade liberalization, improving food access, and addressing the challenges of natural resource scarcity and the environmental damages arising from food systems. The outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), widely known as mad cow disease, brought food safety-related topics and associated trade barriers to the fore.

In the last decade, mounting pressures from climate change, COVID-19 pandemic shocks, and the shift from ensuring sufficient food availability and access to instead promoting healthy diets have fostered new research topics, which we coarsely aggregate into three groups. The first group centers on food nutrition and safety, including food quality, recalls, labeling, the food environment, nutrition programs, healthy diets, malnutrition, the United States' Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and child health. The second group focuses on sustainable food systems, encompassing food waste, sustainable agriculture, adaptive management, pollution control, and greenhouse gas emissions. The third group addresses resilience to shocks such as COVID-19, price spikes, and extreme weather events. Food security and consumer behavioral change have remained dominant themes throughout the most recent decade, albeit with increased focus on food utilization, sustainability, stability, and agency relative to longstanding concerns about availability and access.

A review of the most cited *Food Policy* articles from each decade also underscores the journal's role in shaping key conversation topics in agricultural and food policy (Table 2). In the earliest decade (1975–1985), top-cited works addressed foundational issues in food production, agricultural development, and trade policy, such as Leach's (1975) exploration of energy and food production. During the 1986–1995 period, influential articles reflected a growing interest in commercialization, gendered productivity gaps, and food price policy in developing economies. Citation volume increased markedly from the mid-1990s onward, led by articles on food safety standards, trade effects, and certification systems in global agrifood chains. The period from 2006 to 2015 witnessed a further surge in citations, driven by sustainability, climate change, and the transformation of food systems. In the most recent decade, research at the intersection of nutrition, environmental sustainability, and food system resilience has gained prominence, reinforcing the journal's position as a leading outlet for interdisciplinary scholarship on contemporary food policy challenges.

Table 2: Top Five Cited Articles in Each Decade

Authors	Pub. Year	Title	Citation Count*
1975-1985			
Leach, G.	1975	Energy and food production	277
Ruttan, V. W.	1977	Induced innovation and agricultural development	143
Siamwalla, A., & Valdés, A.	1980	Food insecurity in developing countries	110
Anderson, K.	1983	Growth of agricultural protection in East Asia	93
O'Hagan, J. P.	1976	National self-sufficiency in food	79

1986-1995

Pingali, P. L., & Rosegrant, M. W.	1995	Agricultural commercialization and diversification: processes and policies	890
Udry, C., Hoddinott, J., Alderman, H. & Haddad, L.	1995	Gender differentials in farm productivity: implications for household efficiency and agricultural policy	640
Von Braun, J.	1995	Agricultural commercialization: impacts on income and nutrition and implications for policy	565
Henson, S., & Traill, B.	1993	The demand for food safety: Market imperfections and the role of government	320
Timmer, C. P.	1989	Food price policy: The rationale for government intervention	273

1996-2005

Barrett, C. B., Reardon, T., & Webb, P.	2001	Nonfarm income diversification and household livelihood strategies in rural Africa: concepts, dynamics, and policy implications	3504
Maxwell, S.	1996	Food security: a post-modern perspective	1325
Hatanaka, M., Bain, C. & Busch, L.	2005	Third-party certification in the global agrifood system	1108
Henson, S., & Reardon, T.	2005	Private agri-food standards: Implications for food policy and the agri-food system	1024
Otsuki, T., Wilson, John S., & Sewadeh, M.	2001	Saving two in a billion: quantifying the trade effect of European food safety standards on African exports	1000

2006-2015

Knowler, D., & Bradshaw, B.	2007	Farmers' adoption of conservation agriculture: A review and synthesis of recent research	2629
Hanjra, M. A., & Qureshi, M. E.	2010	Global water crisis and future food security in an era of climate change	1942
Grunert, K. G., Hieke, S., & Wills, J.	2014	Sustainability labels on food products: Consumer motivation, understanding, and use	1734
Garnett, T.	2011	Where are the best opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the food system (including the food chain)?	1433
Pingali, P.	2007	Westernization of Asian diets and the transformation of food systems: Implications for research and policy	1383

2016-2025

Sheahan, M., & Barrett, C. B.	2017	Ten striking facts about agricultural input use in Sub-Saharan Africa	733
Clapp, J.	2017	Food self-sufficiency: Making sense of it, and when it makes sense	705
Thilsted, S. H., Thorne-Lyman, A., Webb, P., Bogard, J. R., Subasinghe, R., Phillips, M. J. & Allison, E. H.	2016	Sustaining healthy diets: The role of capture fisheries and aquaculture for improving nutrition in the post-2015 era	596
Clapp, J., Moseley, W. G., Burlingame, B. & Termine, P.	2022	The case for a six-dimensional food security framework	579
Reynolds, C., et al.	2019	Consumption-stage food waste reduction interventions–What works and how to design better interventions	572

* Citation counts are based on Google Scholar data as of September 2025.

2.3 Geographic coverage

Figure 5 shows how geographic coverage of articles - as distinct from the geography of authors' affiliations (see Figure 3) – has evolved as well. Roughly one-quarter of articles over time have been general, not country- nor region-specific. Of the remaining three-quarters, aside from shrinking coverage of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Food Policy*'s coverage of other regions has ebbed and flowed within a fairly stable base range: 17-33% for Africa, 21-27% for Asia, 19-26% for Europe, 10-20% for North America, and 1-3% for Oceania. Studies about Eastern and Central European countries surged in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War and the rapid expansion of the European Union, and studies about China have increased steadily over the last three decades. That topical observation partly reflects the emergence of China as an economy with increasing relevance in food related issues, and as the country with the largest annual number of submissions to *Food Policy* now.
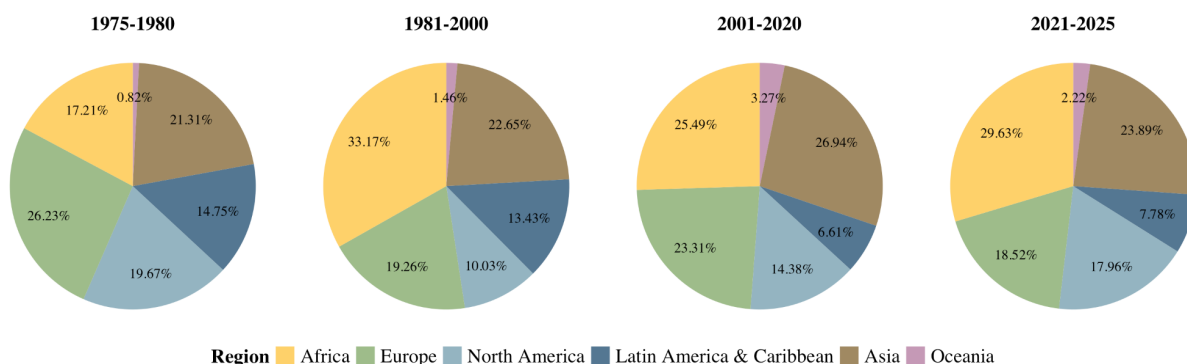
Figure 5: Shares of geographic coverage of studies published 1975-2025

2.4 Methods and data

The journal publishes primarily empirical studies, mostly quantitative ones, although it also regularly publishes high-quality qualitative studies and conceptual pieces, in keeping with its multidisciplinary mission and audience. The methods used in these studies have evolved dramatically over the past fifty years.

Because the journal began as more of a trade publication under professional rather than academic editorial direction, the first decade's articles were mostly descriptive, short, and single-authored. They either described the agriculture and food situation of a country, commented on food-related policies, or qualitatively analyzed policy outcomes. There were many Viewpoint papers. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the structure of the food landscape or trends in food-related measurements. A few studies used simulation modeling methods to analyze policy scenarios or applied multiple regression techniques to estimate familiar policy-relevant parameters, such as income and price elasticities of demand. As this was long before the era of well-identified causal inference and sophisticated quantitative analyses were the exception, not the norm, in the journal's initial decade or two.

The next two decades witnessed an increasing use of sophisticated quantitative models based largely on observational data, using a range of optimization, computable general equilibrium, and econometric methods (Table 3). Studies employing causal inference tools emerged slowly with the dawn of the 21st century, mirroring broader patterns in the social sciences. Nevertheless, most studies in this period remained purely descriptive. In addition to the evolution in quantitative models, the use of panel data has grown rapidly over the journal's history, rising from 3.4% of published articles in 1996-2005 to 19.0% in 2016-2025. This shift highlights the increasing accessibility of the longitudinal datasets and their growing importance in food policy research.

Table 3: Methods and data types used in published articles*

	1975-1985	1986-1995	1996-2005	2006-2015	2016-2025
Method					
Quantitative Methods	17.9%	44.4%	66.2%	79.8%	84.7%
Econometric Methods	-	20.0%	43.7%	62.1%	74.9%
Causal Identification Designs**	-	2.2%	4.2%	18.0%	39.9%
Experimental Designs	-	-	-	4.0%	9.7%
Quasi-Experimental Designs	-	-	1.4%	8.6%	17.5%
Discrete choice and auction experiments	-	-	2.8%	12.2%	15.2%
Non-Econometric Methods	17.9%	24.4%	22.5%	19.0%	10.1%
General Equilibrium	10.7%	20.0%	18.3%	16.5%	6.4%
Machine Learning	-	-	-	-	1.8%

Meta-Analysis	-	-	-	0.6%	1.3%
*Qualitative Methods***	82.1%	55.6%	33.8%	20.2%	16.0%
Discussion-based analyses	78.6%	53.3%	26.8%	6.7%	3.8%
Interview-Based Methods	3.6%	2.2%	8.5%	9.2%	8.9%
Text- and Document-Based Methods	-	-	1.4%	4.0%	4.1%
Data Type					
Panel Data	-	-	3.4%	15.4%	19.0%
Time Series Data	-	2.6%	1.7%	5.8%	4.0%
Spatial Data	-	5.3%	19.0%	5.4%	5.6%
Qualitative Data	3.6%	2.6%	10.3%	16.9%	14.6%

* This table illustrates the most common research methods and typical data types published in *Food Policy*. It does not, however, encompass all articles nor all approaches and data types In recent years, an increasing number of studies have employed multiple methods and data types within a single paper. Therefore percentages do not always sum to 100% within each decade. Data were extracted from the titles, abstracts, and keywords of published articles ("document type" classified as "Article") in Scopus. In total, methodological information was obtained from 1,077 articles, while data type information was extracted from 904 articles. Table entries reflect percentages of those classifiable articles. Extraction relied on the following search terms: model, method, approach, regression, system, strategy, treatment, experiment, experimental, auction, difference-in-differences, DID, randomized controlled trial, RCT, discontinuity, instrumental variable, IV, propensity score matching, PSM, time series, spatial, autocorrelation, SDM, theory of planned behavior, TPB, structural equation model, SEM, selection bias, endogenous, endogeneity, causal, causality, inference, identification, econometrics, general equilibrium, equilibrium, equilibria, CGE, simulation, simulate, optimization, optimize, programming, meta-analysis, machine learning, qualitative, text analysis, grounded theory, narrative analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography, ethnographic, thematic analysis, in-depth interview, semi-structured interview, expert interview, informant interview, focus group, review, synthesize, systematic review, data, dataset, panel data, survey, lab, scanner, questionnaire, and interview.

** The Causal Identification Designs subcategory encompasses "Experimental Designs" (Randomized Controlled Trials, field experiments, and laboratory experiments), "Quasi-Experimental Designs" (Difference-in-Differences, Instrumental Variables, Regression Discontinuity, Propensity Score Matching, Synthetic Control Methods), and related causal inference approaches (Heckman Selection Models, Endogenous Switching Regression, fixed-effects models, etc.).

*** Qualitative Methods are divided into three major clusters: "Discussion-Based Analyses" (Policy discussion, Synthetic reviews), "Text- and Document-Based Methods" (Content analysis, Discourse analysis, Thematic analysis, Text analysis, and related text-based approaches), and Interview-Based Methods (In-depth interviews, Semi-structured interviews, Focus groups, Expert interviews, Informant interviews, and related interview-based approaches).

In the last two decades, econometrics analyses have prevailed with steadily increasing emphasis on causal identification using methods like Instrumental Variables (IV), Difference-in-Differences (DID), or regression discontinuity (RD), and methods meant to address selection bias–like Heckman selection models, propensity score matching models, and endogenous switching regression. A rising share of research articles exploits quasi-experimental data using naturally occurring social, policy, or related events as a natural experiment to identify the impacts of those events. Experimental methods have also been increasingly widely used in *Food Policy* papers, from carefully designed and monitored lab experiments to hypothetical consumer behavior experiments, to large-scale randomized controlled trials and framed field experiments. Most recently, difference-in-differences estimation methods have become quite popular

to examine the effects of policies using panel data. Thanks to the availability of new information technology, large data sets, and ever-cheaper computational power, new machine learning methods and meta-analysis have also become increasingly commonplace in recent years in the journal's research articles.

The data that underpin quantitative empirical papers published in *Food Policy* have likewise shifted over time in their volume, format, and sources. Ever since the journal's launch, empirical evidence has been used in most articles to support policy analysis. Government published data, either in time series or cross-section, mostly at fairly aggregate (e.g., national scale) level, were commonly used in the journal's early years. Small-scale (i.e., individual or household) survey data steadily emerged, especially for farm production studies in LMICs. These data types remain popular today.

But new data types have steadily found their way into the journal's pages as new data sources and tools have emerged. Experimental data collected by researchers are increasingly used in studies. Online survey data and geospatial data, including those derived from satellite-based remote sensors, have emerged since the turn of the millennium. The last decade has brought an especially sharp rise in the use of big data generated through high-frequency databases such as satellite data and scanner or online transactions data.

3. New content in this special issue

For this special, 50th anniversary issue of *Food Policy* we solicited new contributions of two sorts. The first are Reviews, similar to those commissioned regularly by Editors-in-Chief throughout the journal's history. The 50th anniversary is a good moment to summarize the state of key literature related to food policy topics. These reviews offer a substantive introduction to the existing literature on important issues and thus provide an excellent entry point for newcomers to a thread of food policy research. Reviews make clear both the policy relevance of the existing stock of knowledge as well as key remaining research questions.

A two-step review process was employed in order to keep authors from investing considerable time in preparing papers that would be unlikely to survive peer review. First, we invited 2-4 page proposals that clearly identified (i) the topic, (ii) the central theme(s) of the review, including key policy implications of the existing literature and priority topics for future research, (iii) the (co-)author(s) and their qualifications to write such a review, and (iv) the closest review papers/chapters/books to the topic and what differentiates the proposed review paper from that prior work. Second, a subsets of the proposals are invited to proceed with the full manuscripts submission for regular peer

review. We received 62 proposals for Reviews in response to our call for papers. Of those, 13 made it through peer review to appear in this anniversary issue.

One cluster of Reviews reinforces the timelessness of some food policy issues. Agricultural innovation to boost productivity was a central issue at the launch of the journal. As Ragasa et al. (2025) explain, approaches to the conceptualization and promotion of food systems innovations have evolved considerably over the past fifty years but remain no less salient today than in the heyday of the Green Revolution. The methods scholars use to study the diffusion of agricultural innovations has, however, shifted markedly over time with the rise of new technologies, such as seed genotyping, as Melesse et al. (2025) discuss in fascinating detail.

Land and water have always been the key inputs into agricultural production, and land and water use is at the heart of most food systems environmental issues. Thus, control over natural resources – the tenure systems that influence use, transfer and investment patterns – has always loomed large in food policy analysis. As Meinzen-Dick et al. (2025) explain, scholars' understanding of natural resource tenure has evolved considerably over the journal's half century, extending beyond the sub-field's original narrow inquiry at the intersection of law and economics to embrace the full family of social sciences and become ever more salient as real food prices have steadily risen over the past quarter century, making agricultural land and water ever more valuable, and thus contested.

In the journal's first decade, food price stabilization was a hot topic globally (Newbery and Stiglitz 1981). As real prices steadily declined and stabilized over the ensuing quarter century, the topic faded from research prominence. However, since the dramatic food price spikes of 2008-9 (and again in 2011-12 and 2021-22), food price stabilization policies have become first-order policies questions again. Dorosh et al. (2025) draw out what was learned from the earlier generation of studies, how more recent efforts have added nuance to prior conventional wisdom, and flag some important, remaining research questions on the topic.

Food price spikes and other crises – like the COVID-19 pandemic – renewed interest among governments in high-income countries (HICs) for effective mechanisms to safeguard populations' food security. Baldwin et al. (2025) synthesize lessons learned from the recent literature in this space, noting in particular key differences from policies employed in LMIC contexts.

Some topics have endured but shifted in focus as the journal has evolved. For example, although research on food consumption behaviors has continued to emphasize the

importance of income and price effects that were staples of 1970s-1980s policy analysis, scholars have increasingly recognized and emphasized the many other influences on consumer dietary choices, factors often grouped under the umbrella term "food environments". Research on food environments has become a staple of the journal over the past decade or two. Dong et al. (2025) offer a thorough review of the complex web of factors that drive food retail environments, especially in HICs, while Ameye et al. (2025) concentrate more specifically on LMICs, specifically urban Africa, where food environments are changing especially quickly (Barrett et al. 2022).

The rising focus on food environments also brings to the forefront intermediary firms that were often only in the background in farmer or consumer-oriented studies of the 1970s and 1980s. Dong et al. (2025) emphasize the central role of food and beverage firms in shaping evolving food environments and some of the policy options available to governments that wish to influence food environments so as to stem the increasingly widespread adverse health effects of modern diets. Salgado et al. (2025) provide an engaging review of how industry actors, in turn, have responded to efforts to reduce intake of ultra-processed foods and beverages, an established risk factor for obesity and related noncommunicable diseases. Such policies range from taxes (Cawley and Frisvold 2023) to fortification and reformulation regulation (Fanzo et al. 2023) to product labeling rules and practices (Sunstein 2021).

Perhaps the biggest change in global food systems over the past half century has been the rise of China, now the country that consumes, produces and trades internationally more food than any other country. China's dramatic policy changes over these 50 years, and its subsequent rapid economic growth, internal rural-to-urban migration, and rapid technological change throughout value chains, have brought about historically unprecedentedly rapid food systems transformation, as Long et al. (2025) describe in fascinating detail.

Recent decades have brought heightened scholarly attention to new issues that arise from new technologies, such as farming practices intended to improved animal welfare (Woolley et al. 2025), the rise of artificial intelligence in agri-food supply chains (Reitano et al. 2025), and digital platforms for home delivery of restaurant meals (Caputo et al. 2025). These promise to be important topics going forward, not because they are under-researched, emergent topics but because of the considerable policy salience of such issues. New, linkable data sets are also opening up new methods and opportunities to gain more nuanced perspectives on both familiar and new food policy questions, as Chenarides et al. (2025) explain in their engaging Review.

The other new contributions in this special issue are short Policy Comments that summarize the policy impacts (on the non-profit, private, or public sector) of research

published in *Food Policy*. In regular issues of this journal, Policy Comments offer short, original, non-technical reflections on a matter of current food policy debate (Barrett and Wang 2024). In this 50th anniversary issue uniquely, these Policy Comments highlight the many ways in which food policy research generates real-world impacts. On this occasion, we use papers published in *Food Policy* as a lens to showcase how peer-reviewed research can make an identifiable difference in the world. Some of these Policy Comments (e.g., Clapp et al. 2025, Katare and Hodge 2025) report on the impacts of a single *Food Policy* article. Others (e.g., Jensen et al. 2025, Morrow et al. 2025) report on a broader research program of which the *Food Policy* article was just one output but with a direct tie to the policy impacts reported.

The range of *Food Policy* articles that have demonstrably impacted policy is impressive. Some of the most impactful *Food Policy* papers have focused on consumer issues, especially around food prices. Examples include the role of value-added tax exemptions for basic foodstuffs in fighting food inflation in Europe (Jaworski and Olipra 2025, commented on by Morão 2025), and the use of least-cost benchmark diets to monitor and improve food security (Masters 2025, commenting on Bai et al. 2021a,b). Others have focused on producer-level concerns, ranging from the impacts and uptake of a novel catastrophic drought insurance product for livestock herders in East Africa (Jensen et al. 2025, commenting on Jensen et al. 2018 and Takahashi et al. 2020) to the evaluation and promotion of pesticide-free, non-organic cereal production systems in Switzerland (Möhring and Finger 2022, discussed by Finger and Möhring 2025). Other impactful articles have made the case for systemic and institutional reforms in upstream agricultural research, development and extension systems (Summerhayes and Baker 2025, commenting on Hunt et al. 2014 and Summerhayes and Baker 2024). Or for the need for coordination around non-tariff barriers to international trade arising from national-level maximum residue limits for pesticides and contaminants (discussed by Okunola et al. 2025, reflecting upon Otsuki et al. 2001, Wilson and Otsuki 2004, Drogué and DeMaria 2012, Li and Beghin 2014, and Hejazi et al. 2022).

Still other papers with considerable real-world impact have focused on improving measures and concepts widely used in policymaking. A classic example is the Buzby and Hyman (2012) study that helped ignite the modern literature on food loss and waste and has underpinned a wide range of government and industry policy initiatives to reduce food loss (as described by Katare and Hodge 2025). Studies in *Food Policy* have likewise contributed key measures used by governments, multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations to quantify food insecurity to inform humanitarian operations and to design food security information systems (Vaitla et al. 2017, Maxwell et al. 2023, and Bageant et al. 2024, as discussed by Morrow et al. 2025). A rather recent example is Clapp et al. (2022)'s proposal to expand the pillars that underpin food security, adding two additional dimensions (agency and sustainability) to the four

routinely used since the 1990s (availability, access, utilization and stability), a proposal already taken up quite broadly around the world (Clapp et al. 2025).

The clear takeaway from this collection of new Policy Comments is that peer-reviewed research published in this journal has had meaningful impacts on real-world food policy. Albeit better evidence does not always translate into better policy, by emphasizing both rigor and relevance, *Food Policy* offers an uncommon forum through which researchers keen to use science to inform actions by industry, governments, and non-profits can reach policy advisers eager to access the best current evidence relevant to the broad range of food-relevant policies. Our aspiration is that the journal continues its impactful tradition in the decades ahead, prioritizing high-quality research likely to have demonstrable, real-world impacts.

4. Looking Forward: The Next Decade of Food Policy

As the Reviews signal, the food policy research landscape is as exciting today as it was fifty years ago. Longstanding topics related to food security, agricultural innovation and productivity growth, natural resources tenure, international trade policies, corporate concentration within the value chain, and spatiotemporal price transmission and stabilization hold enduring importance and merit continued exploration using new theories, methods, and data. Meanwhile, a raft of new policy questions have arisen in recent years that urgently need rigorous research to inform policies that will inevitably emerge and get implemented. From the rising challenges posed by food systems' role in climate change, zoonoses, noncommunicable diseases, antimicrobial resistance, or environmental degradation to the possibilities afforded by personalized nutrition, artificial intelligence, and novel off-farm production methods for both familiar and novel foods, senior decision makers in both the private and public sectors eagerly seek credible evidence to inform the choices they must make. Furthermore, as the Policy Comments in this issue underscore, peer-reviewed policy research can have demonstrable, lasting, significant impacts. The central role of this journal remains to encourage, to provide rigorous quality control of, and to broadly disseminate timely, food policy-relevant research around the world.

As future *Food Policy* editors grapple with those challenges, the scholarly publication landscape will itself continue evolving. We anticipate – and, frankly, welcome – increased emphasis on reproducibility, on decolonizing research in and about LMICs, on research ethics, on timely and transparent peer review, on promoting inclusive author, editor, and reviewer communities, and on ensuring broad access to the scholarly fruits of the food policy research community. The journal will, and must, continue to evolve in order to continue to thrive and play a central role in informing food

policy deliberations globally. We ask you authors, reviewers, and readers to continue to push the editorial team – as you have steadily for a half century – to keep pace with the exciting, evolving challenges of the food policy world.

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Appendix

The top contributing authors and their article citation impact are listed by decade in the follow Table A1.

Table A1. Top Contributing Authors and Citation Impact by Decade

Decade	Full Name	Num of Publications	Citations
1975-1985	Madeley, John	7	8
1975-1985	Mayer, Jean	5	13
1975-1985	Rawitscher, Mary	5	13
1975-1985	Talbot, Ross B.	5	24
1975-1985	Wallerstein, Mitchel B.	5	21
1975-1985	Meissner, Frank	4	34
1975-1985	Austin, James E.	4	72
1975-1985	Sanderson, Fred H.	4	32
1986-1995	Kennedy, Eileen	7	636
1986-1995	Babu, Suresh Chandra	7	268
1986-1995	Haddad, Lawrence	6	1129
1986-1995	Swinbank, Alan	5	206
1986-1995	Valdés, Alberto	5	93
1986-1995	von Braun, Joachim	5	720
1986-1995	Alderman, Harold	4	736
1986-1995	Quinn, Victoria J.	4	98

1996-2005	Reardon, Thomas	10	5476
1996-2005	Barrett, Christopher B.	6	4720
1996-2005	Jayne, T.S.	4	1312
1996-2005	Kelly, Valerie	4	752
1996-2005	Konandreas, Panos	4	136
1996-2005	Howard, Julie	4	786
1996-2005	Babu, Suresh Chandra	4	117
2006-2015	Jayne, T.S.	12	3062
2006-2015	Huang, Jikun	9	1184
2006-2015	Qaim, Matin	8	2172
2006-2015	Rozelle, Scott	8	948
2006-2015	Marette, Stéphan	8	586
2006-2015	Barrett, Christopher B.	7	3548
2006-2015	Verbeke, Wim	7	1270
2006-2015	Sumner, Daniel A.	6	703
2016-2025	Mishra, Ashok K.	19	821
2016-2025	Lusk, Jayson L.	15	1161
2016-2025	Qaim, Matin	11	1063
2016-2025	Swinnen, Johan	11	860
2016-2025	Chamberlin, Jordan	9	574
2016-2025	Finger, Robert	9	751

| 2016-2025 | Abay, Kibrom A. | 9 | 505 |
| 2016-2025 | Nayga, Rodolfo M. | 9 | 488 |

Notes: The number of articles published by each author was calculated based on Scopus data. Citation counts are based on Google Scholar data as of September 2025.

In the word search, common words shown in almost all articles are excluded from the text analysis using the "Phrases" and "Collocates" tools in Voyant. The System auto-detected stopwords include all numbers, all punctuation notes, all keyboard special codes such as # and /, all alphabetic letters, and the following words as the left four columns Table A2.below. In addition, we add words in the right column .

Table A2. Stopwords

Voyant Auto-detect Stopwods				Self-constructed Stopwords
about	every	must	themselves	1st
above	everyone	my	then	2nd
across	everything	myself	thence	3rd
after	everywhere	name	there	4th
afterwards	except	namely	thereafter	5th
again	few	neither	thereby	analysis
against	fifteen	never	therefore	approach
all	fify	nevertheless	therein	area
almost	fill	next	thereupon	areas
alone	find	nine	these	author
along	fire	no	they	authors
already	first	nobody	thing	average
also	five	none	third	base
although	for	noone	this	based
always	former	nor	those	change
am	formerly	not	thou	changes

among	forty	nothing	though	countries
amongst	found	now	three	country
amoungst	four	nowhere	through	ec
amount	from	of	throughout	effect
an	front	off	thru	effects
and	full	often	thus	elsevier
another	further	on	thy	evidence
any	get	once	to	example
anyhow	give	one	together	factor
anyone	go	only	too	factors
anything	had	onto	toward	findings
anyway	has	or	towards	food
anywhere	hasnt	other	twelve	high
are	have	others	twenty	higher
around	he	otherwise	two	households
as	hence	our	un	impact
at	her	ours	under	impacts
back	here	ourselves	until	important
be	hereafter	out	up	increase
because	hereby	over	upon	increased
been	herein	own	us	large
before	hereupon	part	very	level
beforehand	hers	per	via	levels
being	herself	perhaps	was	likely
beside	him	please	we	long
besides	himself	put	well	low
between	his	rather	were	major
both	how	re	what	million

bottom	however	same	whatever	new
but	hundred	see	when	non
by	ie	seem	whence	op
call	if	seemed	whenever	ot
can	in	seeming	where	paper
cannot	inc	seems	whereafter	policies
cant	indeed	serious	whereas	policy
co	into	several	whereby	pp
con	is	she	wherein	prices
could	it	should	whereupon	problem
couldnt	its	since	wherever	problems
de	itself	six	whether	programme
did	keep	sixty	which	programmes
didn't	last	so	while	rate
do	latter	some	whither	ref
does	latterly	somehow	who	research
doesn't	least	someone	whoever	reserved
don't	less	something	whole	results
done	ltd	sometime	whom	self
down	made	sometimes	whose	short
due	many	somewhere	why	small
during	may	still	will	study
each	me	such	with	table
eg	meanwhile	system	within	term
eight	might	take	without	time
either	mill	ten	would	tion
eleven	mine	than	yet	total
else	more	that	you	use

elsewhere	moreover	the	your	used
enough	most	thee	yours	using
etc	mostly	their	yourself	year
even	move	them	yourselves	years
ever	much			