



Dear friends of New Harvest,

I first heard of coronavirus in early 2013.

I was two months into my new role as Executive Director at New Harvest and digging deep into every piece of news on the state of animal agriculture. At the time, [16,000 dead pigs were floating down the Huangpu River](#) and aside from the accompanying visual, I was most aghast at how locals were referring to the river as "free pork soup."

Perhaps they were able to make light of the situation because the World Health Organization stated that the virus causing the deaths, a porcine circovirus, could not be transmitted to humans.

Of course, I then began researching which common swine viruses *could* be transmitted to humans, and that's where I first encountered coronaviruses.

Fast forward to 2020, and upon first hearing about COVID-19, I was almost certain that this story had its origins at a pig farm. It looks like the animal origins of the virus aren't quite figured out, but it seems that bats are a known reservoir, and some animals at the wet market were probably intermediate hosts (1).

Pigs are part of a parallel story...for the past 19 months, the deeply underreported African Swine Fever has been ravaging China, killing millions of pigs. [The silencing of whistleblowers and systematic avoidance of reporting negative news undoubtedly helped the epidemic spread, ruining the lives of animals and farmers alike.](#) The price of pork tripled over the time period as supply dropped off—and I imagine the secrecy was in part to prevent the demand from decreasing radically.

I am often asked what the "tipping point" for cell ag will be. I think it is most likely that disasters like the African Swine Fever are more likely to lead to widespread adoption and acceptance of plant- and cell-based diets than anything else. Rather macabre, I know.

Anyway, why am I talking about COVID-19 and African Swine Fever?

Well, a few reasons.

1) **Reinforcing the importance of our work.** The way we are farming animals for food—high density (like pig farms) and close quarters with various species (like wet markets)—is highly precarious. I've said this from the beginning: the next outbreak is always a matter of when, not if. And outbreaks *always* link to animal farming, one way or another. To be prepared, we must explore animal-free ways of producing animal products. It's important for food security, food safety, and public health. Cell ag is as much about sustainability as it is about risk mitigation.

2) **Travel considerations in general.** We've seen many conferences cancelled as of late and I'm surprised at how relieved I am at the news. From the health side, sure, but also from an emissions perspective! An "elephant in the room" for me for the past several years is the contradiction that those working in sustainability are expected to fly—frequently!—to events all across the world. Sure, I get the greater-good thought process, but it only takes a couple not-so-great events for me to start really questioning the net benefit of burning aviation fuel for face time. It's also so hard to measure and the impact—positive and negative—of events. Tough questions...I wonder how the next few months will feel without the big ticket events (like SXSW!) happening in the background.

3) **What about the New Harvest conference?** Funnily enough, we have already been working on how to "grow" the New Harvest conference without racking up more air miles. On one hand, we don't want to rack up the carbon footprint. And on the other, we believe that a headcount of ~350 is just perfect for fruitful human interactions. That's why we're pushing forward [livestream](#) participation and encouraging folks to [host watch parties](#) in their local communities. We already have 17 watch parties in seven countries! Oh and also: [robot bodies](#).

The conference is July 10 & 11 so we are still hoping this will blow over by then. But if it doesn't, our current thought process is that since we're already growing a remote audience, we could just do an *entirely digital conference* instead of cancelling. Sound crazy? Maybe it is! But worth investigating...to set a trend for the future? We'll keep you updated!

In the meantime, if you have any last [programming suggestions](#) you'd like to submit for New Harvest 2020, the deadline to do so is this Friday. I'm really looking forward to sharing with you the many "elephants in the room" our community has come up with.

Now for some shout-outs:

- Our postdoc research fellow Dr. Ricardo Gouveia is guest editor on a [special issue of International Journal of Molecular Sciences dedicated to cellular agriculture!](#) This is an important step for cellular agriculture making waves in the academic world. Well done, Ricardo!
- Major shout outs to Alex, Anita, Ariana, Quinn, Rachel, Sophie, and Taylor: our New Harvest 2020 conference planning team! These volunteers will help the conference come together, contingency plan and all. Gonna be an interesting year.
- Big ups to [Dr. Luke MacQueen](#) who was in town for Beer with a Scientist, an event in Alphabet City that brought out some local New Harvest fans. Luke has been a pioneer in cultured meat work since the '90s. Yes, the pre-New Harvest era! He's been making incredible strides in this space and we were excited to see him speak before a rapt audience.
- Shout out to ShioK Meats - we had the pleasure of appearing alongside them [in this Business Insider video](#)—they are doing such great (and fast!) work on bringing cell-based shrimp to market. We're thrilled to see them grow.
- Many thanks to the World Conservation Society for hosting an event dedicated to seafood alternatives, both plant- and cell-based. I continue to be amazed at how the playing field around each animal product is so uniquely complex and knotted. The WCS event showed me how much "terrestrial bias" (thanks to Dr. Jennifer Jacquet for that term) I have when thinking about oceans issues. Also—I [have tasted Van Cleve Seafood's plant-based shrimp and it tastes like the future](#). Seriously: I have no idea how they got the texture 100% correct with plants, but I am totally into it.
- And last but not least, a big thank you to Darren Sparks of [Tipping Point Private Foundation](#) for offering his executive advice! I'm looking to make a big hire later this year and Darren has been a wellspring of wisdom when it comes to leadership and management. We're so lucky to have TPP as donors *and* advisors.

It's nice to have a platform to share thoughts and musings. I would love your feedback if you have any as I continue to iron out this format.

Thank you so much for being a part of this work. Cellular agriculture started at the grassroots thanks to folks like you.

Have a great post-Daylight savings March!

All the best,

Isha
Executive Director, New Harvest

(1) [Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

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