



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on May 20, 2022

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Food on Fire

With all of the current crises both domestic and international, a looming fertilizer and food-storage shortage has so far failed to captivate the American public as much as the war in Ukraine, the lockdowns in China, or the court saga of Amber and Johnny. Yet America's harvest this year is already threatened by an acute fertilizer shortage and crippling fuel prices. Moreover, in one of the stranger stories emerging from an already surreal political landscape, a lot of American food-processing facilities lately have been going up in smoke — literally.



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Back in April, a few in the mainstream media began noticing a startling trend: Food-processing facilities all across America have been catching fire over the past several months, a trend that has included several eye-catching episodes such as small plane crashes and massive explosions. No less an eminence than Fox News' Tucker Carlson took note of the odd string of "coincidences," which others in the media establishment have been quick to dismiss as random occurrences. The *National Review*, ever the bastion of "reasonable" conservatism, for example, noted quite reasonably that "none of the fires have so far been declared cases of arson.... [Moreover,] if you were a terrorist or foreign agent attempting to choke off the American food-distribution network ... would you start with an obscure potato-chip maker in Oregon? Then move on to the source of Hot Pockets in Arkansas? Then move on to a soybean-processing tank in Virginia? Are these the right targets if you're trying to cripple America?"

Fair enough. But on the other hand, some of the fires have indeed struck significant facilities — for example, the massive fire that destroyed much of Wisconsin River Meats in Mauston, Wisconsin, on February 5, or the November 21 fire that left the Maid-Rite Steak Company meat processing plant in Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania, inoperable. Of the claimed total of 18 fires at food-processing facilities over the past six months, the following would appear to be potentially significant, in addition to the Wisconsin and Pennsylvania events already mentioned:

- A fire that completely destroyed a Taylor Farms Processing Facility in Salinas, California, on April 13.
- A fire on April 12 that destroyed the East Conway Beef & Pork butcher shop and slaughterhouse in Conway, New Hampshire.
- An explosion and fire at the Cargill-Nutrena plant in Lecompte, Louisiana, on January 13.
- A January 6 fire that swept through a poultry-processing plant in Hamilton, Ontario.

Others of the claimed "18 fires in 6 months" actually occurred much longer ago, dating all the way back to January 2021. Of the two airplane crashes, one occurred near a plant, and the other appears to be clearly accidental. Moreover, some of the events, such as a fire at a building in El Paso, Texas, that used to harbor a meat-processing facility but has been vacant for three years, and fires at facilities for making potato chips and Hot Pockets, seem unlikely targets for any concerted attempt to sabotage the



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American food supply.

By this author's reckoning, the number of potentially truly significant events during the last six months is between six and 10 — still noteworthy, but not as much as the claimed figures. And of those, the great majority have been investigated and ruled accidental.

In general, when allegations are based on demonstrably false information — such as condensing 16 months' worth of mishaps into six months — they should be taken with a grain of salt. Moreover, lurid stories of fires and explosions are a convenient distraction from the very real threats documented elsewhere in this issue, threats that are a demonstrable consequence of the global debt crisis, the Covid pandemic, and the war in eastern Europe. It is a fact, for example, that the fertilizer shortage triggered by the cutoff of Russian-made fertilizer threatens to seriously compress harvest levels all over the food-producing world later this year. It is undeniable that many countries, from Pakistan and Bangladesh to Egypt, Lebanon, and much of sub-Saharan Africa face the very real prospect of starvation within months, because of their dependency on wheat and other staples grown in Russia and Ukraine. And it is a very real fact that the descent of Sri Lanka over the past several weeks into the status of failed state, complete with national bankruptcy, acute food and fuel shortages, and political and economic turmoil unmatched in that country's troubled modern history, is likely to be the first of many national bankruptcies across the globe in coming months, thanks to the havoc wrought by the Covid pandemic. These and many other bona fide trends and burgeoning crises ought to rivet our attention.

Not that the possibility of deliberate sabotage of America's food supply is entirely far-fetched. America certainly has no shortage of resourceful and determined foes, both within and without, who might attempt such a deed. After all, in a world where cyber and psychological warfare are upheld as cutting-edge tactics, would deliberate targeting of critical infrastructure be that far-fetched?

The problem is that, so far, many of the details of the food-plant-fires story are suspect, and the conclusions too hastily drawn. After all, most of the plants involved were meat-processing plants or manufacturers of food for livestock; one could as easily claim that a malicious group of animal-rights extremists is to blame. Our take, then, is that such events bear watching, but with spurious data and little corroborating evidence, a string of mishaps at food-processing facilities over the last year and a half ranks far down the list of current American concerns.



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