



# A dose of reality

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Accepted: 1 April 2020 / Published online: 31 May 2020  
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The pandemic we're now living through teaches us many lessons, of course, but one of the most basic is something that farmers have known for thousands of years: physical reality is actually...real.

That sounds trite, but in fact it's the thing humans have largely forgotten as we've left the farm and moved to jobs that now mostly involve staring into screens. You can move words and images and money around those screens at the speed of light; there's hardly a constraint on you.

And so it is an affront when something like a microbe comes along and refuses to play by those rules. As it turns out, you can't spin a virus, you can't talk it down, you can't force it to compromise or negotiate. Biology sets limits and we have to respect them, not the other way around. You may wish you could be back in church on Easter, but you can't.

This is a useful thing to know right now, especially since the coronavirus is not the only, or even the most devastating, crisis we need to deal with. Climate change is really nothing

more than the assertion that physics and chemistry, too, are real; we might wish that they operated differently, and that the carbon dioxide molecule didn't trap heat, but wishes get you nowhere.

Farmers, obviously, are used to thinking this way. If you don't pay careful attention to reality—heat, rainfall, pests—than you don't get a crop. Maybe it'd be nicer if it worked some other way (and maybe not—I don't really look forward to a food-from-a-vat future), but at least for now it doesn't. Reality can bite, and bite hard, a piece of information that should underlie every other discussion we have on this planet.

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This article is part of the Topical Collection: Agriculture, Food & Covid-19.

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