

☀ Salty Points of Reference

Many common expressions which reference salt originate from 16C medieval England yet still pepper daily conversations in modern society:

Expression	Meaning
the salt of the earth	reliable, steadfast, worthy
above the salt	an aristocrat
below the salt	a commoner (below the salt cellar)
worth their salt	effective and efficient worker, deserving of one's pay
take it with a grain of salt	accept what is said, but, remain skeptical (sharpen your senses)

When originally used, the metaphors required no explanation, as salt was laboriously excavated from mines set deep in central England, available as a luxury condiment to only the elite. Today, salt is a commodity due to mass-scale [mining and refining techniques](#). Yet, salt-based expressions continue to endure 500+ years in a vernacular that operates like a secret code. In a few short words, a warning, a negative judgement or an endorsement is conveyed in a manner of speech that will most likely be acknowledged silently - with a nod of the head, a raising of the eyebrows, a shift in posture.

☀ Extracting the Bounty of the Planet

These salty sayings may also illustrate how modern society will continue, perhaps at a subliminal level, to use traditional methods to evaluate worth, goodness and quality. It goes without saying that the food industry's primary inputs are from the earth and its seven seas. However, it is also equally dependent on human labour to transport the bounty of the planet to points of further processing or sale. The advance of robotics has successfully displaced manual labour in some food processing applications (lifting skids of palleted containers onto a fork-lift), and, shown to have mixed results in others. Robots are not good at transferring a flat of 24 eggs into a 10-layer deep carton. However, robots are worth their salt at [egg candling!](#), in which fresh eggs are sorted by defects.

☀ Primary Worker Challenges

One of the most complex aspects of the food industry is its reliance on unskilled labour. Frustrating because there are fewer and fewer able-bodied people interested in the work, despite health and safety standards, a steady pay-cheque, benefits and opportunities for advancement. Consequently difficult because Western societies need immigration policies to supply the basic labour force. Increasingly risky due to global human trafficking as a potential source of primary workers.

☀ Agricultural Trafficking

Same old, same old. Just as the ancient trade routes originally established to exchange tea, coffee and cocoa became the avenues to transport other goods such as jewels, seeds and rare artifacts, in the global computerized market of the 21C, the trade routes used by human traffickers are where one is most likely to find illegal migrants [employed in primary agriculture](#), especially in Canada. The US Embassy in Canada reports that "Canada is [a destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor](#) in agriculture, construction, processing plants, restaurants, the hospitality sector, or as domestic servants." According to [the United Nations on Drugs and Crime](#) agriculture, horticulture, catering and restaurants are among the top industrial sectors, worldwide, prone to illegal employment of trafficked humans. The [USA's National Human Trafficking Resource Centre](#) cites two vulnerabilities of the agriculture industry which are exploited by human traffickers – the seasonality of the work, and the physical isolation of agricultural farms.

☀ Are we truly worth our salt?

We are all consumers of food. While the food and agriculture industry needs to shore up its mettle to combat this disgusting global plague, we must all be prepared to take low prices with a grain of salt, and refuse to purchase products that smack of inapt procedures somewhere along the line. **FF**

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