



NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION SHOW 2024  
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# The Journal



How a lethal Ukrainian sea drone is protecting the global food supply



## National Restaurant Association Highlights Guidance for Tomorrow & Beyond

By Angela Hanson 5/29/2024

CHICAGO — For the second year in a row, the National Restaurant Association (NRA) Show focused on the future, offering attendees guidance on how to develop both short- and long-term plans in a rapidly evolving industry.

"We think about the future every day," Tony Smith, CEO and cofounder of enterprise resource planning solutions provider Restaurant365, said during his introduction to the show's featured session, "Journey to 2030 - Forecasting the Future of Foodservice."

Smith asked attendees to think about how people utilize data in 2024, noting that today's consumers can access a tremendous amount of data on what happens when they eat, exercise and more, just from their smartwatches.

"That same growth of information is now available to restaurants," he said, adding that although he thinks data is currently underutilized in the restaurant industry, that is going to change. "I think that's going to help us all make some fantastic decisions for what we should be doing in our restaurants."



Oscartek at 2024 NRA Show

The session's presenter Liz Moskow, a renowned food futurist with more than 25 years of restaurant and food industry experience, explained that future industry trends are being shaped by five elements:

- Craving for convenience
- Eagerness for experience
- Appetite for adventure
- Will for wellness
- Sincerity toward sustainability

"Convenience is about optimizing everything," Moskow said.



Oscartek booth at NRA show

Foodservice operators that offer ways of getting things faster, more personalized and more customized are likely to succeed. This could involve everything from new and easy methods of ordering, to drive-thru and delivery, to the practical use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning on the operations side.

Smith raised the subject of what AI could mean for the foodservice industry, questioning whether it is "just a buzzword" or even a scary prospect.

"I don't think it's here to take all the jobs," he said. Instead, he believes AI can raise the overall performance floor and ceiling. "Imagine all of your managers performing like your very best manager."

AI could also have a big impact on training by enabling employees to get up to speed quicker and smarter, according to Smith. He noted that this could lead to greater confidence and job satisfaction, as well as potentially reduced turnover — a key value in an industry that still struggles with labor.

Human beings are the main part of the restaurant business, and investing in them is "the right thing to do," according to Nate Hybl, founder of gusto! fresh bowls & wraps, who spoke during the "Refreshing the Workforce: Overcoming Labor Challenges" session. It's also the smart thing to do from a business perspective: As companies see more consistency and less turnover, operators' lives get easier, he pointed out.

"It is sneaky capitalistic to invest in human beings. Happier teammates produce happier guest experiences and revenues can go up," Hybl said.

The 2024 NRA Show took place May 18-21 at Chicago's McCormick Place.

# How a lethal Ukrainian sea drone is protecting the global food supply

By [Howard LaFranchi](#) Staff writer May 30, 2024 | ODESA AND MYKOLAIV, UKRAINE

As war closed down Black Sea shipping routes over the summer of 2022, Volodymyr Varbanets did what he says most of his fellow Odesa-region farmers did with their harvests.

“It was hard and expensive to export with the sea routes shut down, so we kept our harvests in the silos,” says the owner of a 540-acre farm where he grows wheat, barley, sunflower, and other crops in the rolling hills outside the port city of Odesa.

But this year, Mr. Varbanets expects to get back to exporting about 70% of his crops to overseas markets – thanks, he says, to the Ukrainian military’s ability to reopen a maritime trade corridor along the country’s Black Sea coastline.



“I don’t know exactly what countries receive my wheat and other crops,” says the director of the 4,200-member Odesa Region Farmers Association. “What I do know,” he adds, standing in a field of thigh-high, undulating wheat, “is that Ukrainian grains are needed to feed the world – just as we have to sell those grains to keep farming.”

Indeed, the return of Ukrainian grains to the global food market is good news not just for the country’s farmers, but also for the many developing countries of the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia that depended on one of the world’s premier breadbaskets for steady food supplies before Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022.

As war disrupted the trade routes that transported much of Ukraine’s grain and other food exports, food prices skyrocketed and global food insecurity spread. A multinational grain trade deal eased the food crunch somewhat – until Russia pulled out of the deal in July 2023.

But over the past year, Ukraine’s stunning and largely unheralded success in opening up a secure and dependable Black Sea shipping corridor has put the country on track to return its grain exports to nearly prewar levels.

Even though Odesa is vulnerable to the occasional long-range Russian missile attack, Ukraine grain exports in April reached 6.3 million tons, the most for one month since before the war.



## Effective use of sea drone

There are a number of explanations for this success, but perhaps chief among them is Ukraine's development of a plucky but deadly little uncrewed boat, or sea drone, that over recent months has pushed Russia's formidable navy far from Ukraine's southern coast – and from key seaports like Odesa.

The sea drones, which look something like small speedboats – and can carry up to 1,000 pounds of explosives – have sunk so many enemy naval vessels that Russia has been forced to withdraw its sea operations to safer waters. Of the 80 warships Russia assigned to the Black Sea before the invasion, at least a third have been either destroyed or disabled, Ukraine's military says. Much of that damage has been inflicted by sea drones.

“These drones are like a slingshot in the hands of the Ukrainians as they go up against the Russian Goliath,” says Daniel Fiott, head of the Defence and Statecraft Programme at the Brussels School of Governance. “They can operate day and night and strike their lethal blows with surprise,” he adds, “and we can see the evidence that they are having significant impact on Russian morale.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin's repeated sacking and reshuffling of naval chiefs is glaring proof of his frustration over Russia's loss of Black Sea dominance, Dr. Fiott says. The sting is no doubt sharper, he adds, as it comes at the hands of a country with no navy to speak of.

The homegrown sea drones are not enough to determine the course of the war, which remains primarily a land-based slog along Ukraine's eastern and northern borders with Russia. But the vessels are playing a critical role in foiling Mr. Putin's goal of bringing Ukraine's economy to its knees, many experts and officials say.

“For the Russians, this war is clearly economic. It's all about destroying Ukraine's industrial and economic strengths,” says Artem Vashchilenko, coordinator of a business community plan to build a new, diversified economy in Mykolaiv, a former Soviet shipbuilding capital.

“When the war started, Russia's big naval vessels were an important element in this economic war – they controlled the sea and struck fear in us, and that strangled our economy,” he says. “But these small drones have changed the paradigm of the sea wars,” he adds. “Their message is, ‘Don't be afraid of the Russians; now it's their turn to fear us!’”

## Ukraine trade corridor

Still, the sea drones are no panacea for Ukraine's southern coastline. As effective as they may be, they are of no help to Mykolaiv, which sits on an estuary upstream from the Black Sea – and just opposite a spit of land occupied by Russia. Where the sea drones have proved to be game changers is 80 miles west at the ports in and near Odesa.



A Magura V5 (maritime autonomous guard uncrewed robotic apparatus V-type), a Ukrainian multipurpose uncrewed surface boat, or sea drone, is seen in Ukraine.

“We now have 100 cargo ships a day that want to come and load up with Ukrainian grains and iron ore, a significant increase from just a few months ago,” says Dmytro Barinov, deputy CEO of the Ukrainian Sea Ports Authority in Odesa. “We owe much of that success to the sea drones and some missile strikes that have destroyed so many of the Russian ships that threatened our ports and shipping lanes.”

Displaying a map depicting the steady retreat of Russian war vessels away from Ukraine to safer Black Sea waters south and east, Mr. Barinov smiles. “They’ve even removed their vessels from Crimea,” the Ukrainian peninsula that Russia has occupied since 2014.

The newly dubbed Ukraine trade corridor – which hugs the country’s Black Sea coastline until it reaches the secure waters of adjacent NATO countries – has been a boon to Ukraine’s war-dampened economy, Mr. Barinov says. But he adds that it also provides relief for the world’s hungry people.

“When you remember that half of the World Food Program’s food supplies come from Ukrainian grains, you understand the importance of this trade corridor to people in many parts of the world,” he says.

Looking forward, Mr. Barinov says the continued security of the trade corridor will be critical to realizing the next goal for Ukraine’s ports, which is to expand exports beyond the traditional grains and iron ore to other goods including fertilizers, construction materials, and steel products.

“The sea ports are critical to rebuilding Ukraine’s economy,” he says, “and the trade corridor is what will allow the ports to fulfill that purpose.”



While shipping lanes were threatened, Ukrainian grain farmers had to keep their harvests in silos, like these seen at the Port of Odesa on the Black Sea, May 21, 2024.

