The Future of Infant Feeding In America: Scenarios for 2025
Alexandra Whittington
Houston, Texas

Introduction
Four scenarios that emphasize the subject of breast feeding forecast alternate futures of American society in 2025, with implications for consumer habits, gender roles, household organization and child rearing. The impact of a new direction for infant feeding to the long-term human future is also addressed.

The resulting scenarios are not predictions or endorsements, but an informed examination of societal change and its impacts on the family, specifically with relation to breast feeding. The goal for this project is to arrive at four distinct forecasts of the future of infant feeding in 2025, and offer strategic insights about American culture and social patterns.

These scenarios are meant to encourage futurist exploration of the possibility that the universal custom of breast feeding is an endangered human behavior which, if it should continue to decline, would represent a notable technological and cultural shift.

Methodology
Global Business Network (GBN) Matrix

Critical Uncertainties

- Will the household produce or consume infant feeding products?
- Is breast feeding the answer or the exception?
- Will the household remain the center of feeding and farming?
- How will the household be re-centered?
- Are we on the verge of parenting as a valued lifestyle choice?
- Are we entering a new era with a more virial social role for women?
- Are we entering a new era where the so-called “Mommy Wars” is portrayed as a conflict over child-rearing agendas? Breast feeding vs. formula feeding, to work or to stay home, natural vs. medical child birth, etc. As western family structures evolve and fatherhood becomes more virial social role, sides in the Mommy Wars are being blurred. A resolution or outcome of this friction could be on the horizon, creating a new homogenous future where either breast feeding or formula feeding is the norm.

Trends and Driving Forces:

- A tipping point has been reached: breast feeding has become “the exception, not the norm”.
- Work and career increasingly determine women’s infant feeding choices and there is an urgency for policies to address women’s roles as earners and mothers.
- Evidence of a shift toward a producer society includes the rise of home cooking, feed, baked goods, crafts, the rise of 3D printing, and “maker” culture, all expressions of this fascination.
- Activities being re-centered around the home, rather than social institutions: homesteading and homeschooling are on the rise. Homesteading and farming is growing as trends.
- Nearly half of all male and female respondents to a Pew survey said they would prefer to stay home with kids than have a paying job. Could our society be on the verge of parenting as a valued lifestyle choice that competes with employment for fulfillment among men and women alike?
- Like the so-called “Mommy Wars”, women are portrayed as competitors pushing one agenda or another in polar opposition. Men are increasingly taking sides in the “Daddy Wars”.
- Homesteading and farming is growing as trends.
- A paradigm shift in a science views breast milk as “as a highly sensitive variables that play a wide range of developmental roles,” and demands a new look nutritionally and scientifically.

Breast feeding rates are high and household mass-consumption habits are strong.
- Formula marketing becomes taboo.
- Breast milk substitutes are aggressively advertised to avoid consumer culture, with bigger and bolder claims to be able to mimic human milk in nutrition and safety.
- The formula industry raises the stakes, throwing huge amounts of money at replicating breast milk. The science of breast milk thrives, revealing new uses in pharmaceutical products and natural health therapies.
- Formula companies to attach themselves to the legions of consumer goods marketed toward new parents.
- Breast feeding norm means many babies are given expressed mother’s milk, often purchased.
- The potential for human exploitation for breast milk procurement is high.
- Breast milk will become a regulated marketable commodity.

Breast feeding rates are low and household consumption is high.
- Formula companies thrive while ecological thresholds are breached by high levels of consumer activity involved (water use, manufacturing, cow’s milk production).
- Low breast feeding rates contribute to poor health outcomes for babies.
- Fringe pediatricians, OB/SVS and nurses urge mothers to nurse below the radar.
- Parenting practices rely on commercial recommendations and hold little regard for what might be “natural.”
- Products to supplement infant health will prosper.
- Parenting becomes a much more commercially-mediated experience, and products that promise health, bonding and security are in high demand.
- No parent-child relationship is considered adequate without a collection of gear.
- Conspicuous consumption is part of the new family identity.

Breast feeding is uncommon and consumerism is rejected.
- Formula is freely available, and enjoys a high profit margin.
- Low consumer demand means less variety of infant formula.
- Dangerous as well as viable homemade infant formulas exist. Homemaded formula is a niche market.
- The urge to resist consumer goods creates a climate of distrust between the formula companies and the public. Claims of safety and benefit are widely disregarded.
- Infant survival could be compromised by the desire to DIY while avoiding breast milk itself.
- Women’s biological role in feeding babies subverted by home brews, hobby science or 3D printing. Men’s expanding role in choosing how babies are fed raises the status of parenting but marginalizes breast feeding.

Breast feeding is a commodity.
- The American family is no longer a reliable consumer unit. The household creates much of its own energy and food, and displaces several mass-marketed products.
- The home is a place for creating unique, specialized goods and sustenance.
- Providing babies breast milk is a prominent signal of a healthy, successful family.
- Government values the benefits of breast milk and offers subsidies to nursing mothers. Maternity leave is expanded and supported through tax incentives.
- Breast milk becomes a regulated marketable commodity.

Breast feeding is an endangered human behavior.
- Women’s participation in the workforce is in decline, and social pressure to breast feed is high.

Conclusions
There is probably little chance that breast feeding will ever disappear completely, but it is at risk of becoming obsolete due to the pervasive reach of infant formula. Breast milk is the ideal food for babies but breast feeding has declined as infant formula has become the food babies are most often fed during their first year of life.

Infant formula is a symbol of the industrial era (mass produced, scientifically formulated and administered, highly marketed to the public through doctors and media), that is ripe for transformation. The rise of women’s participation in the economy, leading to more earning and buying options, will have the largest impact on how babies are fed. Infant nutrition is intricately connected to how a society is organized to exist.

At one extreme, technology, market demand, and/or resource scarcity will create urgency to replace breast milk with substitutes that mimic breast milk products. Human milk may become reserved for medical or commercial use, perhaps creating a modern version of the wet nurse, women who lactate for money. Food science and formula makers will be keen to recreate the original “superfood.”

The increasing role of male participation in child-rearing will be a huge factor in understanding consumer patterns regarding how babies and children are fed.

If humans are no longer nourished from birth on breast milk, can we still claim to be mammalian?
- The norms for infant feeding have a direct impact on infant survival and development. The quality and safety of infant formula needs further and ongoing oversight.
-如Hawaii milk as a treatment for a variety of diseases and illnesses might be in demand as health care needs rise in the coming decades. This transforms its use, and a future where breast milk is consumed as health care practices are replaced by human need.
- Many industries stand to lose if the family unit is a producer rather than consumer. On the other hand, ecological sustainability might depend on households becoming more self-sufficient. A breast feeding norm would eliminate a huge sector of mass consumption. A formula feeding norm, absent innovations in food production and water use, could be a huge ecological burden.
- Without an overt public conversation about what it means to take the path to a future where breast feeding becomes obsolete, societies are not addressing a fundamental change in technological and social development.

Evidence of a shift toward a producer society includes the rise of home cooking, feed, baked goods, crafts, the rise of 3D printing, and “maker” culture, all expressions of this fascination.