



FERN NEWS

Food & Environment Reporting Network
Annual Report
2012

MISSION STATEMENT

The Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN) is the first and only independent, non-profit, non-partisan news organization that produces investigative reporting on food, agriculture, and environmental health through publication partnerships with respected local and national media outlets.

The Food & Environment Reporting Network is pleased to present our first Annual Report, following our first full year of operations in 2012.

In that year, we produced 12 stories--on subjects ranging from nitrate contamination in the drinking water to antibiotic resistance to the chemicals leaching from plastic packaging into our food. We also built relationships with 16 mainstream media publishing partners.

In addition, in 2012 we became a member of the Investigative News Network (INN), the primary organization dedicated to helping nonprofit news organizations produce and distribute stories with impact, to achieve cost efficiencies by pooling resources and services, and to develop new revenue streams that will help member organizations become sustainable businesses.

INN members include all the best-of-breed non-profit news organizations, including the Center for Investigative Reporting, ProPublica, and National Public Radio. This membership represents a major endorsement by our peer news organizations and a milestone in our establishment as a trusted source for investigative news.

In a very short period of time we have established ourselves as a legitimate news organization: Our successes in placing a story in the news pages of the *Washington Post* as well as our broadcast partnership with ABC News are prime evidence of this position since only a handful of non-profit news organizations have achieved the same and in such a short time period.

In the previous year, we put enormous effort into capacity-building, including the establishment of financial and accounting protocols, development of an employee handbook and the setting up of systems to manage full-time employees. We also commissioned a communications and messaging analysis so that our editorial efforts contributed to a set of strategic goals for the organization and developed a rigorous process for assessing each of our reporting efforts and using the results of this analysis to inform decisions about future investigations. In 2012, we had over 82,000 visitors on our Web site thefern.org, grew our followers on Twitter to over 3,300, our likes on Facebook to over 1,800, and our newsletter subscribers to over 2,000.

We also added to our team. We appointed Susan West as our Executive Editor. Since 1995, her consulting company, West Gold Editorial, Susan has helped launch and improve publications and Web sites including *Dwell*, *Cooking Light*, ConsumerReports.org, and *Discovery Communications*. Susan has been the founding editor in chief of travel magazine *Afar*, executive editor of *Smithsonian*

magazine, and a co-founder of *Health* magazine. Her work at those publications earned them four National Magazine Awards and a gold for best magazine from the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism awards. West started her career covering geology and geophysics, climate change, the environment, and health topics at Science News and Science 80 magazines.

Furthermore we expanded our board to include two new members. Aaron Freiwald is a founding partner of Layser & Freiwald, a law office based in Philadelphia, PA. Originally from San Francisco, Mr. Freiwald graduated from Columbia College in New York, where he was Editor in Chief of the *Columbia Daily Spectator*. He is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Prior to law school, Mr. Freiwald worked as an investigative print and television journalist for eight years covering law and politics in Washington, D.C., Latin America, and Europe.

Dan Pullman is a Boston-based investor and advisor to sustainable food and agri/aqua-culture companies. He is the founding President of Sprout Lenders, LLC, an investment group focused on farmers, producers, and food system entrepreneurs that serve the greater Boston area. Mr. Pullman is Chairman of the Spence Group, which creates collaborative solutions with investment, philanthropic, and program partners to drive the expansion of local and sustainable food system solutions.

Thank you for taking an interest in our work. We look forward to sharing more with you in 2013!

Sincerely,

The Food & Environment Reporting Network Team

Our Work

Our print stories from 2012 include:

- An in-depth look at the potential impacts of hydrofracking on food, which was the cover story for *The Nation* magazine. This story appeared on November 29, 2012 on TheNation.com, at the Center for Investigative Reporting, and on NBCNews.com.
- An examination of First Lady Michelle Obama's anti-obesity campaign and the political realities of taking on the multibillion-dollar food industry, also for *The Nation* magazine, published on October 11, 2012.
- An exposé on the effect of nitrogen pollution on low-income communities in California's Central Valley for NBCnews.com and California Watch, published on May 13, 2012.
- An investigation into the health effects of plastic food packaging, which was produced as part of our content partnership with the *Washington Post* on April 16, 2012 and was the top national story on the Washington Post's Web site for 48 hours after publication.
- An investigation into the implications of the farm bill's expansion of the federal crop insurance program for NBCnews.com, published on June 18, 2012.
- An exposé about the problematic political and financial activities of the American Farm Bureau, which appeared in *The Nation* magazine on July 17, 2012.
- A feature multimedia investigation into the "Faces of Food Stamps" for MSN.com published on August 2, 2012.
- An investigation into contract farm labor practices at large-scale farms for *The American Prospect* magazine, published on August 11, 2012.
- A look at the resurgence of the salmon population on the California coast, and whether or not it is sustainable published in *San Francisco* magazine on July 7, 2012.
- An investigation looking at a controversial feed additive, ractopamine hydrochloride, which has become the focus of a long-running international trade dispute that centers on concerns about its effect on human health, which was published on January 25, 2012.

Our broadcast reports from 2012 include:

- A joint investigation with ABC News revealing a startling connection between America's most commonly consumed protein, chicken, and persistent, antibiotic-resistant bladder infections, which effect 8 million woman annually. This report reached 10 million viewers when it aired in July 2012 as a featured segment on both Good Morning America and World News Tonight.
- A second ABC News collaboration on the problem of toxic algal bloom in Midwestern lakes and streams caused by agricultural pollution appeared on World News Tonight in September 2012.

In our first year we have developed rigorous methods for measuring the impact of our stories. This includes collecting data from our distribution partners about circulation, page views, video views and ratings; assessing Twitter analytics, including number of retweets, reach and number of clicks; looking at the number and types of outlets re-reporting the story; and tracking the development of outreach campaigns, policy changes or political responses to stories.

For example, our December 2012 cover story, “What the Frack is in Our Food?” for *The Nation* magazine received over 250,000 page views at thenation.com, was shared over 37,000 via social media (it was tweeted 3,350 times alone), reached 140,000 print subscribers, and reporter Elizabeth Royte was heard by 200,000 listeners to WNYC’s Leonard Lopate Show speaking about the subject of her report.

Our July 2012 story, “How Your Chicken Dinner is Creating a Drug Resistant Superbug” was featured in print at *The Atlantic* magazine and in a broadcast segment on ABC News’ Good Morning America and World News Tonight, which have a combined viewership of 10 million. The story was liked on Facebook 6,200+ times and was re-reported by over 50 additional outlets.

Our January 2012 story, “Dispute over drug in feed limiting US meat exports” for NBCNews.com dealt with a feed additive, ractopamine hydrochloride, which has been deemed safe by the FDA based on trials conducted by the drug’s maker, Elanco, yet which has been banned in parts of Asia and the European Union. Our article allowed the reader to see how this drug had become pervasive in its use and made available fresh documentation of adverse reactions in hogs to the drug, which has killed more livestock than any other. For such a controversial drug, it had rarely if ever been the subject of reporting--ours is the first in-depth look to reach a mass audience.

In the first 24 hours, it was one of the top stories in NBCnews.com's business vertical, reaching 78,000 hits and garnering more than 200 comments and 2,000+ shares via social media. The story was re-reported several times, including in Taiwan, where the government was considering lifting a ban on the drug.

Following queries from reporters and government officials in Taiwan, we released [documents](#) on our Web site that had been taken down previously from the FDA Web site along with others we obtained via Freedom of Information requests. In December 2012, Russia banned import of meat from animals given feed that contained ractopamine. A non-profit advocacy organization, Center for Food Safety also developed a petition campaign asking the top ten pork producers to stop using ractopamine. Later in the year, Consumers Union tested 240 pork products for ractopamine and found, as our report suggested that approximately twenty percent of samples tested positive for detectable levels of the drug.

Financials

We view our style of accountability journalism through investigative reporting as a public good as well as a good that the commercial media market is less and less able to perform. For that reason, foundations must play a role in expanding the public's access to information that the powerful seek to keep hidden.

Along those lines, we've raised \$100,000 from The 11th Hour Project, \$50,000 from the McKnight Foundation (with an additional \$50,000 committed for 2014), \$62,000 from the Food and Farm Communications Fund, \$40,000 from the Clarence Heller Foundation, \$20,000 from the Nell Newman Foundation, \$10,000 from the Gaia Fund and \$10,000 from the Sand Dollar Fund. We have a pending renewal application with the Columbia Foundation.

While we have had great success so far in the foundation community, we are also aggressively expanding our network of large-gift individual donors. In 2012 we held two events, one in San Francisco and one in New York City, which grossed over \$83,000 in donations.

**Audited Financial Statement
For Year Ended December 31, 2012**

REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT

Contributions		\$ 382,669
Other		<u>750</u>
	Total Revenues and Other Support	<u>383,419</u>

EXPENSES

Program Services		
Writers/Editors/Design	\$ 156,132	
Travel and meetings	<u>17,005</u>	
	Total Program Services	173,137
Supporting Services		
Management and general		
Payroll and related	49,815	
Professional fees	12,618	
Insurance	9,029	
Administrative and general	4,585	
Fundraising	<u>6,040</u>	
	Total Supporting Services	<u>82,087</u>
	Total Expenses	<u>255,224</u>
	Increase in Net Assets	128,195
Net assets, beginning of year		<u>53,604</u>
Net assets, end of year		<u>\$ 181,799</u>

Our Publishing Partners

ABCNews
Washington Post
San Francisco Chronicle
MSNBC/NBCNEWS.com
The Atlantic
The Nation
The American Prospect
San Francisco Magazine
Center for Investigative Reporting
California Watch
MSN.com
High Country News
PRI, The World (BBC)
Harper's
Eating Well
Slate

Personnel

Sam Fromartz, Editor-in-Chief
Susan West, Executive Editor
Tom Laskawy, Executive Director
Paula Crossfield, Managing Editor
Naomi Starkman, Strategic Media Adviser
Elizabeth Royte, Contributing Editor

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Dan Pullman, Treasurer
Ralph Loglisci, Board Secretary
Aaron Freiwald
Sam Fromartz

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Ruth Reichl
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Katrina Heron
Brian Halweil
Elizabeth Royte

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McKnight Foundation
Food and Farm Communications Fund
Clarence E. Heller Foundation
Nell Newman Foundation
The Gaia Fund
Cloud Mountain Foundation
Sand Dollar Fund

