



FERN NEWS

Food & Environment Reporting Network
Annual Report
2014

MISSION STATEMENT

The Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN) is the first and only independent, non-profit, non-partisan news organization that produces in-depth and 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 third Annual Report, following our third full year of operations.

In 2014, we produced 22 stories, including seven international stories, on subjects ranging from the impact of pesticides on the children of farmworkers to an in depth look at Whole Foods' attempts to make food affordable and the impact on communities in Detroit. We added new partnerships for a total of 29 mainstream media publishing partners, including the *The Guardian*, *Sunset*, *Fast Company*, *Harper's* and more.

We were gratified to learn that our story from the May 2013 issue of *Eating Well* magazine about antibiotic-resistant bacteria won the 2014 International Association of Culinary Professionals award for "Culinary Writing that Makes a Difference." Our story, "Imagining the Post-Antibiotics Future," was also nominated for a James Beard Award in 2014 (our second nomination), and was included in Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's collection *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*, 2014.

We exceeded our budget goal of \$450,000, raising \$735,000 in funds for 2014, with additional grants from The 11th Hour Project, the McKnight Foundation, Gaia Fund, Claneil Foundation, the Investigative News Network, the Soros Fund Charitable Foundation, and the Clarence Heller Foundation among others. In addition, we received nearly \$280,000 from individual donors, representing nearly 40 percent of our 2014 budget, thus meeting one of our long-term goals.

The budget increases allowed us to increase our reporting capabilities, including hiring photographers and creating graphics and explainers to accompany stories. We also were able to add senior editorial staff to aid in story placement and production as well as developing auxiliary news products like our daily newsletter, the Ag Insider.

In May we hosted our third annual fundraiser in San Francisco, a sit-down dinner prepared by Tracie des Jardins of *Jardinère* for 65 people at the home of Kat Taylor and Tom Steyer, co-hosted by Stuart Davidson. In October, 2014, we held our annual fundraiser dinner for 19 large-gift donors at the home of board member Alison Cayne in New York City, which featured a talk by Paul Greenberg, bestselling author of *Four Fish*, to discuss his new book *American Catch* and a meal of sustainably-caught seafood by chef Michael Anthony of *Gramercy Tavern*.

In January FERN's team met in Philadelphia for a strategic planning meeting, part of a effort over many months with a team of experts, which was funded by the Packard Foundation, to develop a long-term strategic plan for FERN.

We determined that FERN must strive to publish quality work more often in more forums – to build its audience, impact, brand, and revenue streams. Beyond assigning more major pieces, this will mean publishing shorter pieces, frequent updates on major reports, expanded curation of content, and more direct engagement with the audience. The audience’s suggestions, questions and contributions should be seen as potentially valuable content that helps build FERN’s credibility, rather than diminishing it.

FERN should double down on, not dilute, its hard-won reputation for uniquely credible reporting in its chosen niche. The goal of expanding its stream of content should not lead FERN to stray far from the intersection of food and environment. Instead, the goal should be nurture beat reporting that goes deep with frequency on the key issues inside that niche.

FERN’s strategic focus over the next five years will thus involve extending our reach and expanding the kinds of reporting we offer. What can and should not change, however, is the commitment to our core product -- in-depth and investigative long-form reporting distributed through print and online publication partners. This is the central public good we provide. Strategic expansion should involve: diversifying 1) our products, 2) the ways our audience interacts and experiences the information we provide and, of course, 3) our revenue.

Reflecting these new priorities, FERN made several staffing additions. We brought on a Director of Photography, Dennis Chamberlin. He is an associate professor at the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication at Iowa State University where he teaches photojournalism and multimedia storytelling. He has over 25 years experience as a photojournalist for a variety of publications including *National Geographic*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *TIME*. A former staff photographer at *The Denver Post*, he was also a member of the staff at *The Fort Wayne News-Sentinel* that was awarded a Pulitzer in 1983. He grew up in the midwest, spent most of his career working in Europe and now calls Iowa home.

We also engaged George Black as FERN’s Editor-at-Large. In his 30 years in journalism, including stints as foreign editor of *The Nation* and a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, Black has written about everything from the civil wars in Central America and the democracy movement in China to climate change in South Asia and energy conflicts in the American West. From 2004-2014 he was executive editor of *OnEarth* magazine, published by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). He continues to write a regular column for *onearth.org* and is a frequent contributor to the *newyorker.com*. His most recent book, *Empire of Shadows: The Epic Story of Yellowstone*, was a finalist for

the 2013 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. A frequent traveler to India, he is now at work on a new book, his seventh—a personal journey through the history and culture of the Ganges, to be published by St. Martin’s Press in 2016.

We started FERN’s Ag Insider, written by long-time agriculture reporter Chuck Abbott, in early 2014. With three decades of Washington experience, Abbott is an old hand at covering U.S. food and agriculture policy at the national level, ranging from the “Nutrition Facts” labels on food and the never-ending tussle over food stamp rules to renovation of the farm program. Abbott, who grew up on a farm in northern Illinois, was a long-time Reuters commodities correspondent in Washington after a stint as national farm editor for United Press International. The idea behind FERN Ag Insider is to engage more readers on a regular basis, provide an invaluable resource, and gauge interest in a potential “Pro” reported product, which could become a revenue stream for FERN. FERN’s Ag Insider has quickly become an essential daily read by policy and industry figures and has a fast-growing subscription base of 1,300 readers.

FERN is also now participating in a new consumer environmental channel on The Guardian web site, which is now the second most popular English-language news site in the world. Under the content partnership, we will contribute a monthly story but we envision that number rising by the second half of 2015. We were attracted by the offer to have branded content with a respected news outlet and also by the consumer focus of the section, which might allow us to reach more general readership. We will leverage existing writer relationships to generate these moderate-length stories, and bring infographics to the column as well.

Finally, we re-launched our Web site, thefern.org, this year in order to more clearly communicate our impact, effectiveness, and credibility and to highlight content that connects with each of our constituencies and to prompt donations

In May, we co-hosted a public panel discussion at *Sunset Magazine* on the topic of fracking in California, based on our story *Nervous Energy*, featured in the magazine. The panel featured Barry Yeoman, author of the story, Amy Quinton, who produced a companion radio story for Capital Public Radio, Paula Getzelman, a wine grower in Monterey county who was featured in the story, and Jayni Hein, author of a report on the potential impacts of fracking. Fromartz moderated the panel.

Also in May, Fromartz moderated a panel at the Edible Institute, a conference on food and food policy, which took place in New York City. The panel was titled, “Media: Does independent food journalism matter (and can it survive)?”

In June, Editor-in-Chief Sam Fromartz took part in a panel discussion on the change-making power of independent journalism at the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders meeting in Denver, Colorado. Fromartz sat on the panel along with Laura Frank of the non-profit outlet I-News Network.

FERN received an Investigative News Network INNOvation grant for a new event series called *FERN Talks & Eats*, which combines storytelling and food prepared by top chefs. The first, sold-out event took place on November 3, 2014 before an audience of 200 people in Brooklyn, NY, and featured performances by four of our writers, our Editor-in-Chief Sam Fromartz and chef Dan Barber and participation from such well-known New York restaurants as *Pearls & Ash*, *Franny's*, *Tertulia*, *Almond* and *Runner & Stone*. The goal of the grant was to “encourage innovation and experimentation in nonprofit news and public media organizations.” Over 80% of attendees reported that they would recommend future such events to a friend. FERN hopes to replicate the event in other cities as a revenue generator for the organization.

In addition, we expanded our board to include two new members. Leslie Williams was born and raised in Seoul, Korea. She is a graduate of Wellesley College and Harvard Law School. After an early legal career, she took time off from work to raise her daughter. Leslie then founded and managed The Perennial Chef, a high-end retail prepared food and catering business in Westchester County, NY. (The Perennial Chef closed in 2012). Leslie is an avid organic gardener and adventuresome cook. She has a strong interest in the environment and all things related to food particularly, food safety and security.

Alison Cayne is owner of Haven's Kitchen, a recreational cooking school, specialty food shop, and event space in Manhattan. Before founding Haven's Kitchen, Alison began working towards her Masters Degree at New York University's Food Studies program. In addition, Alison is on the boards of Just Food and Edible Schoolyard NYC, a contributing editor at Domino magazine, and a blogger for Huffington Post and USA Today.

Thank you for taking an interest in our work. We look forward to sharing more with you in 2014!

Sincerely,

The Food & Environment Reporting Network Team

Our Work

Our stories from 2014 include:

- [Organic Dairy Farmers Hit by California Drought](#), a short story we produced on the drought for *Medium.com*.
- [Warning Signs: How Pesticides Harm the Young Brain](#), a cover story we produced on a longterm study on pesticides and how they impact the children of farmworkers, which was published in *The Nation* magazine. It reached 300,000 readers in print and online and was shared on social media over 10,000 times.
- [Nervous Energy](#), a story that focuses on fracking in California and how it could impact the food system. It was published in *Sunset Magazine*, which has 1.3 million subscribers. We also worked with a reporter at *Capital Public Radio* to produce a companion piece for an audience of 470,000 listeners.
- [Palau's Plans to Ban Commercial Fishing Could Set Precedent for Tuna Industry](#), a follow-up report to our earlier reporting on the tuna industry in the South Pacific. It was published on *The Guardian's* new sustainable business vertical.
- [Plowed Under](#), a report for *The American Prospect* on how native grassland across America's Western Corn Belt is being plowed up to plant row crops at a rate unprecedented since the 1920s. The story reached 650,000 readers in print and online.
- [The Quinoa Quarrel](#), a story about the battle over the intellectual property of quinoa seeds between breeders and the Bolivian people. It was featured in *Harper's*, which has a readership of 175,000.
- [Are Stores Making Bank Off Food Stamps?](#), a report that looks at a court case that court force the USDA to reveal how much money from the SNAP program goes toward grocery retailers. It was published at *Mother Jones*, which has 500,000 monthly unique visitors.
- [Mexico is Waging War Against American Apples](#), a radio report that looked at how trade is impacting local farming in Mexico, and was featured on *PRI's The World*, which has 2.75 million weekly listeners.
- [The Abstinence Method](#), an investigation on The Netherlands, where they have eliminated sub-therapeutic use of antibiotics in animal agriculture.

The story was featured in *Modern Farmer* magazine, which has 2 million monthly page views and a print circulation of 100,000.

- [Rehabilitating Hospital Food: Aiming for Healthy, Sustainable and Savory](#), a report about a group of San Francisco hospitals are working to transform hospital food, which appeared at *The Guardian*.
- [With Imported Seafood Flooding US, Are Inspections Enough?](#) looks at our regulatory framework for imported seafood in the US, and appeared at *Medium.com*.
- [Apple Growers in Mexico Call Foul on Trade with US](#) appeared in the *Seattle Times* on a Sunday, which has a circulation of over 830,000.
- [Caviar's Last Stand](#) investigated illegal caviar-smuggling in the Ozarks for *Medium.com*.
- [Want to Find Out Where Your Fruit Was Grown? Good Luck.](#), a report looked at the difficulties of tracing produce purchased at a grocery store back to the field where it was grown, and appeared at *Mother Jones*.
- [California Governor Vetoes 'Unnecessary' Livestock Antibiotics Bill](#) covered watered down legislation that consumer groups felt would not curb resistance, and was featured at *The Guardian*.
- [Toxic Chicken: Petition Demands USDA Crack Down on Salmonella](#) was featured on *NBCNews.com*, which has 63 million pageviews per month.
- [Tuna firm's bungled IPO exposes China's flouting of global fishing rules](#), featured at *The Guardian* and contributed to the Chinese firms' abandonment of the IPO weeks later.
- [Can Whole Foods Change the Way Poor People Eat?](#), an in depth look at how a grocer is attempting to alter eating habits in Detroit, and was featured on *Slate*, which has over 10 million monthly page views.
- [Death of a Family Farm](#) looked at the complications of farm succession and appeared at *Fast Company*, which has over 39 million average monthly page views.
- [Hu tieu, a Vietnamese dish spiced with prosperity and climate change](#), a report featured at *The Guardian* on the consequences of a booming economy for rice and shrimp in Vietnam.

**Audited Financial Statement
For Year Ended December 31, 2014**

	December 31	
	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>
ASSETS		
Cash	\$ 433,417	\$ 449,257
Accounts receivable	<u>51,568</u>	<u>3,000</u>
Total Assets	<u>\$ 484,985</u>	<u>\$ 452,257</u>
 LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Liabilities		
Accounts payable		
Accrued expenses	\$ 15,958	\$ 2,608
	<u>23,584</u>	<u>19,476</u>
Total Liabilities	<u>\$ 39,542</u>	<u>\$ 22,084</u>
 Net Assets		
Temporarily Restricted	50,000	
Unrestricted	<u>395,443</u>	<u>430,173</u>
Total Net Assets	<u>445,443</u>	<u>430,173</u>
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	<u>\$ 484,985</u>	<u>\$ 452,257</u>

**Audited Financial Statement
For Year Ended December 31, 2014**

	December 31	
	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>
REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT		
Contributions	\$ 669,887	\$ 644,113
Other	38,491	4,048
Total Revenues and Other Support	<u>708,378</u>	<u>648,161</u>
EXPENSES		
Program Services		
Payroll and related	77,775	-
Consultant fees		
Writers	96,090	51,724
Editors	66818	41,900
Graphic designer	53275	32,100
Project manager	50400	32,250
Communications	36,139	39,750
Digital Engagement	33,402	-
Photographer	15,600	-
Multimedia	14,052	-
Other	37,811	9,200
Travel and meetings	43,934	35,223
Total Program Services	<u>525,296</u>	<u>242,147</u>
Supporting Services		
Management and general		
Payroll and related	77,775	108,223
Professional fees	21,222	19,132
Insurance	11,494	11,787
Administrative and general	19,449	7,433
Fundraising	87,872	11,065
Total Supporting Services	<u>217,812</u>	<u>157,640</u>
Total Expenses	<u>743,108</u>	<u>399,787</u>
(Decrease) Increase in Net Assets	(34,730)	248,374
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>430,202</u>	<u>181,799</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 445,443</u>	<u>\$ 430,202</u>

Our Publishing Partners

ABC's World News Tonight
ABC's Good Morning America
Center for Investigative Reporting
Eating Well
Fast Company
Harper's
High Country News
Medium
Modern Farmer
Mother Jones
NBCNews.com
Newsweek Japan
PRI's The World
San Francisco Chronicle
San Francisco Magazine
Seattle Times
Slate
Sunset
The American Prospect
The Atlantic
The Daily Meal
The Guardian
The Nation
Washington Post

Personnel

Samuel Fromartz, Editor-in-Chief
Susan West, Executive Editor
Tom Laskawy, Executive Director
Paula Crossfield, Managing Editor
Naomi Starkman, Strategic Media Adviser
Chuck Abbott, Editor, Ag Insider

Dennis Chamberlin, Director of Photography
George Black, Editor-at-Large
Elizabeth Royte, Contributing Editor
Kristina Johnson, Assistant Editor

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Alison Cayne
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