MISSION STATEMENT

The Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN) is the first independent, nonprofit, non-partisan news organization that produces explanatory 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 its 2020 Annual Report, following its ninth full year of operations. FERN produces high-impact, change-making journalism about food, agriculture, and environmental health. Without FERN, the world would be a little darker, our understanding of these issues a little leaner. FERN reaches millions of readers — educating consumers, informing influencers, and deepening policymakers’ understanding of our food, the people who produce it, and the land and sea from which it comes.

We believe a free and independent media underpin a healthy democratic society. FERN provides the editorial expertise to explore, explain and investigate all corners of the food system, as well as to fill gaps in coverage that have arisen due to the ongoing disruption of the traditional media business model. FERN expands public understanding of these crucial issues at a time when trusted sources of information are more critical than ever to maintaining our democracy.

The Food & Environment Reporting Network continues to demonstrate an ability to deliver smart, powerful journalism that helps define, and often leads, the media coverage of its areas of focus. In 2020, we produced 48 explanatory or investigative reports on a range of topics published with 18 outlets, including National Geographic, HuffPost, TIME, The Weather Channel, and many others. We prioritized stories about Covid-19 and food workers, climate impacts on agriculture and the food system, biodiversity and agriculture, and oceans and water issues. Despite the pandemic, FERN has never been more productive or influential.
We also produced dozens of articles for our Ag Insider policy news service. Complementing our ability to reach a broad audience with our feature stories, FERN’s Ag Insider is aimed at an audience of policymakers, government officials, advocates, and food industry representatives. We now have more than 300 individual and corporate subscribers and a growing number of academic institutional subscribers, including NYU, Harvard Law School, University of California, Berkeley, Tufts, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, approximately 2,300 people receive the free newsletter version every weekday.

Due in large part to interest in our aggressive coverage of the pandemic, and despite the fact that we expect the vast majority of our readers to experience our content on partner sites, our own web audience increased dramatically last year. In 2020, we had nearly 500,000 visitors to our website, representing more than double the previous year’s audience. In addition, we finished with nearly 1.4 million page views on the FERN site, double last year’s total. Our total email audience across all our newsletters is now approximately 12,500. This includes FERN’s Friday Feed newsletter (FFF), a weekly survey of the stories in our coverage areas that have been published by other outlets. We send this newsletter weekly to a subscriber base of 9,700. We also released our fifth print anthology, *The Dirt 2020.*

At the end of our 2020 fiscal year (June 30, 2020), FERN had $526,182 in net assets against $1,329,370 in annual revenue. Our total expenses across all programs, including fiscally-sponsored projects, were $913,787. As we reach the halfway point in our current fiscal year, we have a total of $718,000 in revenue and $565,000 in expenses.

Engagement and Business Lines

FERN’s social media presence continued to expand its reach and influence. We are active on three platforms — Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Our audience-engagement editor supervises activity on these platforms, including the judicious use of paid promotion (although we have suspended advertising spending on
Facebook indefinitely) in order to reach beyond our followers. We also work closely with our publication partners’ social media staff, who help promote our collaborations and “tag” us within the individual platforms in which they operate.

FERN content for 2020 continues to see an increase in total number of social media followers and engagement across our three platforms. FERN’s combined social media following has shown modest growth since the beginning of 2020. We started the year with 45,000 followers, and have gained a total of 3,000 since then. The current breakdown of our social media audience is 15,750 on Facebook, 29,482 on Twitter, and 2,445 on Instagram. We continue to see particular growth in our post and tweet impressions as well as in engagements (e.g. clicks, likes, and retweets). The goal of our social media activity is to have quality, engaged readers. At the end of 2020, FERN’s combined social media impressions were 3,656,966 and total engagements were 61,863.

We continue to maintain and support FERN’s Friday Feed newsletter, a.k.a. the #FFF, a weekly survey of the stories in our areas of interest that have been published by other outlets. We send this newsletter weekly to a subscriber base of 9,400 as a way to enhance engagement with an audience that is mostly
distinct from our social-media audience. Overall, our total email audience across all our newsletters is now 12,500, which also includes our FERN’s Ag Insider daily newsletter.

Business Line Development

Complementing our ability to reach a broad audience, FERN’s Ag Insider policy news service is aimed at a small but influential audience of policymakers, government officials, advocates, and food industry representatives. For a modest annual fee, subscribers gain access to original reporting by Chuck Abbott (Ag Insider’s editor) and staff writer Leah Douglas, as well as to a full archive of past issues with subject tag-based organization. The email newsletter, which includes summaries of the full stories, is available for free. We now have several hundred individual and corporate subscribers and a growing number of academic institutional subscribers, including New York University, Harvard Law School, University of California, Berkeley, Tufts, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, approximately 2,300 people receive the newsletter version every weekday. We produced dozens of original articles during the past year covering a broad range of federal and state legislative and regulatory issues.

We also syndicate Ag Insider content to agriculture.com and its print periodical Successful Farmer, one of the leading news sites for commodity farmers, as well as to other outlets such as Univision and Mother Jones. Ag Insider articles are among the best-performing content on Agriculture.com. Our product is a key source of information for this audience and also serves as a “tip sheet” for reporters as it helps influence coverage across the media spectrum. This year we also saw Ag Insider reporting cited by large national media organizations as well as several politicians.

FERN Talks & Eats New York City

Just before the pandemic hit, FERN hosted a public event on February 10, 2020, in New York City with an audience of almost 200 people. It was a lively discussion on the connection of land — both agricultural and residential — to the health of U.S. fisheries. The panel, called “Surf ‘n’ Turf: can our seafood survive Big Ag and climate change?”, wrestled with the tension between how what happens on the land — from the use of farm chemicals to the demand for lush lawns in the suburbs — affects the success and failure of fisheries.

Panelists Niaz Dorry, coordinating director of the North Atlantic Marine Alliance, Karen Rivara, a marine biologist and president of Aeros Cultured Oyster Company, Inc. on Long Island, and Corey Hendricks, who runs First Light Shellfish Farm, a project of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe in Cape Cod, discussed
management tactics of successful fisheries and the challenges that loom as they attempt to meet global demand for seafood without causing further damage to the environment. The moderator was Paul Greenberg, a frequent FERN contributor and the author of *Four Fish* and *American Catch*.

**Editorial Report**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, FERN has paused airline travel for our longform reporting. That said, we turned our attention to the impacts of Covid-19 on the food system. Under our *Ag Insider* brand, we significantly increased production and published essential reporting from across the nation thanks to our network of freelance reporters. We put all of our Covid-19 coverage in front of our paywall and had several of our stories go viral on social media, particularly in February and March. As the year progressed, we were able to restart some local travel and produced deeply-reported stories for our biodiversity, climate, and oceans initiatives.

Our most significant single effort involved the April launch of a tool to track Covid-19 outbreaks in food and meat processing facilities across the country. FERN Associate Editor and Staff Writer Leah Douglas has collated and collected the map data daily and added new features and visualizations as the year progressed, including the ability to see state-level data and a breakdown of cases and deaths by company. The data project has become the go-to resource for other news organizations reporting on the pandemic and food system workers, including *The Washington Post, the*
Associated Press, Vice, Politico, Axios, Bloomberg, Business Insider, and literally hundreds of local, national, and international news outlets. It is even cited as a source in the Wikipedia entry on the subject and was cited, linked and credited in a deep-dive by The New York Times. This work has catapulted FERN to an entirely new level of influence and attention.

Our data was cited by The Union of Concerned Scientists as part of a public engagement campaign to support workers, and the HEAL Food Alliance created a series of Instagram graphics using our data in support of a Title VI discrimination complaint to the USDA. The data has also been cited multiple times by Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker, and was incorporated into the announcement for Sen. Booker’s bill to address issues with line speed and worker health at meatpacking plants, in addition to mentions by many other politicians and organizations. FERN’s data is now the foundation of a Congressional investigation into Covid-19 deaths in meatpacking plants by the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis.

Thanks to the data project, FERN made its first cameo on Netflix during the early summer on the political satire show "The Patriot Act" with Hasan Minhaj. A segment on the spread of Covid-19 that aired May 31 featured a version of FERN’s Covid-19 map as well as a second chart of the growth over time of infections in food workers.

Douglas also worked with reporters at Al Jazeera to guide their reporting for a special episode of the video documentary series Faultlines on poultry plants and Covid-19, in which Douglas appeared as an expert. The data was also cited in a PBS Frontline investigation into farmworker treatment during the pandemic.

Douglas was invited to present her reporting and data at over a dozen universities, including Harvard Law School, Yale Law School, University of California, Berkeley, and Johns Hopkins University, as well as at several conferences hosted by farm groups including the Kansas Farmers Union annual convention and the National Young Farmers Conference. Douglas gave dozens of interviews to major media outlets and podcasts about the impact of the pandemic on food system workers, including to Vox, CBS News, Iowa PBS, and Univision.

It is now almost routine to see politicians and advocates use our figures in discussing the issue of food worker infections, even if FERN is not cited. We are the only entity tracking Covid-19 outbreaks at food production, processing, and distribution facilities at a granular level, i.e. by food work type, location, or employer.
FERN endorses a formulation of journalistic impact defined by the *Center for Investigative Reporting*. It states that impact represents "a change in the status quo as a result of a direct intervention, be it a text article, documentary, or live event. Impact can be characterized by three types of outcomes: structural/macro events like changes in laws and policies; meso-level changes such as shifts in public debate; and micro-level changes, like alterations in individuals' knowledge, beliefs, or behavior."

We implement this concept by tracking (i) views and reads of online stories and ancillary products like infographics, (ii) reach of print and broadcast partners, (iii) awards received, (iv) media uptake (including media appearances by the writer/FERN representatives, coverage of the story or re-reporting by other outlets, and changes in coverage patterns), (v) effects on public debate, (vi) public engagement campaigns created by other organizations based on our reporting, (vii) changes in individual/consumer behavior, and (viii) policy changes at the corporate, federal, state, or local level.

It is our expectation that overall our work will raise awareness in the general public of the issues on which we report. A combination of the information we produce and awareness/debate among the general public can and often does result in greater accountability and transparency regarding the issues. We have also demonstrated a further ability for our reporting to lead directly to corporate and government policy change.
Despite the obvious challenges, our editorial production in 2020 was strong, both in terms of reach and impact. In response to the coronavirus era, we adjusted our editorial model. We temporarily scaled back longform reporting in the early spring — and all the travel that involves — in favor of shorter, newsier, phone-reported stories, in part due to the pandemic's dangers but also because we knew things were moving fast and we needed our reporting to move fast as well. Over the summer, we began to send reporters back into the field, although we continue to minimize air travel.

Although the daily inundation of news was primarily a public health story, we immediately saw the implications for the food supply and began reporting on them in Ag Insider. We tried to avoid competing directly with news organizations on the same story, but we felt that mainstream media wasn't focusing on the food dimension of this emergency. That left room for us to do some original reporting on issues like food access (SNAP, WIC and other nutrition benefit programs), local food (farmers markets shutting in some areas), the supply chain (why are those grocery stores empty?) and other issues.

Chuck Abbott’s story on the news that the Trump USDA had decided to go ahead with SNAP benefit cuts for 700,000 recipients despite the pandemic went viral after it was shared by Chris Hayes of MSNBC to his 2 million social media followers. To date, Chuck’s story has over 22,000 reads. In fact, during the peak of the pandemic our COVID-19 coverage drew 2,000-5,000 reads per story on our site, more than double our average total Ag Insider readership, including through syndication. It resulted from a combination of lifting the paywall on these stories and social sharing.

As part of this coverage, we also broke a major story from Mexico City, with freelancer Esther Honig, on the U.S. decision to shut down consulates, which threatened the processing of H-2A worker visas. After the outcry, they made provisions for continuing to process those visas for seasonal workers that harvest crops in the U.S., some 200,000 people a year. The farm lobby reacted strongly, saying the move potentially threatened the U.S. food supply.

Even with this intensive coverage of the pandemic, we managed to release several stories on other topics, with a particular focus on climate and biodiversity.

“As the Salton Sea shrinks, it leaves behind a toxic reminder of the cost of making a desert bloom,” by Lindsay Fendt with The Weather Channel. Fendt explains how pesticides and other toxins, lodged in the mud at the bottom of the Salton Sea by decades of agricultural runoff, are creating a public-health hazard now that the lake is shrinking and the exposed mud is drying out, turning to dust.
Asthma rates, already high, are expected to rise even higher. The once-prosperous resort towns by the lake have collapsed, and the only people left are farmworkers and others who are too poor to leave.

The Water Desk, a project run by the University of Colorado and funded in large part by the Walton Foundation, which also provided support for the story, published the piece on their website. Water News Network, which is published by San Diego County Water Authority, linked to the story on their website. The story was posted to Reddit, which ranks as the No. 5 most visited website in the U.S. and No. 13 in the world. On social media, we saw shares by UC Food Observer, Global Water Partnership, Water Foundation, Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Public Policy Institute of California, UC Davis’s Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology, as well as journalists and individuals focused on issues pertaining to conservation and sustainability. Our media partner for this piece, The Weather Channel, shared FERN's link to the story via their Facebook page which resulted in nearly 3,000 story views via Facebook alone. In fact, this story was our top performing story on the FERN website in 2020.

A Texas community chokes on fecal dust from cattle feedlots, by Chris Collins and published with the Texas Observer. This story, which was part of our Livestock Project, also represented a promising new approach to FERN partnerships: Collins is a staff writer at the
Observer, not a freelancer. FERN covered travel and photography costs, and supplied the data on which the story was based. As we look to do more to support local and regional outlets, like the Observer, this story serves as an important proof of concept. As mentioned above, we are trying to make this style of project into a larger initiative.

- The reporter for the story was interviewed on a local NPR station.
- Texas Observer shared the story in their newsletter, which has 17,000 subs. And on social media, the Texas Observer link to the story had over 15,000 social media shares.
- The story’s photographer, George Steinmetz, shared it on his Instagram and it got incredible engagement with 16,407 likes.

Are outbreaks of foodborne illness getting worse?, by Leah Douglas and published in Time Magazine’s special newsstand-only issue, The Science of Nutrition. This, too, represents a new type of partnership. Time does dozens of these themed “book-a-zines” each year, placing them in newsstands and checkout aisles at supermarkets. This story has led to an ongoing discussion with Time about a possible collaboration on an entire issue.

- Social sharing by Food Tank, Food Solutions New England, Public Justice Food Project, and Global Land Programme. Journalism orgs such as Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting, SEJ, and Covering Climate Now tweeted the story.

U.S. Embassy and consulates in Mexico to shut down, threatening labor supply for American farms, by Esther Honig. As I mentioned earlier, Honig broke this story for FERN. She had been talking with farmworkers advocates about H-2A visas, when she learned the U.S. embassy was shutting its doors and only processing limited seasonal work visas. After FERN broke this story and shared it on social media, both Reuters and NPR followed up on it.

- Broadly shared on social media, including Southwest Florida Research & Education Center, Center for Global Development, America’s Voice, University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, University of Arkansas Public Policy Center, Union of Concerned Scientists, and several journalists and individuals interested in ag policy and farmworker issues.
- In less than three days, our Facebook post for the story had a reach of over 2,500 users and nearly 800 engagements.
- Referenced by The Counter, Salon, and The Raw Story.

Mapping Covid-19 in meat and food processing plants, by FERN staff writer, Leah Douglas. Leah created a map of meatpacking and food processing plants
where cases of Covid-19 have been reported. The impact of this story is too
great to list here. It is
illustrated in a series of
graphics incorporated into
this report. What started
out as just another project — Leah’s work tracking Covid-19 cases and deaths among food-system
workers — has turned out
to be groundbreaking. On
April 22, we first published
an interactive map Leah
built to represent that
data. Since then, her work has been cited in major media, including twice in the
New York Times, in a Netflix show, and just about every major news organization,
including in Europe.

Can Asia’s infectious disease-producing wildlife trade be stopped? By Brian
Barth for FERN reports on the increasing pressure to shut down the trade for wild
animals, ever since the source of Covid-19 pandemic was provisionally linked to a
“wet market” in Wuhan, China, where throngs of customers shop for live animals
help in cramped quarters. The markets have long been linked to disease
outbreaks as they create the conditions for infectious diseases to jump from wild
animals to humans.

- This story was republished on Grist and Mother Jones.
- This story was shared on Twitter by the Head of Global Conservation at The
WCS and by Racing Extinction. We saw Facebook engagement from
1,000,000 Strong Against Offshore Drilling and Centre for Wildlife Studies
(India).

Migrant farmworkers feed America, and they’re at high risk for a coronavirus
outbreak, by Liza Gross and Esther Honig for HuffPost, discusses how tens of
thousands of migrant farmworkers will arrive in agricultural centers across the
nation, from Washington’s Yakima Valley to the coastal plains of North Carolina
and Georgia, where they will live and work in conditions that are prime for a
Covid-19 outbreak. Yet despite the fact that these are the men and women
Americans depend on to plant, tend, and harvest their food, workers are
provided virtually no information on how they can protect themselves, co-
workers or their families from Covid-19.
Food waste—and food insecurity—rising amid coronavirus panic, by Elizabeth Royte for National Geographic, details the disturbing reality of food waste, which already accounts for 40 percent of all food produced. Now with Covid-19, it appears to be increasing at the same time as food insecurity. Royte digs into the bottlenecks that exist in our food system, especially when a huge portion of it shuts down in a heartbeat.

Is carbon farming a climate boon, or boondoggle? by Gabriel Popkin for YaleEnvironment360, looks at the efforts to wean society off fossil fuels have stalled, “natural climate solutions” such as carbon sequestration have rapidly gained steam. Millions of dollars are now pouring into soil-climate initiatives from corporations, philanthropists, and governments. However, new studies reveal that carbon sequestration practices may not provide the climate benefits society has hoped for.

As pandemic spreads and growing season ramps up, farmworkers deemed ‘essential’ but still largely unprotected, by Esther Honig for FERN. Farmworkers have been deemed “critical infrastructure workers.” meaning they will stay on the job even as the pandemic grows. Despite their essential status and persistent outcry, state and federal agencies have so far failed to address their heightened risk.
Praying for rain, by Tim Folger for The Weather Channel, reports on the Zuni people in the arid Southwest region of the U.S., who centuries ago when faced with a mega-drought, developed a sophisticated farming culture, channeling water towards crops and breeding climate resilient seeds that have been updated and utilized until the present day. With a new 50-year mega-drought potentially underway, scientists and farmers are exploring if these techniques can provide a path forward.

- Partner circulation: 80 million unique users per month
- Media mentions include Archaeology Southwest
- Social media mentions include tweets from the Water Desk and World Federation of Science Journalist.

Coronavirus forces California farmworkers to scramble for safe drinking water, by Liza Gross for FERN reports that some 1 million California farmworker communities have relied for years on bottled water because their tap water is tainted with nitrate and other agricultural pollutants. As stores begin to ration water to prevent hoarding during the Covid-19 crisis, these residents are relying on friends and family, or driving many miles to bigger towns in search of water.

- Media mentions for this story include Reddit and American Rivers
- Social media mentions for this story include tweets from Dr. Bob Bullard and Community Water Center and a post on Facebook from Latinos for Water. FERN’s link to the story had over 500 social media shares as well

When meat plants shutter, what happens to marker-ready animals? By Elizabeth Royte for Mother Jones. The spread of Covid-19 has forced some meat-packing plants to close, while many others run at half-speed. Industrial farmers find their barns filling up as production drops. Farmers are now tasked with ‘depopulating’ their livestock.
Trump’s executive order seeks controversial overhaul of seafood industry, by Leah Douglas details the Trump administration’s executive order which laid out a pathway for the approval of ocean aquaculture in federal waters, a controversial departure from existing policy that could reshape the country’s seafood production. The order sets in motion a process for approving finfish aquaculture projects in federal waters, establishes authority over those projects at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and aims to deregulate and expand seafood production.

This story was referenced in an article for HuffPost and MSN and was also cited in a piece for Modern Farmer. FoodPrint included it in their newsletter, and we saw the story posted to Reddit. On Twitter, the piece was shared by UC Davis’s Agricultural Sustainability Institute, the Canadian Association for Food Law and Policy, and International Institute for Sustainable Development. It was also tweeted by Cara Cowan Watts, a member of the Cherokee Nation Tribe and currently running to be Oklahoma’s District 14 Cherokee Nation Tribal Councilwoman.

‘The workers are being sacrificed’: As cases mounted, meatpacker JBS kept people on crowded factory floors, by Esther Honig and Ted Genoways for Mother Jones, tell the stories of workers in America’s meatpacking plants who are facing high rates of Covid-19 -- and of the industry’s chilling disregard for its workforce.

How did Europe avoid the Covid-19 catastrophe ravaging U.S. meatpacking plants? by Bridget Huber for Mother Jones. In the U.S., Covid-19 has been
sweeping through meatpacking plants, infecting more than 24,000 workers (and growing). Those figures are nine-times larger than at meat plants in Europe, though the U.S. industry has only a third more workers.

- Monthly unique visitors to the site: 8 million
- Media mentions for the story include Civil Eats and Newsbreak

**With thousands of seafood workers coming to Alaska, the state tries to contain Covid-19.** by Miranda Weiss, explains how local leaders in southwest Alaska’s Bristol Bay begged the state’s governor to consider canceling the commercial sockeye season, fearing a Covid-19 outbreak that could spread throughout the region’s small villages. Despite those concerns, preparations for opening the Bristol Bay fishery barreled ahead with expectations of about 10,000 fishermen and processing plant workers to descend on the region. Newsbreak, an app for breaking local news, posted the story. The story was also shared on social media by Food Policy Action.

**Pandemic and protest in a meatpacking town**, by Esther Honig and Mary Anne Andrei. Produced with Latino USA. This 30-minute radio piece, with a video sidebar, tells the story of how the adult children of workers at a Smithfield plant in Nebraska stepped up and led an ongoing protest against the company’s failure to protect its workers. The story was also published on Latino Rebels, Latino USA’s sister website.

**As Covid cases spike, an unprecedented alliance emerges to protect California farmworkers**, by Liza Gross. Published with Univision in English and Spanish. This story goes inside an unusual alliance of researchers, activists, public health officials and farmers who banded together to keep workers safe.
• Our media partner for this piece is the No. 1 Spanish-language digital property, with 20 million monthly U.S. users.

• "Good news amid this really interesting reporting on the alliance of agriculture industry representatives, county officials, farmworker advocates, doctors, and scientists that has turned longtime adversaries into allies in the race to protect farmworkers during the pandemic." -- Growing Empowerment on Facebook.

Can grazing save endangered grasslands? by Lynne Curry, published with The Guardian. The first story in our multi-part project on biodiversity and agriculture explores an ambitious partnership between conservationists and ranchers designed to prove that the goals of the two groups—often at odds—can complement each other and protect the largest remaining bunchgrass prairie in North America.

• The piece was republished by High Country News.

• This story was shared to Reddit twice on two different subreddits (specialized conversations), directly reaching about 138,000 users: The official subreddit of Oregon (~73,000 members) and a climate change activism subreddit (~65,000 members).

How do climate change, migration and a deadly sheep disease alter our understanding of pandemics? by Carson Vaughan, published with Ensia. The second story in our biodiversity series, this is the story of how science arrived at a new, and ominous, understanding of the ways opportunistic pathogens spread, mutate and generate new disease outbreaks.

• This story was republished on Medium, a website that reaches over 6 million unique visitors a month. It was also published on Patch.com.
At the nation’s largest student farm organization, a reckoning on race

LEAH DOUGLAS FOR MOTHER JONES

A racist incident involving a leader of the 700,000-member FFA organization spurred a backlash and revealed a long history of inequity.

The piece was republished by Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting. It was also referenced on The Counter’s website.

After a farmworker in rural Texas died of complications from Covid-19, his family and federal investigators want answers, by Dana Ullman, published with Texas Observer. Another outrageous story of neglect of worker health and safety by a food-processing operation. This is our third piece with the Observer, and we have now formalized the partnership. Expect a lot more investigative stories out of Texas in the coming months.

This story was posted to Digg.

Texas Observer’s link to the story had over 4,000 shares on social media.


As California’s wildfires rage, the harvest goes on, by Teresa Cotisrilos, in partnership with KALW-SF’s podcast Crosscurrents and the KQED-Bay Area show and podcast WorldAffairs. Farmworkers are out harvesting despite the smoke, flames, and heat—to say nothing of Covid-19. Despite state regulations governing things like how long workers can be outdoors in extreme conditions, advocates worry that growers are taking advantage of the chaos violating those labor laws. This story was shared on Twitter by National Farmers Union, Food Policy Action, and Fight for 15 (international movement against underpaid workers).
Food system workers may get early access to a Covid-19 vaccine, but how should states prepare?, by Leah Douglas, published on FERN. With meatpackers and other processing facilities clamoring to get their workers to the front of the vaccine distribution line, Leah points out that the lack of trust among those workers—engendered by the failure of their employers to protect them from the virus—is likely to make it difficult for states to effectively deploy the vaccine.

- This story was cited by the following online news sources: *Yahoo, Univision, Press News Agency*, and *The Takeout*. It was also mentioned on *Supply Chain Dive*.

- Engagement on Twitter around this piece was seen by National Farmers Union, 50by40, Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting, AGree, Pesticide Action Network (PAN) North America, NASEM Agriculture, and Familias Unidas por la Justicia (independent union of more than 300 indigenous migrant farmworker families in Burlington, WA).

From the sea floor to the courtroom, the fight to save right whales grows urgent, by Rene Ebersole, published with *Yale Environment 360*. With fewer than 400 North Atlantic right whales left, activists are hoping the courts will force the lobster fishing industry to change how it operates to protect the remaining whales from getting tangled in its lines. This is part of our ongoing biodiversity series.

- Our media partner for this story, *Yale Environment 360*, reaches 4 million online readers per year.

- The story was mentioned on the web by *Saving Seafood*.

- The story received wide social media exposure through the #WordFisheriesDay hashtag.
In the jungles of Borneo a novel approach to end deforestation — and the spread of disease, by Brian Barth and published by Popular Science. A healthcare and sustainable farming model could provide a blueprint to keep diseases from making the deadly leap between wildlife and people. This was another entry in our biodiversity project.

- Popular Science reaches 5.5 million online readers per month and has a social media audience of about 5 million.
- Republished by MSN.
- Promoted by NewsBreak (a local news app).

A grassroots push to save vanishing birds and bees forces change on Germany’s farms by Bridget Huber and published by National Geographic. Across Europe, species are disappearing, especially on agricultural lands. In Bavaria, Germany’s most conservative state, the shocking declines in bird and insect numbers fueled a powerful, citizen-based movement to protect nature, one that seems to be catching on across Europe.

- This story received over 200 social media shares.
- Popular Science reaches 5.5 million online readers per month and has a social media audience of about 5 million.
- Republished by MSN.
- Promoted by NewsBreak (a local news app).

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- This story received over 500 social media engagements.
- Popular Science reaches 5.5 million online readers per month and has a social media audience of about 5 million.
- Republished by MSN.
- Promoted by NewsBreak (a local news app).
the events in Germany along with the attempts to bring these policies to the whole of Europe through the EU's version of the US Farm Bill.

- *National Geographic* reaches an online audience of 26 million unique visitors per month. Social media reach of over 220 million across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Their tweet for the story received over 500 engagements.

- Republished by *MSN* to its approximately 11.5 million unique visitors per month.

- Posted to the Patagonia Area Resource Alliance's website, Flipboard (a site that features the day's most important and interesting news) and Solutions Journalism Network’s website.

**The water war in Indian Wells Valley** by Brent Crane and published by *Bloomberg Green* is part of the University of Colorado’s Water Desk initiative on water issues in the Western US. It details a legal dispute over water rights in California’s Mojave desert that has growers for one of America’s most powerful agricultural enterprises on one side and a town reliant on a sprawling naval base on the other. Our media partner for this story, *Bloomberg Green*, is part of *Bloomberg Media*, which reaches 53 million unique visitors per month, and also extends across 70+ countries and 120+ global news bureaus. *Bloomberg Green* alone has about 135,000 social media followers across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

- Published on *Bloomberg Quint*, an Indian business and financial news organization, and a joint venture of *Bloomberg News* and *Quintillion Media*.

- Republished by *Yahoo Finance* (both the general U.S. version and a version published for the state of California) and *The Mercury News*.
Published Work

JANUARY 2020

- As the Salton Sea shrinks, it leaves behind a toxic reminder of the cost of making a desert bloom - The Weather Channel

FEBRUARY 2020

- A Texas community chokes on fecal dust from cattle feedlots - Texas Observer
- It’s illegal to take drone photos of feedlots in Texas - Texas Observer
- Are outbreaks of foodborne illness getting worse? - TIME

MARCH 2020

- U.S. Embassy and consulates in Mexico to shut down, threatening labor supply for American farms - FERN
- Can Asia’s infectious disease-producing wildlife trade be stopped? - FERN
- Migrant farmworkers feed America, and they’re at high risk for a coronavirus outbreak - Liza Gross HuffPost
- Food waste--and food insecurity--rising amid coronavirus panic - National Geographic
- Is carbon farming a climate boon, or boondoggle? - Gabriel Popkin for Yale Environment 360

APRIL 2020

- The coronavirus has laid bare restaurant workers’ ‘tip to mouth’ existence - FERN
- On the front lines at a North Carolina food bank - FERN
- As pandemic spreads and growing season ramps up, farmworkers deemed ‘essential’ but still largely unprotected - FERN
- Praying for rain - The Weather Channel
- Coronavirus forces California farmworkers to scramble for safe drinking water - FERN
- Mapping Covid-19 in meat and food processing plants - FERN
- When meat plants shutter, what happens to market-ready animals? - FERN
- What needs to change in America’s food system - FERN Editors

MAY 2020

- ‘The workers are being sacrificed’: As cases mounted, meatpacker JBS kept people on crowded factory floors - Mother Jones
- As Covid-19 hobbles the industrial meat industry, small producers are having a moment - HuffPost
- A burst of home-grown food, farming, in Alaska - FERN
- Trump’s executive order seeks controversial overhaul of seafood industry - FERN
- Charting the spread of Covid-19 in the food system - FERN
- Feeding refugees on the U.S.-Mexico border was always a challenge. Now there’s Covid-19. - FERN
- When Covid-19 hits a rural meatpacking plant, county infection rates soar to five times the average - Daily Yonder

**JUNE 2020**
- For this North Dakota grocery, the pandemic is personal - FERN
- Covid-19 is spreading among farmworkers, and it may get worse - FERN
- How did Europe avoid the Covid-19 catastrophe ravaging U.S. meatpacking plants? - Mother Jones
- With thousands of seafood workers coming to Alaska, state tries to contain Covid-19 - FERN

**JULY 2020**
- As Covid-19 cases spike, an unprecedented alliance emerges to protect California farmworkers - Univision
- As Covid-19 rises, Alaskans crowd rivers to stock up on wild salmon - FERN

**AUGUST 2020**
- Pandemic and protest in a meatpacking town - Latino USA
- Can grazing save endangered grasslands? - The Guardian

**SEPTEMBER 2020**
- How do climate change, migration and a deadly sheep disease alter our understanding of pandemics? - Ensia
- At the nation’s largest student farm organization, a reckoning on race - FERN
- After a farmworker in rural Texas died of complications from Covid-19, his family and federal investigators want answers - Texas Observer
- As California wildfires rage, the harvest goes on - KALW’s Crosscurrents

**OCTOBER 2020**
- Could the food system face a new Covid-19 wave? - FERN
- Are Democrats missing a fundamental issue for rural voters - FERN

**NOVEMBER 2020**
- Food system workers may get early access to a Covid-19 vaccine, but how should states prepare? - FERN
- From the sea floor to the courtroom, the fight to save right whales grows urgent - Yale Environment 360

**DECEMBER 2019**
- In the jungles of Borneo a novel approach to end deforestation — and the spread of disease - Popular Science
- A grassroots push to save vanishing birds and bees forces change on Germany’s farms - National Geographic
- Documents show scope of Covid-19 in North Carolina meat industry - FERN
- The water war in Indian Wells Valley - Bloomberg Green
- She stakes her claim - Virginia Quarterly Review
- The tasting menu at the end of the world - Eater
**Audited Financial Statement**  
**For Year Ended June 30, 2020**

**Statement of Financial Position**

**ASSETS**

**Current assets**
- Cash $518,595
- Contributions and grants receivable, due within one year $84,813
  - **Total current assets** $603,408

**Non-current assets**
- Contributions and grants receivable, due within two years $73,764
  - **Total Assets** $677,172

**LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS**

**Liabilities**

**Current liabilities**
- Accounts payable $22,515
- Accrued expenses $31,526
- Deferred revenue $12,949
  - **Total current liabilities** $73,986

**Non-current liabilities**
- Loan payable $84,000*

  - **Total liabilities** $150,990

**Net Assets**

- Without donor restrictions $177,732
- With donor restrictions $348,450

  - **Total Net Assets** $526,182

  - **Total Liabilities and Net Assets** $677,172

---

*SBA PPP loan forgiven as of Jan. 2021*
# Statement of Activities and Net Assets
For the Year Ended June 30, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT</th>
<th>Without Donor Restrictions</th>
<th>With Donor Restrictions</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>$ 855,525</td>
<td>$ 326,610</td>
<td>$1,182,135</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net assets released from restrictions</td>
<td>86,264</td>
<td>(86,264)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial revenue</td>
<td>64,326</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>64,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events, gross</td>
<td>50,125</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscription revenue</td>
<td>31,206</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other revenues</td>
<td>1,578</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,578</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Revenues and Other Support</strong></td>
<td>$1,089,024</td>
<td>240,346</td>
<td>$1,329,370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPENSES</th>
<th>Without Donor Restrictions</th>
<th>With Donor Restrictions</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Services</td>
<td>642,426</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>642,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and general</td>
<td>195,908</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>195,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>75,453</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>75,453</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Supporting Services</strong></td>
<td>271,361</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>271,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>913,787</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>913,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in Net Assets</td>
<td>175,327</td>
<td>240,346</td>
<td>415,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, beginning of year</td>
<td>2,495</td>
<td>108,104</td>
<td>110,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net assets, end of year</strong></td>
<td>$ 177,732</td>
<td>$ 348,450</td>
<td>$ 526,182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Staff

Tom Laskawy, Publisher & Executive Director
Samuel Fromartz, Editor-in-Chief
Dana Dugan, Audience Engagement Editor
Brent Cunningham, Executive Editor
George Black, Editor-at-Large
Chuck Abbott, Editor, Ag Insider
Elizabeth Royte, Contributing Editor
Leah Douglas, Associate Editor & Staff Writer
Deni Chamberlin, Director of Photography
Tess England, Development Coordinator

Board

Joanne Kelley, Board Chair
Nathaniel Brown, Treasurer
Samuel Fromartz, Secretary, Editor-in-chief
Aileen Burdick
Lorraine Fontanes
Dan Pullman
Susan West

Major Foundation Supporters:

The 11th Hour Project
Woodcock Foundation
The BAND Foundation
Walton Family Foundation
The McKnight Foundation
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Joyce and Irving Goldman Foundation
Broad Reach Fund
Cloud Mountain Foundation
Lumpkin Family Foundation
The Snider Foundation
Nell Newman Foundation
2020 FERN Revenue: $1.3M

- 63% Earned by Individuals
- 23% Earned by Foundations
- 14% Earned by Other Sources

FERN At-a-Glance

Staffing

- **Editorial**: 5 full-time/3 contractors
- **Support**: 2 full-time
- **80+ freelance reporters** engaged over nine years
- **69 partner news outlets** since 2011

FERN Expenses

- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019
- 2020