Meet FACT’s New Executive Director

By Harry Rhodes

I joined FACT as its new Executive Director on June 1st. I am honored and excited to be here. I have big shoes to fill following Richard Wood, and I look forward to continuing and growing upon his legacy.

Prior to joining FACT, I was a Co-Founder and Executive Director of Growing Home in Chicago, which grew into the leading organic urban farming organization in the city, producing over 30,000 lbs. of organic vegetables annually. At Growing Home we used organic farming in underserved communities to transform over 300 lives through a unique hands-on job training program.

Having worked closely with underserved communities throughout Chicago who do not have access to healthy food, I have come to believe that everyone has a right to healthy food. FACT’s mission is closely aligned with my core values, and I look forward to working with all of FACT’s terrific stakeholders to make that mission a reality.

As many of you know, FACT was founded in 1982 and has been under the leadership of Richard Wood since 1995. Under Rich’s direction, FACT helped to create a market for eggs from uncaged hens in the 1990’s. In 2002, FACT became a founding member of the Keep Antibiotics Working Coalition and has provided leadership ever since. More recently, Rich helped FACT to launch its Fund-a-Farmer Project which has cumulatively awarded 157 grants totaling over $355,000 to family farmers across 34 states, fencing and water systems are two essential components of a successful pasture-based system.

Fencing is needed to provide protection from predators as well as to keep the livestock where they need to be. Fencing also helps the farmers to manage how the land is used when they are “rotating” or moving the animals from fresh pastures throughout the season. Ensuring that clean, cool water available to animals grazing on distant pastures can present a significant challenge. The Smiths like to pipe water from natural springs that are fenced away from their livestock. This is done to provide the highest quality water for their animals and to protect the spring itself from the trampling damage of the cattle and sheep.

The FACT-funded project allowed the farmers to increase the available pasture for their sheep, cattle, and hens – making it possible for the animals to forage more land while providing protection from bobcats, coyotes and parasites.

It also decreased the costs associated with additional feeding. Less hay is now needed for the cattle and sheep and less grain is required for the hens because the animals are grazing and foraging on dense, nutritious plants. Eric and Cher report that the project is creating better soils and a more diverse plant community, which will ultimately result in healthier, more productive animals.

Bugtussle Farm, located in southern Kentucky near the Tennessee border, is a little slice of paradise. The 170-acre farm is surrounded by forests, creeks, and lush pastures. The rich pastureland is grazed by a herd of cattle, and flocks of sheep and chickens.

In 2018, farmers Eric and Cher Smith received a Fund-a-Farmer Grant from FACT to install electric fencing and a new water system on a remote part of their farm. Fencing and water systems are two essential components of a successful pasture-based system.

Larissa Kleven recently joined FACT as our Food Safety Program Assistant. She brings important scientific background to this team.

Our Humane Farming Program is directed by Larissa McKenna, who has been with FACT since 2006. Under Larissa’s leadership FACT supports farmers who wish to improve their treatment of farm animals. This is accomplished through annual grants and a wide array of educational opportunities. This program also provides much needed information for consumers who want to purchase humanely-raised meat, milk and eggs.

Charlotte Isles, our Staff Associate, rounds out our team, providing much needed administrative and communications support.

I am fortunate to have this terrific team to work with. I am looking toward the future I am excited to work with our Board of Directors and staff in developing a new Strategic Plan to look at new ideas and determine how we can expand our current programming to further accomplish our mission. We want to make sure that everyone has access to healthy food. As we move forward with this process, we will want your input. You have supported our work for many years, and we welcome your ideas.

FACT is a unique organization with a history of many accomplishments. I believe that it is needed today more than ever and am looking forward to the next decade of work creating a better, healthier food system for all. I would love to get to know each and every one of you. When you are in Chicago, please give me a call.

Harry Rhodes, Executive Director
The Nutritional Benefits of Pasture-Raised Food

Here at FACT, we are committed to helping livestock and poultry farmers raise their animals outdoors on well-managed pasture due to the numerous benefits associated with pasture-based animal production.

Animals living and cared for on pasture can move freely and engage in natural behaviors like rooting, socializing, running and jumping. They also experience lower stress, disease and lameness, as well as fewer reproductive problems. Pasture-based animal production can help to improve soil health and fertility, and mitigate climate change.

In addition to all of these incredible benefits, studies consistently show there are real nutritional advantages associated with pasture-raised meat, milk and eggs.

Across the board, food from animals raised on pasture has better fat quality and increased levels of important vitamins and nutrients, when compared to food from animals that were fed grains and raised in confinement. Here are a few selected findings:

**Better fat.** Studies show that pasture-raised food contains less saturated fat and more heart-healthy polyunsaturated fat. It also has a lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 polyunsaturated fats. This is true for beef, dairy, poultry, lamb, goat meat, pork & eggs.

**More vitamins and nutrients.** Pasture-raised beef, dairy, lamb, pork and eggs have been found to have higher levels of vitamin E than food from conventionally-raised animals. Vitamin E is an antioxidant and helps to protect cells from damage due to free radicals.

Meat from pastured sheep, goats, poultry and pigs has more protein. Protein is needed to build, maintain, and repair tissue. Eggs from pastured laying hens also have higher levels of vitamin D, which helps to protect against osteoporosis and heart disease.

FACT is in the process of developing detailed materials about the nutritional benefits associated with pasture-raised food. More information will be available soon!

The how and why. Feed plays a major role. Forages and grasses are good sources of beneficial omega-3 fats. In contrast, grains such as corn are dominated by inflammatory omega-6 fats. As the animals digest the pasture plants, the beneficial fat in the plants eventually makes its way into nutritious meat, milk and eggs for human consumption.

In addition, animals that live most or all of their lives outside on pasture exercise more than animals do in confinement. This factor likely contributes to muscle development and results in higher protein content. Living outdoors also exposes hens to natural sunlight, resulting in higher vitamin D3 content in their eggs.

It is clear that there are significant advantages to raising animals on pasture as nature intended - rather than in confinement with an unnatural diet.

Through our grants, scholarships, webinars, and mentorship program, FACT is helping farmers raise their animals on pasture. Our services improve animal welfare and the quality of the food the animals produce. We recognize that it takes a great deal of time, effort, and energy to care for animals humanely, and we feel that it is vital to invest in farmers who are doing it the right way.

Studies consistently show that pasture-raised animals produce nutritionally superior meat, milk and eggs.

At the grocery store

As described below, some of the terms you may find on packages are not 100% reliable or tightly regulated. Look for third party verified labels, or a local farm that uses humane practices but may not be certified due to the costs involved. Learn more at foodanimalconcerntrust.org/food-labels

Some common claims include:

- **Cage-free** means laying hens were not confined in cages. There is no legal definition of this term under the FDA, but the claim is verified if the egg carton has a USDA Grade shield. It does not mean that the hens had any access to the outdoors.

- **Free-range** implies that the animals were raised outdoors. However, under USDA labeling laws, this is not always the case as animals only have to be allowed access to outdoors with no provision for how much time or space must be allowed outside.

- **Grass-fed** implies that only grass was fed to the animal. However, USDA does not tightly define this term or require on-farm inspection to verify the claim. While many farms use the term with integrity, it is possible that “grass-fed” can be used to label conventional meat or dairy that was started on grass but finished on grain.

- **Grass-finished** implies that grass was fed in the final phase of production, and therefore the animals were on grass their entire lives. However, this label is not regulated by the USDA.

- **Pasture-raised** suggests pasture was included in the animal’s diet. However, there is no standard diet requirement or definition of pasture under this claim.

The piglets on Care Country Farm in Michigan are allowed to root and forage in the earth from a very young age. The farm received a grant from FACT in 2019 to purchase portable shelters and farrowing huts for their pigs on pasture.
Beef cattle are born to graze on vegetation and green plants. In fact, they are healthiest when they spend most of their time out on pasture eating grass. That is why FACT has provided over 30 grants to farmers who raise their cattle on pasture since 2012, including the Adirondack Beef Company in upstate New York (picture above).

On sustainable, humane farms beef calves are raised alongside their mothers. They are weaned when they are ready and slowly transition from suckling the mother cows to eating grass and other pasture plants. The young animals stay at the farm eating grass to gain weight. Cattle on farms like these remain healthy and rarely need antibiotics.

Sadly, most cattle in the U.S. are not raised this way. While beef calves often begin their lives on small farms where they eat grass, almost all calves are eventually shipped from their home farm to feedlots. Cattle on these practices, such as grain-based diets. They are moved from their home farms too soon after weaning. Feedlots can be huge operations, housing tens of thousands of animals at a time. Most keep the cattle in bare, uncovered pens with manure covered floors and no grass. These pens are fed diets high in grain from troughs.

The fundamental problem with the feedlot system is that cattle are not designed to eat grains such as corn; nor are they meant to live in crowded, unsanitary conditions. Due to these factors, disease runs rampant in these confined feeding operations – and ultimately results in heavy antibiotic use.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), nearly eight million pounds of medically important antibiotics were sold for use with beef cattle in 2016. This is higher than for any other livestock sector. As expected, feedlot cattle are routinely fed antibiotics to address problems created by the feedlot system. Over half of these animals receive antibiotics to prevent liver infections that are caused by feeding cattle high grain diets instead of grass. One quarter of all feedlot cattle are fed the essential human drug chlorotetracycline to control respiratory diseases. Respiratory diseases are common in cattle that are moved from their home farms too soon after weaning.

In addition to use in feed, 40 percent of the large feedlots also routinely inject whole pens of cattle with antibiotics when they arrive at the feedlot because they assume the stress of weaning, shipping and mixing with thousands of other animals has made them vulnerable to sickness. Then when some eventually do become ill, they receive additional antibiotic shots. This system of moving cattle from farms to feedlot is not just bad for cattle but also bad for humans. Using antibiotics in cattle helps spread antibiotic resistance superbugs and moves us closer to a time when routine bacterial infections can no longer be treated.

For this reason, FACT has joined with the Center for Food Safety, Consumer Reports, the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, and Natural Resources Defense Council to form the Antibiotics Off the Menu Coalition. The coalition first targeted McDonald’s as the world’s largest purchaser of beef. This paid off in December 2018 when McDonald’s committed to cutting back on antibiotic use in its beef supply.

Now we are calling on Wendy’s to do the same. In June 2019, FACT’s Food Safety Program Director Steve Roach (picture below) joined several coalition members at the Wendy’s headquarters in Columbus, Ohio for an event timed with the company’s annual meeting. The groups urged Wendy’s for reductions in antibiotic use by its beef suppliers.

We have seen incredible progress in the chicken industry as a result of our advocacy efforts. Now over 90 percent of chickens in the U.S. are only given medically important antibiotics to treat disease. We hope to see a similar change in cattle.

While 100% pasture raised is the ideal, it will be a long time before we get there. In the meantime, feedlots can reduce their antibiotic use by purchasing calves that have been kept on pasture longer and by limiting grain in diets. Small feedlots, probably because of greater access to hay, use fewer antibiotics to control respiratory disease and prevent liver infections.

Companies like Wendy’s and McDonald’s are essential to convincing cattle feedlots to change. FACT and the Antibiotics Off the Menu Coalition are here to see that they do their part.

Take action for safer beef!

FACT is urging Wendy’s to strengthen its purchasing policies when it comes to beef. We want the company to require its beef suppliers to cut back on the antibiotics they feed to their cattle. This will protect both people and cattle from the spread of antibiotic resistant superbugs; it will also help move the cattle industry away from unhealthy practices such as grain-based diets.

You can take action online at foodanimalconcernstrust.org/ action-center or send a letter to Wendy’s CEO using the sample language below. Be sure to personalize your message to include why this issue is important to you. Thank you for your efforts to improve the safety of our food system!

Sample letter:

Dear CEO Todd A. Penegor:

I am horrified by the spread of antibiotic resistant superbugs that threaten to reverse the medical advances of the 20th century and return us to a time when routine bacterial infections will kill. Farms and feedlots create and spread antibiotic resistant superbugs when they overuse and misuse antibiotics. These superbugs then cause difficult to treat infections in both humans and animals.

For this reason, I ask Wendy’s, as a major purchaser of beef and a company that markets its connection to beef producers, to make a commitment to establish a time-bounded, meaningful, and verifiable policy that phases out the routine use of all medically important antibiotics from its beef supply chains. Chicken raisers have responded to consumer and meat buyers like Wendy’s by eliminating routine use of antibiotics. It is now beyond time for cattle producers to do the same and we need Wendy’s help to move them along.

Send to:

Todd A. Penegor
Chief Executive Officer
The Wendy’s Company
1 Dave Thomas Blvd.
Dublin, OH 43017

We want the company to require its beef purchasing policies when it comes to beef. FACT is urging Wendy’s to strengthen its purchasing policies when it comes to beef.
FACT is pleased to share that we have the Gold Seal of Transparency from Guidestar, a nationally recognized charity watchdog. You can rest assured that FACT maintains a high level of accountability and transparency. Few nonprofits attain this high level of recognition.

Contact Us
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