Racial Justice and Strategic Planning

By Harry Rhodes

When I joined FACT just over a year ago I had no idea that I would spend most of 2020 working from home, responding to a terrible pandemic that has hurt humane farmers throughout the country, and confronting, yet again, systemic racism in our country.

Yet, here we are. So much has happened, and it’s only August.

I’m very proud of the way that FACT, both our staff and Board, has responded to these crises with positive action. Here are a few of the highlights:

Mini-grants for farmers: In April we established an emergency mini-grant fund to support humane farmers during this difficult period. We raised over $95,000 and distributed 202 mini-grants of up to $500 to farmers throughout the country. You can read more about our mini-grants on page four.

Connecting consumers to local food: We started a National Directory of Local Food Vendors to support family farms that deliver products or have curbside pick-up, and to provide an alternative for consumers to large national distributors or supermarket chains. Find vendors in your local area at foodanimalconcernstrust.org/vendor-list.

Commitment to racial equity: In June we were deeply struck by the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent outpouring of calls for justice and racial equity. After thoughtful deliberation, we issued a statement committing to diversify our leadership and expand outreach to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Specifically, we stated that:

- We must dedicate ourselves to reaching out and listening to BIPOC farmers throughout the country.
- We must address our lack of diverse leadership, starting with our Board of Directors.
- We must examine our programs and policies to identify how they can reflect and sustain broader societal inequities and take corrective steps.

You can read our full statement at foodanimalconcernstrust.org. This statement was just the first step. Now we must ask ourselves how we as an organization carry out that commitment.

I am optimistic that FACT will rise to the occasion. To guide us over the next three to five years, our Board of Directors recently decided to initiate a strategic planning process.

We will continue to uphold our mission to promote the safe and humane production of meat, milk and eggs, and to guarantee that all food-producing animals will be raised in a healthy and humane manner so that everyone will have access to safe and humanely-produced food. We will also consider:

What changes need to be made to this mission statement to increase the impact we are having on our food system?

What can we do to make this healthy food accessible to more people?

How can we reach out to people and communities that have not taken an active part in our work?

How do we make racial justice and inclusion a core value of our organization?

We will ask these and many other questions during the next five months. Our staff members and Board of Directors will work closely with Open Door Advisors, an experienced consulting firm based in Chicago, to develop this new plan.

We cannot develop a comprehensive plan without you. Your input will be crucial as we move ahead. We will reach out to friends, donors, partner organizations and diverse networks to get input as to who we are and where you think we should be going.

We are at an important junction in our country’s history. We at FACT will make our voice heard for justice. We will do our best to widen the impact of our work to improve our food system – and in doing so ensure that all animals are raised humanely and that all people have access to safe and healthy food.

Harry Rhodes, Executive Director
Meet FACT’s New Board Members

We’re pleased to welcome two new Board members who joined the FACT Board of Directors during the past year:

**Jill Shriver, Veterinarian**

**Mark Bearce, Business Owner**

**Jill Shriver, DVM. MLA. joined FACT’s Board of Directors in February 2020**

When I first started working as a veterinary meat inspector, I knew little about the food industry. What information I did possess was based solely on a reading of Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle—a portrayal both antiquated and negative. Thankfully, as I began interacting with meat producers, I recognized they didn’t fit into my preconceived notions, and knew I needed to grow my understanding of what it means to produce ethical meat. In pursuing this knowledge, I stumbled upon FACT’s website. Taking advantage of the educational webinars available, I came to depend on FACT as a valuable source of training material on organic and sustainable animal husbandry. As I began exploring the organization’s ongoing support for humane farming practices and their advocacy for health-centered food regulations, FACT also helped me develop both clarity and vision regarding ethical food production.

Even after I resigned from my food-safety position, I knew I wanted to stay committed to supporting humane meat and dairy producers. This commitment motivated me to join FACT’s Board of Directors in January 2020. Since leaving meat inspections, my professional interests have expanded to incorporate veterinary medicine and food-safety under the broader umbrella of environmental health, but I continue to work with livestock and poultry farmers, and I am thankful for this ongoing connection with our food-producing world. I am also grateful for the opportunity to support FACT’s hardworking staff, and through their efforts, the farming community at large. FACT’s mission has demonstrated enduring relevancy amidst tumultuous times, and I am glad to support the purposeful work of healthful, humane food production.

Stay safe and take care.

**Mark Bearce joined FACT’s Board of Directors in November 2019, nominated by Board member Kirsten Jurcek of Brattset Family Farm.**

“When the FACT Board decided to increase our directors and their animal welfare knowledge base, I thought Mark Bearce of Kettle Range Meat Company would bring a diverse skill set and perspective to our Board,” Kirsten said. Kirsten got to know Mark when she started supplying cattle to Kettle Range Meat’s Milwaukee butcher shops. They immediately became friends when they saw that their values and passion for farming aligned.

Kettle Range sources its grass and forage fed beef from a close network of local, family owned farmers who raise their animals without added antibiotics and hormones. They are closely involved throughout the process, selecting well-finished livestock on-farm and transporting it to local processing facilities where they can ensure humane and respectful handling.

Kettle Range is a “whole animal” meat company focused on making the best use of every part of the animal, adding value through traditional dry aging of select cuts and by making cured, smoked and other ready-to-eat products. They also sell their products directly to values-focused institutions like the University of Wisconsin Hospitals, and various Milwaukee restaurants.

“When Kirsten told me about FACT, I was very interested,” says Mark. “I appreciate their support programs for Wisconsin farmers and their leadership in the fight against antibiotics in the food chain. It’s exciting to be on the front line of these important issues!”
FACT launched an emergency mini-grant program to help independent livestock and poultry producers respond to the challenges they faced as a result of the crisis. Since April, FACT has awarded more than $95,000 in mini-grants to 202 farmers located across 40 states. The grants ranged in size from $180 to $500. Some examples of the projects we funded include:

- **Elodie Farms** in Rougemont, NC used its grant to purchase coolers and gel packs to ensure safe delivery of their goat cheese. As a result, they have been able to expand their delivery route and nourish more members of the local community.

- **Nettle Valley Farm** in Spring Grove, MN used its grant to invest in a new freezer for storing its pastured pork. The new appliance provides a reliable, abundant source of freezer space, and gives the farmers the flexibility it needs to better serve its customers.

- **Prairie’s Edge Farm** in Castalia, IA used its grant to redesign its online store. Before the pandemic, the farm had a lot of wholesale clients but, as restaurants reduced their purchases, they shifted to more direct sales to consumers. The upgraded online store has facilitated this transition.

- **Ten Fold Farm** in Bellingham, WA used its grant to install a walk-in cooler for its perishable food items such as eggs, meat and fresh produce. The new cooler helps to preserve the food, improving the longevity and quality to feed their neighbors and community members.

“The global coronavirus crisis has exposed the fragility of the industrial food system. It’s become crystal clear that family farms are an essential part of a more resilient food system,” said Larissa McKenna, FACT’s Humane Farming Program Director. “We value the hard work that small farms are doing to care for their animals and feed their local communities. FACT is pleased to support these farms by funding projects that help them adapt to shifting markets.”

While many of the funded projects are still underway, so far over 97% of the funded farmers report that the mini-grant has helped their farm business to address a challenge related to the COVID-19 pandemic. 93% report that their mini-grant has already helped the financial viability of their farm business.
In addition to the mini-grants, FACT organized and moderated a webinar in early April called “Strategies for Online Farm Stores” which featured four individual farmers who are successfully selling their projects online. 165 people attended the live session and hundreds of people have viewed the recording since then.

As the pandemic continues, we are monitoring the situation and will respond in additional ways to support those in need. You can learn more about our COVID-19 response at foodanimalconcernstrust.org/fact-covid19.

FACT’s Local Food Vendor Directory

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, FACT put together a ‘National Directory of Local Food Vendors with Online Shopping’ to help farmers connect directly with consumers.

The directory includes humane, family run farms and independent grocers and aggregators across the US that deliver products or have curbside pick-up. Farms that have received a Fund-a-Farmer Grant from FACT in the past are prominently featured throughout the directory.

Many consumers are now looking for alternatives to corporate online delivery companies or large supermarkets and want to buy their food directly from a farmer or good food vendor. This national directory is helpful to both consumers and farmers.

FACT volunteer Edward Silva transferred the directory into a convenient Google Map, making it easy to find vendors in your local area. You can view the directory and the map on our website at foodanimalconcernstrust.org/vendor-list.

If you have a farm, delivery company, local grocery or COOP that would like to be featured in the list or know someone that does, please let us know by emailing info@foodanimalconcerns.org or calling us at 773-525-4952.

Aerie Farm East in Maryland used its mini-grant to purchase a new freezer to store lamb and pork.

A mini-grant recipient in New York shared the following about her grant:

"Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we lost our major restaurant customer, to whom we sold dozens of eggs per week. We were lucky enough to find a new market as we began selling these eggs to local families who could no longer purchase affordably-priced, pasture-raised eggs in the grocery store due to shortages. We switched to a once per week delivery method to maximize social distancing but this required us to hold on to the eggs much longer. This was challenging with limited refrigeration.

With the mini-grant we purchased a small refrigerator, and we now have room to store the eggs between deliveries. Not only are the eggs kept at safe temperatures, but we’re able to extend our reach to customers who have also been directly impacted by COVID-19 (and in a safe way). We are incredibly grateful to have received this grant - it has been instrumental in keeping our business financially viable during the pandemic.”
There is a direct link between our treatment of farm animals and our personal health and wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly illustrated this interconnection. From packing plant workers sacrificed to maintain the flow of animals to slaughter, to antibiotic resistance and the emerging threat of another pandemic, human disease remains closely tied to animal care.

COVID-19 recently topped 18 million reported cases globally and continues to grow. In the U.S. about six months after the first reported case, (August 4) there have been almost 5 million cases and over 150,000 deaths.

COVID-19 is caused by a virus that likely originated in wild animals but then jumped to humans and now spreads easily from person to person. Previous pandemics were caused by viruses that first spread between animals on farms. The most well-known is the 1918 Spanish flu that probably originated from farm animals in the U.S. The Spanish flu led to 500 million illnesses and 50 million deaths worldwide. A more recent global flu pandemic was the 2009 H1N1 pandemic that spread among pigs before jumping to people. The virus from 2009 is still circulating and continues to make people sick to this day. Currently, a similar strain of potentially pandemic influenza is circulating in pigs in China, and we should be taking steps to make sure it does not jump to people.

In order to stop pandemics, public health authorities need access to farms

Since there are many more food animals than either people or wild birds and mammals, farms provide the perfect breeding grounds for new viruses. These viruses make both animals and people sick. After the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) set up a program to monitor flu in pigs and poultry. However, despite the incredible threat that viruses create for human and animal health, the programs are completely voluntary. This is part of a much larger problem - public health officials do not have the authority to investigate farms for pathogens (bad germs) that can spread to humans. To address this crucial issue, FACT supports the Expanded Food Safety Investigation Act. This federal legislation would give the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority to investigate farms as a source of germs that have caused foodborne outbreaks. If passed, the bill would improve the status quo but it still does not go far enough. FACT has called on the Senate Health Committee to give authority to investigate and control influenza and other pathogens on farms as part of any legislation tackling preparation for future pandemics.
these secondary infections. In 1918, antibiotics had not yet been developed for disease treatment so these infections were untreatable. The spread of antibiotic resistant superbugs, which is driven by antibiotic overuse, means that secondary infections are harder to treat. In some cases they are completely untreatable, like they were back in 1918. The spread of superbugs can also increase the number of people contracting secondary infections, since people taking antibiotics for another purpose are more susceptible to infections with superbugs. Secondary infections do not seem to be nearly as common in COVID-19 patients as in earlier pandemics, but patients are still regularly receiving antibiotics. This means even greater spread of superbugs.

FACT is working with our allies in the Keep Antibiotics Working coalition to call on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to track antibiotic use and secondary infections in COVID-19 patients, and to make clear that antibiotics should not be used routinely in these patients. FACT also continues to push for reducing the overuse of antibiotics on farms, since superbugs created on the farm do not stay there. They infect farm workers and spread to others through contaminated food and water. These superbugs then make people ill with difficult to treat disease, including secondary infections in patients ill from other diseases like COVID-19.

Big Meat Packers Putting Workers at Risk

According to the Food and Environment Reporting Network, as of August 5th, at least 53,646 meat packing workers have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 and at least 232 workers have died. Just four companies - Tyson, JBS, Smithfield, and Cargill - control 80 percent of the meat supply. These companies have failed to take the necessary steps to protect workers such as requiring social distancing and slowing line speeds. Instead, the Trump administration ordered the plants to remain open and states have passed legislation protecting the plants from liability for putting their workers at risk.

FACT has joined with the Heal Food Alliance, Food Chain Workers Alliance, and other worker advocacy organizations to call for greater protection of workers. Supporting workers’ advocacy efforts is part of FACT’s goal to better address racial equity since, in many cases, workers are people who face racial discrimination. As a society, we have given these huge companies way too much power and they have used it to great harm. The terrible treatment of workers is just one of the many ways they harm our communities and neglect public health. This begins with the farms supplying animals to the packers where crowding and unhealthy practices lead to routine antibiotic use and the consequent spread of antibiotic resistant superbugs. The manure from feedlots and farms pollutes our rivers and lakes. The packers knowingly ship meat and poultry contaminated with foodborne pathogens, including antibiotic resistant superbugs to grocers. FACT will continue to fight to address these harms and to find ways to limit the power of bad actors in the food system.

Watch Out for Misleading Labels

Food labels can be an important tool for consumers who are looking for products raised in a humane and healthy manner. FACT has long recommended that consumers seek out products certified as humane with labels such as “Animal Welfare Approved by A Greener World,” “Certified Humane,” and “Global Animal Partnership Animal Welfare Certified,” along with several others that are listed on our website at foodanimalconcerntrust.org/food-labels. We do not recommend welfare certifications that have weak animal welfare standards, including many industry-run programs. FACT also does not recommend most “raised without antibiotics” labels because they are not certified and do not require steps be taken to improve welfare.

We want to warn you to watch out for a new label called “One Health Certified” which can now be found on packages of chicken and turkey found in grocery stores. The company marketing this label is profiting off of the concept of One Health. One Health is an approach used by public health agencies like the USDA and the CDC to improve health by looking at the interactions between people, animals, and the environment. When FACT argues that how we treat animals impacts human health, we are truly taking a One Health approach.

We do not recommend the “One Health Certified” label because it falls short in actually requiring farms to take significant steps to address these three areas. In terms of the treatment of animals, “One Health Certified” does not guarantee high welfare. Participating farms must be certified, but not by one of the strong welfare certification programs that FACT that recommends. Regarding human health, “One Health Certified” addresses antibiotic use but allows preventative use of antibiotics in chick hatcheries and allows farms to use antibiotics in flock after flock. This is a weaker standard than the chicken industry average which limits antibiotics to disease treatment. Finally, the environment component of the “One Health Certified” label only requires the company to share some data with a university research group and to obey state and federal pollution laws. We continue to recommend that you look for the meaningful labels listed on our website and avoid “One Health Certified.”
FACT is pleased to share that we have the Platinum 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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SAVE THE DATE
for FACT’s first Cow Pie Fundraiser
Online at 6pm CT on Tuesday October 6th
Find out more at foodanimalconcernstrust.org