2013: What We’ll Do This Year

Message from Wenonah Hauter, Executive Director

With your support, we’ve helped communities fight fracking in states across the country, and demanded the right to know what is in our food. Both fracking and labeling of genetically engineered (GE) foods will continue to be on our agenda this year, and we’re fighting for what we want — not the best we can get. This means demanding fracking bans and insisting that consumers should decide, through mandatory labeling laws, whether they eat GE foods or not.

While we’ve made strides in protecting our essential resources, our work is never done. We hope you will renew your membership with Food & Water Watch in 2013. Together, we can put the oil and gas industry and Big Food on notice that we’re growing the movement to protect our essential resources.

UPDATE: National Campaign to Ban Fracking
By Mark Schlosberg, Organizing Director

The movement to ban fracking has grown exponentially over the past year, and recently, we joined with our allies to launch a new national coalition to ban fracking — Americans Against Fracking. The coalition was launched in December and includes over 190 organizations including CREDO Action, 350.org, Greenpeace, Democracy for America, Center for Biological Diversity and Breast Cancer Action, as well as leading state and local groups like Berks Gas Truth, Our Longmont, etc.

GE Salmon: Soon to Be on Your Plate, Unlabeled?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is poised to approve the first genetically engineered animal for human consumption. This lab creation is an Atlantic salmon with genes spliced from the Chinook salmon and an eel-like fish called the ocean pout. The result? The company claims that the fish grows faster than regular salmon, but many in the salmon industry say this is pure hype.

If approved, GE salmon could wreak havoc on wild salmon populations when they escape. And for consumers, the fish will likely be sold unlabeled, so you won’t have an opportunity to avoid GE salmon’s high growth hormone levels and other food safety concerns. Go to foodandwaterwatch.org for the latest on the saga of GE salmon approval, or to take action to try to stop GE salmon from reaching your plate.
Fighting the Foodopoly

Corinne Rosen, a Food & Water Watch organizer in New York, serves up corn syrup in test tubes at the Foodopoly book launch. At the event, staff and volunteer “waiters” engaged in performance art to depict the decaying diet of Americans and broken food system addressed in the book.

Where else would you be served spray cheese and crackers, candy antibiotics and shot glasses full of corn syrup? Why, the Beard House of course! But only for the book launch of Foodopoly: The Future of Food and Farming in America by our Executive Director, Wenonah Hauter. The odd fare was all in good fun to juxtapose the offerings of a highly consolidated food system with local and sustainable fare, which was also served. For more information on Foodopoly or to watch the book trailer, go to foodopoly.org.

Working with national, state and local allies, we achieved some significant victories in the last several months:

- Working with local allies, we passed a ballot measure in Longmont, Colorado, banning fracking in the city, despite industry’s half-million dollar campaign against it.
- We secured commitments by legislators in Illinois, Florida and Iowa to introduce legislation requiring labeling of genetically engineered foods.
- Take Back The Tap coordinators made significant progress, including at UNLV where the administration committed to a master plan to phase out bottled water, and Florida State University, where the Center for Leadership (which houses all student affairs) will no longer purchase bottled water.
- We successfully pressured SUNY Buffalo to close its pro-fracking Shale Resources and Society Institute.
- We helped communities pass 28 new local anti-fracking measures in states across the country, including Colorado, Illinois, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.
- We helped a community in Asheville, North Carolina, pass a ballot measure opposing water privatization.
- We worked to pass a measure in Santa Cruz requiring a public vote before building any desalination plant.

When will Wenonah be in your area to discuss Foodopoly?

See Foodopoly.org for full event information. Here are a few upcoming dates:

April 4: Red Bank, New Jersey
April 27: Albuquerque, New Mexico
May 1: Houston, Texas
May 6: Tallahassee, Florida
May 14: Bethesda, Maryland

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Frack Action and Illinois People’s Alliance.

The coalition launched with actions at movie theaters around Matt Damon’s movie Promised Land, where flyers were distributed to moviegoers outside theaters across the country. We also worked together on a national call-in day to President Obama urging him to reject fracking, which generated over 8,000 calls to the White House.

We are at a critical point in the fight against fracking. As of this writing, Governor Cuomo in New York is poised to make a decision on whether to move forward with fracking, and we are battling the oil and gas industry across the country from Colorado to Maryland, California to Ohio, New Jersey to Illinois. We are making progress and will continue to strengthen alliances, build coalitions and bring in new volunteers as we fight to protect our air, water and climate for our collective future.
We had such a great response to our survey at the beginning of 2012, we thought we would again use our newsletter as a way to poll our best supporters and ask your opinions about the different issues we focus on at Food & Water Watch. Just like the first survey, we were blown away by the number of responses — nearly 1,000 of you took the time to respond! And, more than 600 of you (!!!) made a gift at the same time. We are so grateful for your interest and support. You proved once again that our members are our most important resource in advocating for the changes we need to protect our food and water.

Now we want to report back to you about what we learned. We asked you if your primary concern was around local, state or national issues related to food and water. Based on how many of our members respond to our email action alerts and sign petitions directed at all three levels, we weren’t surprised to see that the number-one choice was all three (67%), with national issues in second place at 18%. It may sometimes feel that people care only about the things that happen in their backyards, but our members care about the world. When it comes to specific issues, it is clear that you care deeply (i.e., rating it as a 5 - Very Important Issue) about food safety (81%), food labeling so that you know what’s in your food (83%), stopping fracking (83%) and chemical contamination in our water (86%).

It’s also clear that many people don’t understand what we mean by “financialization of nature” (while 62% said it is very important, many people wrote in comments saying that they did not know exactly what we meant), so we need to provide you with more information on what we mean by the phrase and why we think it is so important.

Overall, we feel like the survey told us that you think we are on the right path in terms of the issues we focus on: of the 13 specific issues we listed, from stopping factory farming to ensuring safe seafood, each one of them was rated 4 to 5 by at least 70% of our respondents.

Your opinions are very important to us — after all, without your support we cannot do this vital work. So, thanks again for your incredible response. We will continue to ASK for your input about Food & Water Watch and our work — and hope that you will continue to TELL us what you think. We’re always listening.
Let Me Decide:
GE Labeling Campaign Nationwide

Last year, Food & Water Watch worked hard to support California’s Prop 37 calling for the labeling of genetically engineered foods — contributing money to the Right to Know campaign committee, producing star-studded ads for Internet and television, and driving people to phone banks, among other things. While we were disappointed by the measure’s defeat, we are not deterred and have redoubled our efforts this year, working in support of mandatory labeling across the country.

We are currently active in over 15 states, working with state and local partners on labeling efforts. In Illinois, for example, we are working with allies across the state, including the Chicago Food Policy Council and Illinois Stewardship Alliance, on a bill authored by Senator David Koehler, Chairman of the Agriculture & Conservation Committee. We are also active in Connecticut, New Jersey, Florida, Iowa, Colorado and California, where we are working with a newly formed coalition.

This year all eyes will be on Washington State, where Label It WA has qualified I-522, a labeling measure, for the ballot in November. We are working closely with our partners to help pass this measure, and have sent field organizers to help with the campaign during the first few months of the year.