

# EWG'S 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



ewg



# CONTENTS

## NOTE FROM KEN

## FINANCES

## BIG WINS

- Chemical policy
- PFAS
- Glyphosate

## RESEARCH, REPORTS AND ACTION

- Science Investigations: The backbone
- Healthy Living Science: The people's source
- EWG VERIFIED: The market force
- Agriculture and Conservation: Our roots
- Government Affairs: Boots on the ground
- Communications: Our voice

## VIDEOS



## NOTE FROM KEN

One of the most important and heartening lessons of the past several difficult years has been seeing the positive impact of EWG's scientific leadership, even in circumstances where facts and science about crucial matters of public health are deliberately ignored by government leaders whose loyalty lies with polluters, big food and chemical companies, and other vested economic interests.

We saw over and over that EWG's research- and science-based human health standards for food, tap water, and personal care products were critical to national conversations about environmental health. Our guidance – to lawmakers and industry leaders alike – became more sought-after and respected than ever.

Today we see an increased need for this leadership, as the country's collective health is crushed under the many impacts of the pandemic, but fresh opportunities are emerging under a new administration in Washington that will be infinitely more receptive to the facts and science with which EWG drives public awareness and policy change.

That is why, now more than ever, EWG must stay the course to maintain its scientific expertise and leadership in the environmental health movement.

Thank you for joining us in that fight.

– Ken Cook



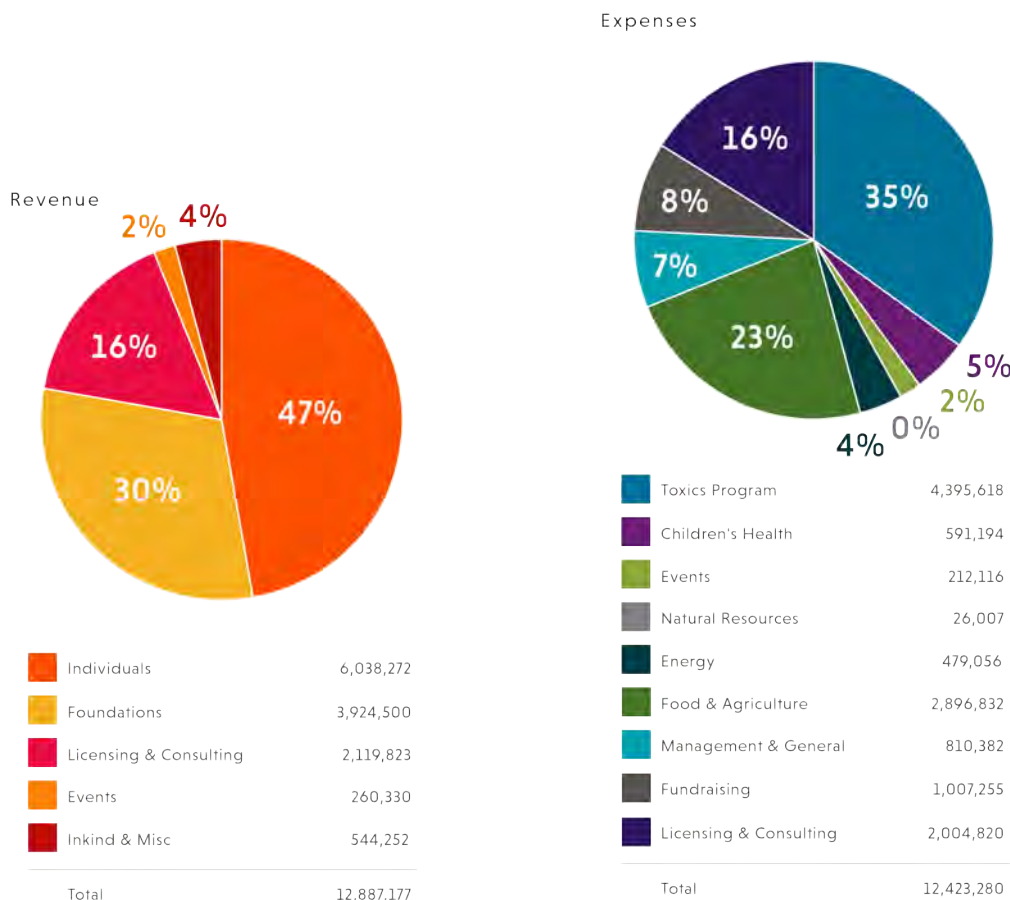
# FINANCES

EWG provides one of the best returns on your philanthropic dollar, to shape policy conversations on public health, lead entire business sectors away from priority chemicals and reach consumers through the megaphone of our social media and appearances in mainstream media.

And we achieve this impact on an annual budget that is one-tenth the size of other environmental nonprofits with the major national reach of EWG.

There are many reasons we can do this. The most important is the reputation we've earned as a scientific leader on the topic of environmental exposure. This leadership has turned our top issues – like tackling the “forever chemicals” known as PFAS in our water – into national, mainstream priorities.

And our sound, scientific leadership is ensuring that action taken by manufacturers and policymakers has enough teeth to protect public health effectively, the way consumers expect, so that someday when environmental standards are legal they will also equal safe.



## BIG WINS

The year 2020 will forever be synonymous with tragedy, loss and chaos.

Through this difficult time, we kept our focus on our mission, knowing that the environmental problems we face are more enduring than either a pandemic or political upheaval.

And we saw wins for the environmental health movement. Most notably, new regulations on three groups of priority chemicals that EWG worked toward for decades:

- A California ban on the 24 most toxic cosmetics ingredients, written to EWG's science-backed specifications.
- A death blow to the use of glyphosate pre-harvest, as manufacturers blocked the purchase of oat crops sprayed with the chemical.
- Movement among some states, national policymakers and the Environmental Protection Agency toward the regulation and remediation of PFAS.

These wins illustrate EWG's skill at pulling different levers as opportunities arise – in the media, in Congress, in markets and with consumer pressure – to great success.

Not all levers are always available or effective. But when we work strategically to identify where interest or pressure is reaching a tipping point, we can effect change that otherwise appears impossible.



## CHEMICAL POLICY

In a major victory for the safer cosmetics movement, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law the Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act, in October 2020.

This is the nation's first state-level ban of toxic ingredients in personal care products, including the toxic fluorinated chemicals known as PFAS, mercury and formaldehyde, as well as endocrine-disrupting phthalates and long-chain parabens, preservatives used in skincare products.

This ban was the brainchild of EWG's California lobbying team. Achieving this win took two years of effort on several fronts – working with legislators, the national cosmetics trade association and the Personal Care Products Council. Because of this comprehensive strategy, the bill got virtually unanimous support in both houses. What's more, it was not achieved by watering down the bill to please everyone and serve no one – the law is strong and sets a national benchmark for the industry.



But getting anything banned from any product is a heavy lift, even in California.

Legislators typically don't want to weigh in on issues of chemicals and contaminants, preferring instead to leave the science to the experts in California's Green Chemistry program. But in this instance, EWG had an ace in the hole: our science program, backed by more than 20 years of health-based research on personal care product ingredients.

Our scientific leadership – made possible by your long-term funding – is what took this bill from idea to execution. Your funding is what made 2020 the year when ingredients known to cause damage to our health were finally outlawed from use in personal care products and cosmetics.

And as we've seen in so many other cases – from California's regulation of car emissions to Proposition 65 labeling – manufacturers are likely to sell their new, safer formulations across the country, in effect extending the ban to all 50 states. This is a huge win for science and for consumers.



## PFAS

In the fall of 2019, we focused our PFAS research on contamination in drinking water. This decision paid off many times over, pushing action and engagement from stakeholders across the country.

EWG's work was amplified through an invitation from Participant Media to help launch and promote their new movie, "Dark Waters."

The film stars Mark Ruffalo as Rob Bilott, the lawyer who famously fought DuPont on behalf of the citizens of Parkersburg, W.V., after it was discovered the company had polluted the town's water supply with PFOA, the carcinogenic chemical used to make Teflon.

We knew previous PFAS tests from an EPA-mandated program had failed to address the full scope of PFAS contamination across the country, because the EPA required tests for only six PFAS chemicals, and the test methods were not sufficiently sensitive. EWG stepped in to fill this data gap with a national water testing campaign.

Our report, published in January 2020, analyzed water collected from 44 utilities and found PFAS levels above EWG's health benchmark in 40 samples.

Following the release of the test results, EWG scientists published three peer-reviewed papers highlighting the carcinogenic characteristics of PFAS chemicals, the challenges and questions involving PFAS disposal, and the management of PFAS as a chemical class.

Because EWG collected and published timely information about PFAS contamination in tap water in communities large and small across the country, all local media outlets whose water utility was included in the study picked up the story with their own community-specific focus.

We saw clearly that people in many locations, in all demographics, want to know what's in their water. It's a universally important environmental story. To date, PFAS contamination has been confirmed in the groundwater or tap water of more than 2,200 communities, including 328 military installations.

The laboratory test results were also a revelation in Congress and sparked an outcry from people who would never have previously considered themselves environmentalists, including conservative legislators.



We also enlisted the participation of military service members and firefighters to highlight the risks of PFAS pollution. They are disproportionately harmed by the health effects of PFAS, because of its use in firefighting foam. Veterans and firefighters came out to support our efforts to bring awareness to the issue, even testifying along with EWG in congressional hearings.

Their support has accelerated these reform efforts significantly.

The risks of PFAS have long been understood by regulators and scientists, but media coverage of our map of sites of known or suspected PFAS contamination has dramatically accelerated efforts to reduce and remediate PFAS pollution.

As more people have learned they are drinking PFAS-contaminated water, more state and federal legislators have chosen to act. This includes efforts to ban the use of PFAS in firefighting foam and food packaging, and expanded efforts by lawmakers to restrict PFAS discharges into water supplies.



## GLYPHOSATE

Since we published our first report on laboratory tests of glyphosate residues on Cheerios and other oat-based cereals, in 2018, our goal has been to eliminate exposure to the chemical through food. We chose this objective because exposure through food is largely preventable – it typically results when glyphosate, the active ingredient in the pesticide Roundup, is sprayed on grain crops just before they are mowed, to dry the grain and make it easier to harvest.

In the past two years, EWG has published several follow-up studies of glyphosate





residues on food products, primarily oat cereals and snacks like granola bars. This year, with your support, we conducted a study of glyphosate residues on legumes, including chickpeas and hummus.

As with PFAS, consumers, the media and lawmakers all sit up and pay attention when test results of food contamination are published, because the numbers don't lie. But under the Trump administration, the EPA has doubled down on its support of the probable carcinogen and the Bayer-Monsanto corporation. So instead of presenting our findings and arguing our case in front of Congress, we took it to the court of public opinion: food consumers.

Our 2019 petition to stop the use of glyphosate on oats drew 40,000 signatures, an upswell the market couldn't ignore. In early 2020, Kellogg's was the first company to announce its commitment to stop using oats grown with glyphosate.



As we kept the consumer heat on Quaker Oats and General Mills to do the same, major oat buyers in Canada, where most leading U.S. food manufacturers source their oats, announced they would no longer accept oats sprayed with glyphosate pre-harvest.

This is a huge win and, again, unprecedented. Now it appears that, in the wake of the pressure we have exerted, the market may solve the problem itself.

## RESEARCH, REPORTS AND ACTION

EWG's programs, from investigations to communications, work in harmony to achieve our goals. Our research, data analysis and consumer tools are put into action to bring about change in policy, consumer demand and market behavior.

These elements – research and action – are what make EWG such a powerful force in the environmental movement, with such an outsize return on investment.

Science Investigations: The backbone

The Science Investigations program is the backbone of our work, generating the peer-reviewed research that guides all other elements of our standard-setting and leadership.



## MAJOR REPORTS

- **PFAS Contamination of Tap Water Far More Prevalent Than Previously Reported – January 2020**

New laboratory tests commissioned by EWG found PFAS in the drinking water of dozens of U.S. cities, including major metropolitan areas. The results confirm that the number of Americans exposed to PFAS from contaminated tap water has been dramatically underestimated by previous studies, both from the EPA and from EWG's own research.

- **Mapping the PFAS Contamination Crisis – July 2020**

This update of our interactive map documented PFAS pollution in public and private water systems. The extent of American communities' confirmed PFAS contamination continues to grow at an alarming rate. As of July 2020, 2,230 locations in 49 states were known to be contaminated with PFAS.



- **EWG Tests of Hummus Find High Levels of Glyphosate Weedkiller – July 2020**

In this latest food testing project, we found glyphosate, the notorious weedkiller linked to cancer, in more than 80 percent of non-organic hummus and chickpeas samples, and detected at far lower levels in several organic versions.

- **Food Additives State of the Science – September 2020**

A new EWG guide brought attention to food additives, commonly found in many processed foods, that can increase the risk of cancer, harm the nervous system, change the body's hormonal balance and affect the immune system.



## PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH

- Application of the Food Quality Protection Act Children's Health Safety Factor in the U.S. EPA Pesticide Risk Assessments – Environmental Health, February 2020
- Analysis of Cumulative Cancer Risk Associated with Disinfection Byproducts in United States Drinking Water – International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, March 2020
- Application of the Key Characteristics of Carcinogens to Per and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances – International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, March 2020
- Scientific Basis for Managing PFAS as a Chemical Class – Environmental Science and Technology Letters, June 2020
- Current PFAS Disposal Practices Can Cause Environmental Contamination – Chemosphere, July 2020
- Population-Wide Exposure to Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances from Drinking Water in the United States – Environmental Science and Technology Letters, October 2020
- Asbestos Contamination in Talc-Based Cosmetics: An Invisible Cancer Risk – Environmental Health Insights, November 2020

## HEALTHY LIVING SCIENCE: THE PEOPLE'S SOURCE

EWG's Healthy Living Science program is charged with one of the most integral and long-standing parts of our mission: educating consumers.

EWG's databases and guides

We make continuous updates and additions to the databases and resources our audiences rely on to make informed decisions, year after year. These include:

- EWG's annual Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce™ and Guide to Sunscreens, two of our most popular website releases.
- EWG's searchable consumer databases: Skin Deep®, Tap Water Database, Guide to Healthy Cleaning and Food Scores. Consumers rely on these databases to provide safety and toxicity information. And because our datasets are often the



most comprehensive source of information in the country, so do manufacturers, researchers, policymakers and governmental agency scientists.

- EWG's Healthy Living app, which gives consumers access to safety scores for food, personal care products and cleaning products with the simple scan of a barcode in the store.
- The safety standards and restrictions used by the EWG VERIFIED program, providing science-based guidance for manufacturers and assurance for consumers that a product meets EWG's standards for safety.
- The second annual EWG CleanCon™ conference featured speakers and interviews with leaders advancing the clean-living movement, deeper information for consumers and opportunities to engage with and ask questions of EWG's scientists.



- ✓ Avoids EWG's ingredients of concern
- ✓ Full transparency
- ✓ Good manufacturing practices

## EWG VERIFIED: THE MARKET FORCE

Over the past several years, EWG has turned its expertise in personal care products and chemical safety into two market-changing juggernauts: the EWG VERIFIED and Reviewed for Science programs.

Now we are successfully pushing huge numbers of manufacturers in the personal care product, baby care and household cleaning industries to eliminate chemicals of concern in their products and reformulate them to EWG's strict safety standards.

One of the most exciting outcomes of 2020 was EWG's visible role as a leader in the clean-living movement and de facto regulator of the personal care product industry. This is entirely thanks to the growth of the EWG VERIFIED and Reviewed for Science programs our supporters helped us build.

As projected, we ramped up these programs significantly in 2020. At the close of the year there were more than 1,600 products bearing the EWG VERIFIED mark, including 140 baby products. We also saw the first household cleaning products join the program and created standards for EWG VERIFIED diapers.



The Reviewed for Science program was created as an offshoot of the EWG VERIFIED program, in response to major personal care product manufacturers seeking our expertise in creating products. It now includes six major U.S. manufacturers seeking to create safer, cleaner products with EWG's guidance. They include Procter & Gamble, Revlon, Olay and three others under nondisclosure agreements.

We now expect to see the EWG VERIFIED mark on many major brands' products across the U.S. within the next five years.

## AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION: OUR ROOTS

Since EWG's inception in 1993, our Agriculture Program has worked to conserve agricultural land and water. Today we use advanced geospatial mapping of satellite imagery and data analysis of farm subsidy payments and USDA conservation programs to affect local and national policy decisions on agriculture.



## PRIORITY TAP WATER CONTAMINANTS

As part of our broader, organization-wide effort to protect America's tap water from health-harming contaminants, in 2020 our agriculture program focused its research and reporting on two pollutants that result from agricultural runoff: nitrate and cyanotoxins.

- **Across Farm Country, Nitrate Pollution of Drinking Water for More Than 20 Million Americans Is Getting Worse – June 2020**

This water quality trend report found that in much of America's farm country, nitrate contamination of drinking water poses a serious health risk. The problem is largely caused by polluted runoff from crop fields, and it is getting worse. Using water quality data from 10 states, we found that nitrate contamination in water from 2,100 utilities with the most serious problems has grown steadily worse. These community



water systems serve almost 21 million people across vast stretches of the Midwest, Southwest, Atlantic Coast and California.

- **EWG Investigation: In California's Majority-Latino Communities, 5.25 Million Drink Tap Water With Nitrate Above Federal Limit – October 2020**

In California's majority-Latino communities, 5.25 million people drink tap water contaminated with nitrate at levels at or above the federal limit, according to our analysis of state and federal data. Nitrate contamination is widespread in California's drinking water supply, but EWG's analysis found that as nitrate levels rise, the likelihood that a community is majority-Latino also goes up – especially in the eight-county San Joaquin Valley, the nation's leading agricultural region.

- **Study: Nitrate in Wisconsin's Drinking Water Linked to Cancer, Preterm Births and Up to \$74 Million in Yearly Healthcare Costs – December 2020**

Nitrate contamination of drinking water in Wisconsin may cause nearly 30 cases a year of colorectal and other cancers and increase the risk of very premature births, very low birth weight and birth defects.

## **ALGAE OUTBREAKS**

Beginning in January 2020, we researched and published three pieces to keep attention focused on toxic algae before the summer outbreak season:

- Toxic Algae Blooms Now a Year-Round Problem – January 2020
- New Study Raises Concern About Airborne Exposure to Toxic Algae Blooms – February 2020
- Mississippi River Flood Management Could Cause Another Devastating Gulf Coast Toxic Algae Bloom This Year – March 2020

In the spring, as algae outbreak season began, we started regular reporting and analysis of outbreaks, tracking news stories and using social media to draw attention to toxic algae across the country. Some of these releases included:

- Mississippi River Flood Management Could Cause Another Devastating Gulf Coast Toxic Algae Bloom This Year – April 2020
- Escaping Quarantine? Watch Out for Toxic Algae – June 2020
- Beware Toxic Algae Over the Fourth of July – July 2020
- Lakes with Algae Outbreaks May Also Be Tainted with E. Coli – July 2020



- Dog Days of Summer: Pet Deaths from Toxic Algae Blooms Already Mounting – July 2020
- The High Cost of Algae Blooms in U.S. Waters – August 2020
- Toxic Beaches: Hundreds of Closures and Health Warnings in 2020 – September 2020
- As Algae Season Ends, the Toll: More Than 400 Outbreaks in 2020 – October 2020



## INDUSTRIAL ANIMAL AGRICULTURE

In 2020 we doubled down on our work to reveal the threat presented by billions of pounds of phosphorus-laden manure – in terms of algae outbreaks and contaminated drinking water – and to press for more effective oversight of animal feeding operations.

- **EWG Investigation: Manure Overload Threatens Water in Minnesota’s Farm Country – May 2020**

Using innovative geospatial techniques, EWG mapped the likely application of 49 million tons of manure – produced each year by the state’s cattle, hogs, turkeys and chickens – to cropland as fertilizer. This is frequently on the same acreage where commercial fertilizer is also used. We found that manure from Minnesota’s 23,000 animal feedlots threatens to overload nearby cropland with chemicals that can pollute lakes, streams and aquifers, including drinking water sources.

- **Exposing Fields of Filth: Factory Farms Disproportionately Threaten Black, Latino and Native American North Carolinians – July 2020**

The predominantly Black, Native American and Latino residents of three eastern North Carolina counties now live with 30 million more chickens and turkeys than they did eight years ago, according to our investigation, conducted with Waterkeeper Alliance. This



report and map show that, from 2012 to 2019, the estimated number of chickens and turkeys swelled from 83 million to 113 million, a 36 percent increase. This is more than twice the rate of growth in the state's other 97 counties.

- **Industrial Animal Agriculture Poses Serious Threats to Human Health – September 2020**

As the reckless and explosive growth of animal feeding operations continues across the U.S., the number of Americans potentially at risk continues to rise too. This report details the serious health threats associated with living near animal feeding operations – whether swine, cattle or poultry.

## **GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS: BOOTS ON THE GROUND**

EWG's Government Affairs programs are our boots on the ground, turning the recommendations and standards defined by our research staff into actionable information for policymakers and federal agencies.

## **PRIORITY CHEMICALS CAMPAIGNS**

- **PFAS**

In 2020, EWG emerged as the scientific leader on per- and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals, and these "forever chemicals" finally got attention on Capitol Hill.

Throughout the year, we kept pressure on Congress to make PFAS regulation a priority with an organization-wide research and communications campaign. We made updates to our PFAS mapping project and tested the tap water of major U.S. cities for a broad spectrum of PFAS chemicals, which we published in collaboration with Participant Media and its release of "Dark Waters."

- **Glyphosate**

We also leveraged consumer interest in glyphosate to capitalize on two opportunities: national legislation banning late-use harvesting and direct market pressure on major manufacturers like General Mills, owner of Cheerios, to discontinue the use of oats harvested with glyphosate. We knew from our direct relationships with manufacturers about cracks in their resolve to continue using grains harvested with late-use glyphosate.

We saw the first domino fall in early 2020, when Kellogg's stepped in as the first company to announce its commitment to stop using oats grown with glyphosate.





As we kept the consumer heat on Quaker Oats and General Mills to do the same, major oat buyers in Canada, the source of most major U.S. food manufacturers' oats, announced they would no longer accept oats sprayed with glyphosate pre-harvest. This removed one of the biggest sources of this toxic chemical in our food supply.

## COMMUNICATIONS: OUR VOICE

EWG's Communications program is key to our success in reaching consumers, bending the ear of policymakers, and influencing manufacturers to change their practices and formulations.

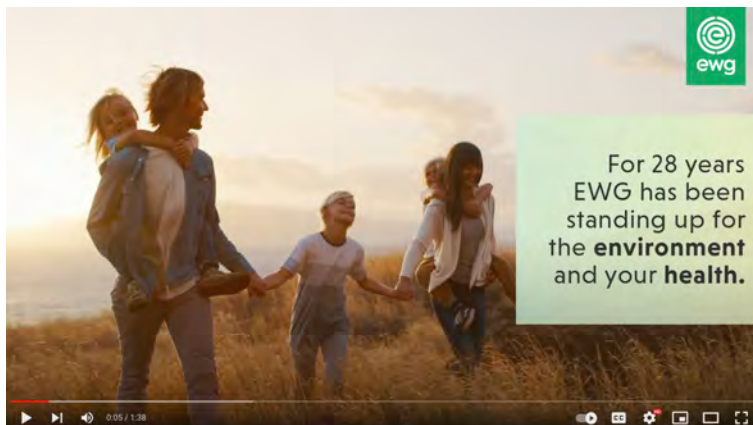
It was the overwhelming media coverage of our "Breakfast with a Dose of Roundup" report that finally pushed major oat buyers and manufacturers to discontinue the use of oats sprayed with glyphosate – not the Food and Drug Administration or the EPA stepping in to regulate the pesticide's use on food.

It was media coverage of our PFAS in tap water report that made policymakers – in Congress and state governments nationwide – suddenly clamor to take action against the chemical, not the overwhelming scientific evidence and cries from the scientific community mounting over the past 20 years.

With your support, we will continue this successful strategy, harnessing consumer and media engagement to create an urgent, unified voice for change at key moments.

## VIDEOS

### OUR IMPACT: 2020



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLc1T4K4QOE>

