Annual Report
October 2020 - September 2021
How non-profit, non-partisan journalism meets the moment.

When I look back on 2021, I can’t help but reflect on where the nation was at the end of 2020, when a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic was instilling an atmosphere of fear and helplessness, seizing up economic activity, and aggravating the political polarization of the country, pushing all of us further and further away from each other and from common ground.

At the same time, a racial upheaval around social equity—however fractious—was transforming our country for the better. So much impetus to innovate and reform, while at the same time so much yearning to return uncritically to the seeming stability of familiar norms.

The heroes here have of course been the scientists, who have kept us from the pandemic's worst consequences. But also indispensable—amidst all the persistent uncertainty—has been credible journalism, doing its best to find the evidence underlying what we were all going through, tell its story, and validate what can be justifiably inferred from it.

That is what we at The Counter will continue to do, to help you and your communities both make better personal decisions and have a keener sense of where the nation’s best path ahead lies.

We are also looking to expand our readership into communities whose informational needs are underserved. We have made real strides in amplifying stories from the lives of Black farmers, and are part of a collaborative of non-profit newsrooms committed to covering issues affecting rural Americans. More plans are in the works for community-level audience engagement, and seeking staff members who are part of those communities.

It is for you the reader that we put in the hours, follow the story, and challenge the status quo. We don’t put our content behind a paywall, because it is too important that it be disseminated as widely as possible. For those of you who can afford to do so, your help has been a significant factor in helping us to continue doing this work. Thanks for challenging us and affirming what we do. To our entire team, it makes all the difference to know we have your support.

2022: So much more to learn, to understand, and to share with you.

Yours,

Jeffrey Kittay
Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Here I am, new document open; ready to tally in prose the sum total of our 2021. And all I can think is: You already know what happened. If I were advising a reporter on how to tackle this lede, I’d say, don’t bother trying to find a new way to write “global crisis,” everybody knows where we’ve been.

As I write, we are in the new year and the kingdom outside my window is hinting at spring’s reliable return. But while the Ides are still days ahead on my calendar, they appear to have arrived early for too many of our fellow human beings, and the suffering of conflict has begun anew.

How will we write about food?

At The Counter, we believe that every story is in some way a food story. So, we will continue to connect the dots for you between what’s happening in the world and the smaller, more intimate encounters we have with food every day. Those connections are everywhere, if you know where to look.

It’s been our job since 2015 to point you in the right direction. But we’re also eager for change. We’re writing for a new world now, with different ideas and keener instincts, and we’re also citizens of the world; working and striving in it, making hard choices, and learning as we go.

This year, you’re likely to see some evidence of our evolution in the stories you find at The Counter. We’ll be thinking as much about how we get information to new readers—and what their needs are—as we will about what that information should look like, sound like, and include. One thing you can be sure of: there’s a place for you in that conversation.

As the world continues to sort itself out and re-prioritize, we’ll be here to help you make sense of the role that food plays in every part of the process.

We’re in this together, dear reader.

Kate Cox

Editor-in-chief
Staff Features

Jeffrey Kittay  
Founder and publisher

Kate Cox  
Editor

Joe Fassler  
Deputy editor

Jesse Hirsch  
Managing editor

Mike Dang  
Senior editor, enterprise and strategic initiatives

Dr. Cynthia Greenlee  
Senior editor

Karen Stabiner  
West Coast editor

Patrick Clinton  
Contributing editor

H. Claire Brown  
Senior staff writer

Tina Vasquez  
Senior staff writer

Jessica Fu  
Staff writer

Talia Moore  
Senior producer

Tricia Vuong  
Senior producer

Safiya Charles  
Reporting fellow, future of farming

Matthew Sedacca  
Reporting fellow, Covid-19 recovery

Jessica Terrell  
Reporting fellow, Vision: Nourished Schools

Not pictured:

Sofia Sokolove  
Audience engagement editor

Patricia Escarcega  
Reporting fellow, Covid-19 recovery

Mike Speziale  
Chief revenue officer

Alex Hinton  
Production assistant

Nate Pazik  
Chief of operations and development

Erika Scelfo  
Development coordinator
Our 10 most-read stories in 2021 include pieces that uncover different ways our food system obscures inequities, profit-mongering, and criminal enterprises. And as the pandemic continued to shine a light on the plight of workers everywhere, stories that gave voice to the people who produce, make, serve, and deliver our food resonated most with readers.

1. **Lab-grown meat is supposed to be inevitable. The science tells a different story.**
   By Joe Fassler | September 2021

2. **I make gluten-free snacks. It took a Black man dying for people to try my crackers.**
   By Jovani Prince + Shirah Dedman | January 2021

3. **Slimy, smuggled, and worth top dollar: Can one Maine entrepreneur break into the crime-ridden global market for eel?**
   By Karen Pinchin | March 2021

4. **In North Carolina, poultry works are quitting in large numbers after an unknown chemical was introduced at their plant**
   By Tina Vasquez | October 2021

5. **Freedom food: Incarcerated no more, Michael Thompson finds joy in meals**
   By Tana Ganeva | February 2021
6. I opened a wine store in NYC, right before the pandemic started. My entire business has been defined by Covid
   By Tewelde Debessay + Jesse Hirsch | March 2021

7. Restaurant workers across North Carolina say there's no labor shortage. It's a ‘wage shortage’.
   By Tina Vasquez | July 2021

8. How corporations buy-and sell-food made with prison labor
   By H. Claire Brown | May 2021

9. Delivery Apps like Grubhub and DoorDash charge restaurants huge commission fees. Are delivery co-ops the solution?
   By Vivienne Machi | June 2021

10. Regenerative agriculture needs a reckoning
    By Joe Fassler | May 2021
Audience and Reach

Over 80 percent of our readers have a higher education degree. More than half of them hold advanced degrees, including 10 percent who hold doctorates.*

*According to a 2021 audience survey

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517,777 annual pageviews*
359,162 pageviews per month on average
31,000 Email subscribers
678 Members

25,800 Twitter followers
20,000 Facebook likes
8,400 Instagram followers

*Pulled from Google analytics + Apple News

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Reading a story from The Counter has led me to:

- Think about a food issue differently: 85%
- Feel more informed: 96%
- Feel more connected to food producers: 64%
- Change my eating or purchasing habits: 43%
- Share information with a friend, colleague, or family member: 87%
- Engage with my community in a new way: 35%
- Contact an elected official: 19%

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**Future of Farming**

The Counter's Future of Farming project, a reporting fellowship we launched in 2021 with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, will continue to explore the roles that racism and injustice have played in shaping the U.S. agriculture system. We’re talking to a new generation of leaders who are seeding food sovereignty for the future, and we will continue to chronicle the politics of redress for Black farmers.

**Vision: Nourished Schools**

The Counter's Vision: Nourished Schools reporting project launched in 2021 with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. It will chronicle in a 2022 podcast the evolution of school food reform—from coronavirus crisis to the politics of universal meals. We expect to launch in November.

**Coming Up**

In March, West Coast editor Karen Stabiner will dive deep into the reasons why aid may not be what America's restaurant sector really needs now.

Future of Farming reporter Safiya Charles examines the state of mental health for Black farmers.

Contributing writer Lela Nargi goes all in on the real barriers to converting commodity farmland into regenerative agriculture enterprises.

We'll run a micro-series on the infant formula industrial complex. This reporting will uncover the unseen system of purchasing by the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, which buys about half the formula sold in the U.S.—and the impact is has on the formula market and on families.

This summer, our editing team will launch a crowd-sourced reporting project that looks at the psychology of wallet boycotts and the complicated calculus of protesting with your dollars.
During the 2020 fiscal year, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 to constitute a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern.” Disruptions to the The Counter’s operations have occurred as a result of quarantines and pivot to remote working of all organizational staff, restrictions on in-person events, and significant impacts on in-person reporting, across the United States. Additionally, donors, members and other constituents have continued to be impacted by the pandemic. Through PPP loans, continued major donor support for operation funding and significant grant revenue, the Organization was able to continue to meet its charitable purposes without any disruption. No adjustments or provisions were made in the financial statements related to Covid-19.

After incorporating as a nonprofit, we built a fundraising strategy focused on growing revenue through four key initiatives: foundations, board support, major gifts and reader donations. We have invested significant resources and time in our fundraising strategies in 2021 including new hires. Fundraising increased 187% over the past fiscal year.

- **Board Support**: Primary funding comes from our Board of Directors, which provides annual operating support throughout the course of the year. One of our Directors provided primary operating funds through a multi-year pledge and our members of the Board continue to support our operation in several aspects throughout the year.
- **Major gifts/foundations**: We continue to build relationships with foundations in both the media and food/agriculture spaces. In fiscal 2021, we are funded by: The Chicago Community Foundation, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation, The Marcus Foundation, The Greater Kansas City Foundation, The Fund for Nonprofit News at The Miami Foundation, and The Emma Bowen Foundation.
**Reader support:** Our community of readers supports The Counter with gifts of various sizes, and we’ve placed a special emphasis on developing relationships with readers who make recurring donation commitments. In this aspect of our fundraising, we continue work with News Revenue Hub, which provides a user-friendly donor dashboard and runs the annual NewsMatch fundraising campaign, during which funds are matched dollar for dollar by Foundation commitments.

Looking forward to 2022, we are planning to expand our fundraising with foundations and to develop a major gift program that focuses on internal and external donors who will support the general operations of the organization. We believe that through further development in our fundraising team, we will be able to move forward with a further strengthened philanthropic program that will sustain 25 percent of the general operating budget by 2024 and help us focus on long-term sustainability past our Board of Directors primary funding.

**Functional Expense**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Services</th>
<th>Management and General</th>
<th>Fundraising</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries and wages</td>
<td>$1,114,225</td>
<td>$438,063</td>
<td>$92,047</td>
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<tr>
<td>Payroll taxes and other employee benefits</td>
<td>108,754</td>
<td>42,755</td>
<td>8,984</td>
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<tr>
<td>Editorial expenses</td>
<td>147,107</td>
<td>10,988</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office and administration</td>
<td>39,885</td>
<td>37,293</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional fees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>86,839</td>
<td>31,463</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupancy and utilities</td>
<td>25,722</td>
<td>10,112</td>
<td>2,125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>57,582</td>
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<td>Depreciation and amortization</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other expenses</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>17,340</td>
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<tr>
<td>Registration fees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,371</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,121</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total functional expenses</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,494,005</strong></td>
<td><strong>$697,417</strong></td>
<td><strong>$139,368</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continuing our role as good stewards of donor funds, we have made significant cost savings while investing in our editorial team. In 2021, we prioritized and continue to maximize efficiencies in operational costs—specifically overhead—by becoming a fully remote newsroom, which eliminated the enormous cost of maintaining office space in New York City. We have also contracted qualified third parties for our accounting, human resources, insurance services, benefit packages, and technology support through a bidding process overseen by our Board. While we maintained minimal costs in operating expenses, we invested heavily in our editorial leadership, bringing on two new senior editors, hiring an experienced editor focused on audience development and offered four year long fellowships to talented reporters through significant funding from two major foundations.

While we continue to strive for capacity on both sides of our organization, the attached statement of functional expense demonstrates that our development and operational costs are on par—and often come in under—those of our peer organizations in similar lifecycles, while our operating budget focuses more significantly on the editorial growth.

As we move into 2022, it is our strong goal to further build capacity on the editorial side and to strengthen the organization with strategic hires that are focused on our long-term sustainability for our reporting.
Our Approach to Post-Pandemic Reporting

We continue to delve into the workings of the agriculture and food industries, as well as the perceptions around people who grow, pick, process, and sell our food.

This past year, the pandemic and call for social justice reform on our streets has been a catalyst for furthering our investigative work and re-enforcing our core organizational strengths and beliefs in providing a just and more equitable food system. When we started the year, our newsroom had a packed calendar of events, meetings and editorial travel to all parts of the country. By March, our team was fully remote and we were strategizing our focus to the critical impact that Covid-19 was having throughout the food system.

A true testament of the quality of our news can be found in the award-winning journalism we put out throughout the pandemic. With respect to the pandemic, we launched our Eating In Series and The Shutdown Notebook. The former covered the pandemic’s daily effect on our individual interactions with food, the latter was a weekly account of one restaurateur’s struggle to keep his restaurants open throughout.
In 2020, Philanthropist and Director, S. Donald Sussman provided a long-term multi-million dollar pledge to the organization.

**Foundations**

Greater Kansas Community Foundation  
Local Media Foundation  
The Chicago Community Foundation  
The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation  
The Emma Bowen Foundation  
The Fund for Nonprofit News at The Miami Foundation  
The Marcus Foundation  
Tim and Gwen Wurst Family Foundation  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

**Individual Giving**

$25,000 and Below  
Jeffrey Kittay  
Gregory Muth  
Douglas Phillips  
Bonnie Porta  
Margot Fassler  
Andrea Folds  
William Marcus  
Ann Okerson  
Ian Petrie  
Elizabeth Prince  
Kim Richman  
Harley Seligman  
S. Spodek  
Allison Thomas  
Tammera Wells  
Lisa Bernard  
Vivek Bhagwat  
Charlotte Biltekoff  
Gary Borer  
Haven Bourque  
Jamie Bowers  
Teresa Briggs  
Susan Brison  
Joan Brucha  
Louisa Burwood-Taylor  
Marc Bushell  
Rhonda Caldewey  
Mike Callicrate  
Pat Castaldo  
Stephen Cerny  
Elizabeth Chandler  
Naeemah Chike  
Anastasia Christman  
Janet I Clark  
Daniel Colarusso  
Jeff Cole  
Allison Connell  
Anne Conness  
Ensign Cowell  
Jack Cox  
Megan Cronin  
Kristi Crookham  
Joan Daly  
Cathy Davies  
Nicola Deasy  
Sarah Ditton  
Mary Dooley  
Amy Draut  
Steven Dunn  
Kathleen Eckler  
Kevin Edmonds  
Robert Eiser  
Helen Elkins  
Fred Epstein  
Rob Eshman  
Christopher Fagnant  
Anthony Fagnant  
Lynn Fantom  
Julie Finkel  
Susan Fix  
Jason Flatt  
Jon Fogarty  
Mark Gale  
Lorraine Garkovich  
Patricia Garrett  
Theodore Gioia  
Andrew Gold  
George Goldstein  
Robert Gonzalez  
Sarah Graddy  
Jan Greenberg  
Lin Griffith  
Audrey Groce

$1,000 and Below  
Ann Brown  
Margot Kelley  
Marc Kramer  
Corby Kummer  
Joan Powell  
Gretchen Wetzel  
Sarah Neider  
Elizabeth Adams-Smith  
Sohrab Andaz  
Evan Anderman  
Molly Anderson  
Paul Appelbaum  
Alison Arnett  
Sharon Badian  
Samantha Baiz  
Solomon Barnett  
Wendy Bazil  
Michael Beall  
Joan Beeson  
Mitra Behroozi  
Carlos Bernal  
$100 - $249  
Sarah Neider  
Elizabeth Adams-Smith  
Sohrab Andaz  
Evan Anderman  
Molly Anderson  
Paul Appelbaum  
Alison Arnett  
Sharon Badian  
Samantha Baiz  
Solomon Barnett  
Wendy Bazil  
Michael Beall  
Joan Beeson  
Mitra Behroozi  
Carlos Bernal  
$500 - $999  
Corinna Baban  
Myron Beasley  
Caroline Culver  
Karen Karp  
Jerold Mande  
Stacy Molander  
Marcie Rothman  
$250 - $499  
Amy Brown  
Sarah Bruning  
$250 - $499  
Amy Brown  
Sarah Bruning