

Hidden secrets in food and water – 10 tips

By Nils Mulvad, nilsmulvad@kaasogmulvad.dk

1. Lack of investigations

Everywhere media has cutbacks in good investigative journalism in important topics have a hard time, but according to my experience it's even worse in environment. There's a big white area with uncovered and untold stories.

2. Global pattern

Many of the stories done in this area stick to a national focus – or the media send their own journalists out to other countries to do investigations there. Lifting the national stories to an international level, cooperating with colleges in other countries will give a fast push forward to the spread of a story.

3. Strong companies

Monsanto is an example of a strong worldwide company in the business of chemicals and seeds. You also on other area see very strong global or international companies. You see farmers from Denmark buying up land in a big scale to do farming in other countries. Many of these companies are run after global strategies, but also implemented in different ways regionally.

4. Strong organizations

The Farmers organizations are really well structured in Europe. They have enormous amount of money to conduct scientific investigations and to interfere in the whole scientific world. They are very strong on the political level. Very often their messages are spread uncritical by the Medias. One example of that is the amount of the Danish export from farming. The Farmers organization repeatedly doubles the figures to spread the idea of a more important area. And the media just report in uncritically.

Also NGO's in this area are strong and international. They also try to spread the focus on specific areas and suppress other important stories. Often they also lack proper research into this world.

5. Extreme subsidies

It's hard to understand how much money is used here. In EU the farm subsidy count for around 60 bio. Euro every year – close to half the budget of the whole EU. On top of that there are several other subsidies to this area. On a varying quality we have got the subsidies, www.farmsubsidy.org and also www.fishsubsidy.org. But we need really to get this on the next level, focusing on the stories and not only lists of payments. And we need to investigate the pattern between subsidies and centralization in the farming industry, and how this harm farmers in the Third World. And many more good stories.

6. Start local and spread

All these stories nearly always has a local starting point. Do the investigation and try to use these result to lift it up. Is it the same in the rest of the country/EU/World? Or what kind of impact does it have

other places? Be open for that, but don't do it all yourself. Publish your material in English, written for the global audience and for other journalists to continue the work.

7. Spread in social and mobile media

Make your material for smartphone-presentation. Make a Youtube-channel with good short documentation of your story. Integrate the Youtube-channel with other social media and your website. Especially Youtube give us important possibilities. We saw that with a story on GMO – published by Investigative Reporting Denmark.

8. Access to data

There's a specific UN-convention on Access to environmental data, called the Aarhus-convention. It's implemented in many countries, in EU as a directive on access to environmental data, which then again is decided as national laws. We now see a new Danish law, which will try to make it much more difficult to get this information. We then need to fight again for a long time to get the data according to the international regulation and not the Danish law.

Authorities try to avoid following these good regulations on access to in environmental data, but you can get them after long fight. We did that with farm subsidies, fertilizers, pesticides, antibiotics in pig industry, dangerous production, new measurements of ground level heights for the whole country. Etc.

9. Check the data

In many cases these data has been filled with errors and in the end we decided not to publish just all the data, but used as a step stone to describe pattern and identifying the top polluters/recipients or whatever.

10. Bringing the stories to life

This is such a great area. Many people feel really concern about environment, food and water quality and there's a huge lack of proper investigation, good told stories and spreading this in social media.

We want stories on dangers from food and water, animal welfare, diversity, climate change, uncovering companies spreading wrong numbers, reporting on the effect of the industry lobbyists results for keeping the world unsafe.

Remember to share and work together.