



# HHRA

Heartland Health  
Research Alliance

## Annual Report 2023



Platinum  
Transparency  
2023

Candid.

[www.hh-ra.org](http://www.hh-ra.org)

## About the HHRA

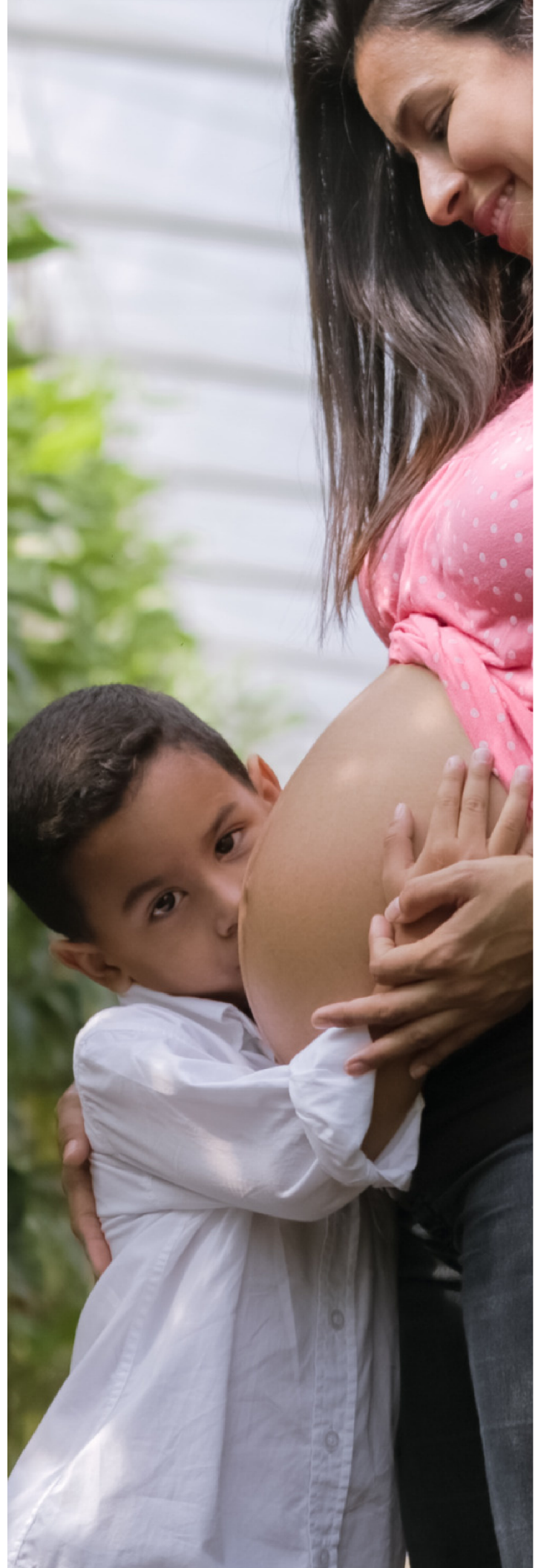
The HHRA is a 501c3 nonprofit focused on managing and funding the Heartland Study, a large-scale, long-term public health research project started by the scientists and clinicians who designed and are conducting it. Its primary goal is to determine whether the substantial increase in use of herbicides since around 2015 in the Midwest is causing an increase in the frequency or severity of adverse birth outcomes.

The word “alliance” is central to what HHRA is about. Our success depends on our ability to live up to the core meaning of the word.


## Vision and mission

We envision a new future rooted in flourishing farms where agriculture is managed, first and foremost, to cultivate health. Our mission is to inform the decisions that shape agriculture by advancing research on the health effects of food and farming.

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## HHRA Highlights 2023


 The leadership of the HHRA changed, as HHRA's founder, Chuck Benbrook, stepped away in April, and HHRA's CFO, Phil Hartnett, served as interim executive director until the new executive director, [Russell King](#), started in August.


King brings more than 20 years of experience in nonprofit leadership and consulting to the HHRA. That experience includes leading: a foundation that funded scientific research into tree health; a mental health clinic; a nurses' association; and a medical society, where he was editor of a peer-reviewed medical journal and two volumes of medical law for physicians.

Serving as both executive director and development director, King's focus in his first year will be on expanding the HHRA's revenue base while helping the HHRA transition from an emerging to a stable and growing organization.

 The HHRA commissioned the development of a breakthrough method that enables the simultaneous determination of 13 pesticides. This important development is documented in the peer-reviewed journal [Chemosphere](#).

 The HHRA earned its first [Platinum Seal for Transparency](#), an achievement earned by fewer than one percent of US-based nonprofits. The Candid Platinum Seal is the highest level of recognition offered by Candid (formerly known as GuideStar) and is awarded to organizations that meet the highest standards of transparency and accountability.

 The HHRA submitted comments on the California Department of Pesticide Regulation's released report, Sustainable Pest Management: A Roadmap for California. The comments focused on assuring the recommendations in the "Roadmap" will constructively and cost-effectively support its goals, and shared thoughts on essential considerations not addressed in the "Roadmap." The full comments are [here](#).

 The HHRA contributed data, via its Dietary Risk Index, and partial funding in support of important research and its publication.

- Genotoxicity Assays Published since 2016 Shed New Light on the Oncogenic Potential of Glyphosate-Based Herbicides. [agrochemicals](#)
- Missing the mark -- new methods needed to detect and address high-risk pesticide residues in the global food supply in [Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology](#).

## The Heartland Study Takes Great Strides Forward

The HHRA's flagship project, the Heartland Study, is making powerful strides forward toward answering critical questions about the potential effects of herbicides on mother and infant health and development. In 2023, the study took great strides forward:

- the study's methods paper was published in the peer-reviewed journal [Chemosphere](#);
- the University of Iowa Hospital joined the study;
- the University of Iowa Hospital began enrolling mother-baby pairs;
- more total number of mother-baby pairs enrolled reached more than 900 (more than double the number at the end of 2022); and
- the study's findings on dicamba levels in pregnant women in Indiana were presented at the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry's meeting (later published in the peer-reviewed journal [agrochemicals](#)).



In Phase 1, more than 900 mother-infant pairs in Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin have enrolled in the study toward our goal of 2,000. Preparation for Phase 2--in which we analyze urine samples to track herbicide levels in moms and babies, and document women's health during pregnancy and the health and development of their babies--has begun.

### HHRA Launches ORG-Tracker

The HHRA began, in 2023, the process of designing, building, vetting, and testing ORG-Tracker to support researchers seeking to understand better the effects of organic farming systems on pesticide residues and dietary risk levels and to provide data and analytical insights as the National Organic Program, certifiers, food companies, and farmers work to more effectively prevent synthetic pesticides from entering organic food supply chains, and especially those residues posing greater than negligible risks. ORG-Tracker will also help the organic community identify sources of domestic and imported organic food containing residues out of compliance with NOP rules or posing possibly worrisome risks. The HHRA has contracted with Benbrook Consulting Services to manage ORG-Tracker.

## A year of changes

Last year saw great change at the HHRA, and such moments can be worrisome to supporters. Understanding nonprofit life stages and their perils can alleviate those concerns, as well enable us to make good decisions for the future.

The growth cycle of nonprofits has been compared to the life cycle of humans starting with infancy when a nonprofit is born; to a toddler with the combination of growth and weak infrastructure; adolescence as the time of conflict between those who want uncontrolled growth and those who want to plan and manage growth; maturity when volunteers and staff are working smoothly together for real impact; and lastly, aging, a period of decline and ultimately death of the nonprofit unless there is a focus on reinvention and renewal. The stages can overlap, and each brings its own existential threats.

In 2023, the HHRA saw the departure of its inspirational founder, Chuck Benbrook—with our gratitude and admiration—in April, and my arrival in August. The transition saw other changes, as well, in board membership, projects beyond the Heartland Study, and the consultants working with us. The HHRA took the prudent steps of cutting costs and focusing almost exclusively on the Heartland Study.

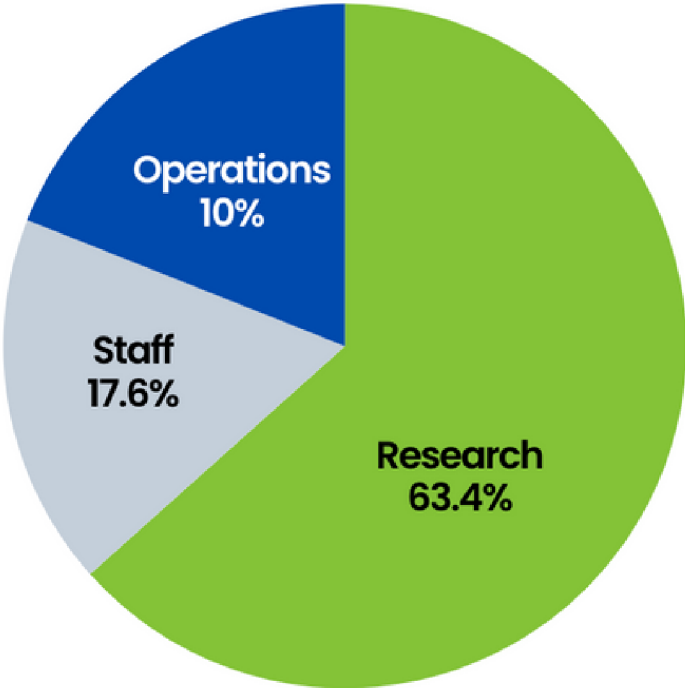


The Heartland Study, as you can see on page 4 of this report, made great progress in 2023, adding a site, more than doubling the number of enrolled mother-baby pairs, and publishing important papers.

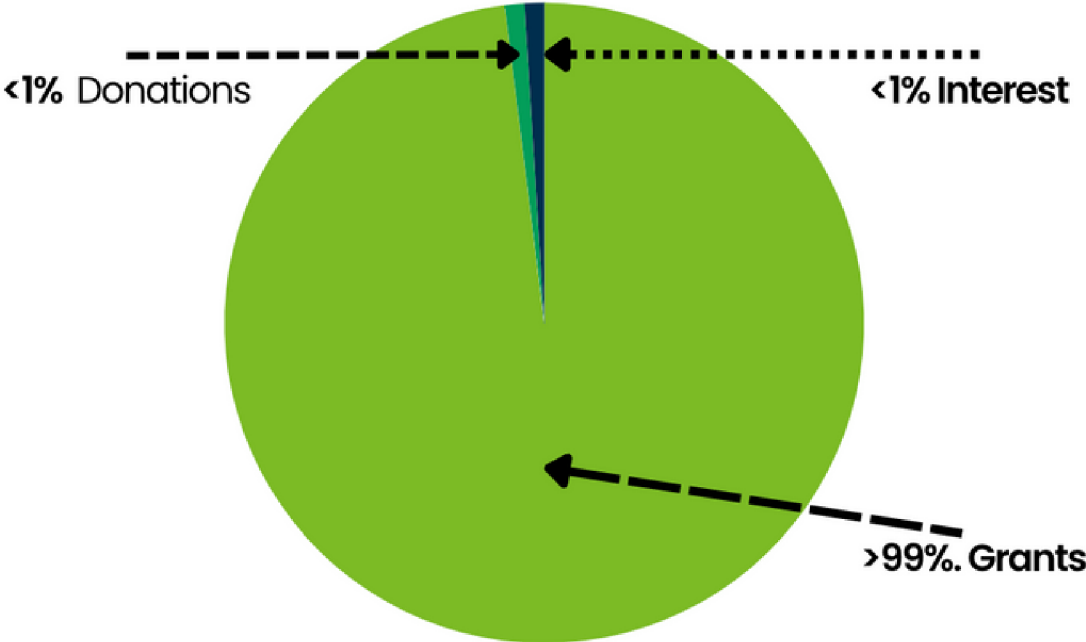
My priority over the past few months, beyond learning as much as possible about the HHRA, has been—and remains—preparing for our next stage. We are building capacity to achieve our mission through protecting and enhancing the HHRA's reputation for credibility; establishing infrastructure for financial development; prudent programming; hiring and supporting staff; and maintaining overall leadership and management for the organization.

The journey ahead is akin to hiking through a pathless wood. I am, however, undaunted, hopeful, and even inspired both because we pursue a worthy goal and because we are making the trek together. Your support deepens the meaning and intrinsic rewards of this work. Thank you.

# Expenses



# Funding



## Call to Action for Healthier Mothers and Children

Every day, in America's heartland, families are exposed to herbicides in their air, water, and food, and the use of herbicides in agricultural food production has dramatically increased over the past decade. What that might do to their health is a vital question that receives far too little attention. At HHRA, we're dedicated to finding answers. We are advancing and enhancing scientific research in food safety and maternal and child health.

You can be part of the effort! With your support, we can fund innovative research to protect the health of future generations and empower consumers with the information they need to make choices for themselves.

Here is how you can help:

1. donate to the HHRA;
2. subscribe to our free newsletter;
3. follow the HHRA on social media and share our posts;
4. help us identify new sources of grant funding for our research.

Your contributions and assistance will affect lives, helping to identify and prevent potential herbicide-related illnesses, enhance nutritional standards, and promote overall mother and child well-being.

Together, we can create a world where every child has access to safe, nutritious food and the opportunity to thrive. Together, we can work for a worthy cause that may leave a legacy far beyond what we imagine.

Together, we can make a difference.

Learn more at [www.hh-ra.org](http://www.hh-ra.org). Reach us at [info@hh-ra.org](mailto:info@hh-ra.org).

### HHRA Institutional Partners

- Indiana University School of Medicine
- University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine
- Gundersen Health System
- Heartland Study Data Coordinating and Analysis Center
- Indiana Biobank
- *Centre de toxicologie du Québec*
- First Class Solutions
- Boston College
- Ramazzini Institute

### HHRA Board of Directors 2023

Tom Green, *chair*  
Robin Greenwald, JD, *vice chair*  
Audrey Tran Lam, MPH, *secretary*  
Jose Cordero, MD  
Jeanne Conroy, MD  
David Haas, MD, *ex officio*  
Phil Landrigan, MD, *ex officio*

### HHRA Staff 2023

Russell King, MBA, *executive director*  
Paul Hartnett, *chief financial officer*  
Grace Koch, *communications & projects*