

## Case 15

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is a non-profit organization that began in 1980 and became first a national, then an international, voice for animal rights. Over its history, PETA has taken on a number of issues such as the cruel treatment of animals in factory farms, in research labs, and in circuses. Its activities have included undercover reporting, protests, advertising campaigns, and litigation.

PETA has scored a number of successes. Undercover investigation by PETA of a laboratory in Silver Springs, Maryland, led to the first U.S. police raid on an animal treatment facility. A protest campaign against McDonald's led McDonald's in 2000 to become the first major U.S. corporation to impose, on all their suppliers, minimum standards in the treatment of chickens.

While the ultimate goal of the organization is the liberation of all animals from suffering caused by humans, PETA does not itself engage in the more extreme forms of activism that characterize other groups, such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Instead, PETA aims at improving the living conditions for animals and reducing the demand for animal products. This approach has sometimes led to the criticism from more radical animal rights groups that PETA is not so much about animal rights as about animal welfare.

The founder and guiding force behind PETA, Ingrid Newkirk, has long used aggressive, attention-grabbing campaigns to bring the organization's message to the public. It would seem that nothing is too tasteless or offensive for PETA, as long as people talk. Some of its noteworthy campaigns have involved linking the treatment of animals with the Holocaust, with slavery, and with certain infamous serial killers. PETA volunteers have disrupted fashion shows, dragged themselves through the streets in leg-hold traps, and have dumped money soaked in fake blood on audiences at fur fairs. Their tactics became so notorious that in 1997 the *Onion* ran a satirical article, "Heroic PETA Commandos Kill 49, Save Rabbit."

Another technique PETA has used to attract attention is sex. To protest the running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain, it sponsored a "Running of the Nudes" two days before. To protest the wearing of fur, they featured attractive models (both male and female) in the campaign, "I'd Rather Go Nude Than Wear Fur." To promote vegan diets, they sent out "Lettuce Ladies," dressed in bikinis made of strategically placed lettuce leaves. It announced plans to host a soft porn website, [www.peta.xxx](http://www.peta.xxx).

Some of these tactics have drawn criticism from various women's groups for objectifying women. In an interview by Michael Specter, published in the *New Yorker* April 14, 2003, Newkirk commented on Pamela Anderson's appearance as a Lettuce Lady: "Who could ask for anyone better than Pam? People drool when they look at her. Why wouldn't we use that? We need all the drooling we can get."