

Farmer Labor

Solidarity Tractorcade

Madison - 3/12/11

Remarks by Tony Schultz

My name is Tony Schultz and I'm a third generation family farmer. Born and raised on a 50 cow dairy in Athens, Wisconsin. My Partner Kat Becker and I now run the family farm as a 150 member CSA with Maple syrup, beefers, pigs and chickens. I came back to the family farm after college because of my values; values that I believe to be the true values of this state. The Red Barn on our license plate symbolize values of family farms which to me are essentially the values of the labor movement. Family farms like unions value the dignity of having some control over your life and your work; to feel empowered by your work not alienated by it. Family Farmers like unions value the means to afford a beautiful and constructive setting to raise a family. Family Farms like unions value economic democracy. What is a union anyway, but working people coming together to improve their lives, and that is what we are here to do today, to come together with labor to express these values and take our state forward together.

Solidarity between farmers and workers is an old and sacred alliance of producers that dates back to the Populist Movement and beyond when farmers and workers got together to fight for things such as a progressive income tax, a financial system that served the people, and the formation of unions and the eight hour day. It was over 120 years ago the famous Georgia populist Tom Watson stated words that could not be truer and have brought us together today: "The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up the fortunes for a few unprecedented in human history." The great Minnesota Populist Ignatius Donnelly proclaimed: "The interests of rural and urban labor are



the same. Their enemies are identical." For more than 100 years we've been fighting together. We've been on the picket line, sitting in, dumping milk, on strike, blocking traffic, fighting and dying together! We fought our way out of one guilded age and we'll do it again!

And yet there are those who tell us this isn't a farmers' issue. Those whose petty resentment is amplified by right-wing radio until a skewed moral analysis has them thinking a fireman's pension is the root of the problem. And while I won't give up on my neighbors, there are those who explicitly represent this evil, such as the Dairy Business Association who claim the legacy of Wisconsin's farming heritage while pursuing policies that drive the family farm into extinction. They were here on Wednesday at "Ag day at the capitol" saying hooray for Walker's budget. Let me draw back the curtain and tell you those aren't farmers. They're agribusiness corporations with a few factory farmers in front and I want Wisconsin and the world to know that this is the real Ag day at the Capitol and this is a farmer's issue.

It's a farmer issue because rural schools are the centers of our small communities and they are being decimated by this budget. In our farm town of Athens 14 of 44 staff are losing their jobs. This is bad for our children's education. It is bad for the stability of our town, puts the very future of our school district in jeop-

ardly, and we say no!! It's a farmer's issue because Badgercare is being hacked. More than 11,000 family farm members depend on this program because of the exclusivity of for profit health insurance and the volatile and pathetic price we receive for milk and other corporate controlled commodities. We depend on this program and we support Badgercare!

It's a farmer's issue because family farmers have been battling corporate power for more than a century as it's concentrated markets, leveraging a price below the cost of production, and directed federal and state policies to say "get big or get out." Walker's budget and union busting bill could not be a clearer give away to corporate power and to that we say no!! In the age old struggle between the haves and the have-nots we know what side we're on.

It's a farmer's issue because public sector workers are our friends, and neighbors, and family members and We stand in solidarity with them !!

It a farmer's issue because we understand we are all in this together. We go up together or we go down together. We have two choices, unions can be busted and I can be pit against my neighbor in a desperate and unequal and dominated economy, or we can come together to say this is what our families need, this is what our communities need, this is what a living wage looks like and this is what a democracy looks like!

Making a Statement with our Tractors

By: Joel Greeno FFD vice president, and dairy farmer near Kendall, WI



Madison, Wisconsin is truly an amazing scene of beauty — as well as unprecedented political mobilization. Among the throngs of demonstrators, you'll find Democrats, Republicans, independents, progressives, libertarians, and socialists walking together, discussing real solutions while sowing the seeds of solidarity.

I've traveled from France to Malawi to stand with peasants, farmers, and farm workers, but leading the March 12 tractorcade to Madison was one of the most inspiring things I've ever done. Riding to Madison's Capitol Square required a daylong commitment from the 51 farmers on their tractors of every size, color, and make — along with a few manure spreaders, a fire truck, and a self-propelled combine for effect.

I don't know when I've ever felt as welcome as the moment when our tractors drove through the crowd of 100,000-plus people waving caps and flags, yelling, "Thanks for being here, farmers!" The energy and spirit of camaraderie were overwhelming. This wasn't just about standing up for collective bargaining rights — it also proved that public and private sector workers will stand together to build a

sustainable community. Governor Scott Walker's attack on workers' rights will harm rural schools, communities, and churches. Rural communities, like my town of Kendall, Wisconsin, are the true source of this country's wealth. The fate of these communities is tied intricately to the fate of workers everywhere.

Wisconsin is a dairy state — one in five Wisconsinites is employed by the dairy industry — whether that's on a farm, in a cheese factory, at a farm equipment dealership, or driving a milk truck. Today, 80 percent of our dairy farmers sell their milk through cooperatives, which use collective bargaining to establish milk prices for their members.

As it is, dairy farmers are losing money because their cooperatives aren't standing up to the processors buying their milk, such as Kraft and Schreiber Foods. If public-sector workers lose their collective bargaining rights, then we co-op farmers will lose our rights too. We'll be paid even less for our milk. That's bad for Wisconsin, and it's bad for the poor, the elderly, the sick, women and children, and farmers everywhere. In many industries, workers don't have collective bargaining rights, so

they can't demand fair wages.

However, since 1938 the Fair Labor Standards Act has guaranteed almost all Americans a minimum wage, time-and-a-half for overtime in certain jobs, along with child labor restrictions that help give kids a fair shot at getting a decent education. Corporations, and now governments, are chipping away at these rights and protections. Can this really be happening in the United States? Without fair wages and safe working conditions, what have we accomplished as a nation in the past 200 years?

Classified ads in a recent issue of *Agri-View*, a Wisconsin farm journal, listed 21 farms for sale, with dairy herds ranging from 20 to 180 cows or goats. It's nothing new: nationwide, the consolidation of dairy farms is dramatic. More than half of them disappeared between 1992, when we had 131,509, and 2010, when only 53,127 were left.

When those 21 farms are sold, at least 21 families will move somewhere else, leaving fewer farmers supporting local businesses and the tax base that funds community schools and infrastructure. As the tax base shrinks, school districts eliminate programs and local businesses close, leaving even fewer places for people to work and to buy goods. Is this really good for America or its bottom line? State governments need to realize that they're not just hurting civil servants when they eliminate bargaining rights, but everyone: family farmers, fishermen, and farmworkers — the people who provide our food — as well as the communities in which these people live and pay taxes. It's time for all of us to stand together, raise our voices, and demand our rights. The strength of our families, our communities, and our nation depends on it.