

## Family Farm Defenders

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### FFD Mission

Family Farm Defenders is a tax-deductible non-profit activist organization made up of farmers and concerned consumers. We are seeking ways to bring fair prices back to farmers and to insure a safe and sustainably produced food for consumers.

## FFD President's Message

By: Joel Greeno, Kendall, WI

President of Family Farm Defenders (Madison, WI)

A lot has happened since our last Family Farm Defenders newsletter. First off, the fallout of the recent election weighs heavy in many people's thoughts. The outcome was shocking, and minds are still swirling over the reasons voters may have had for making the choices they did. Just listening in the locker room at work, I picked up several key reasons for why turn out went the way it did. First, there was the general dislike of Hillary Clinton for whatever reason. Second, people love their guns, and any discussion - whether true or not - about someone restricting access to them is going to be met with extreme distrust. I have one coworker that hosts an annual shoot-out for the simple goal of expending as much ammo as possible. Third is trade deals. In the three decades since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) passed, workers have grown tired of having their jobs shipped out of the country, and our president elect promised he would end such trade deals including the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). In a very tight election, these three factors alone were enough to sway the vote.

In September I flew to DC to attend a meeting with USDA. This meeting was set up by our friends at Farm Aid. There was a film about thirty years of farm crisis followed by a panel. With USDA officials present, our own Ben Burkett, Scott Marlow and others made for a lively discussion. During the open mic session, PA farm activist and president of Pro-Ag, Arden Tewksbury, addressed the current crisis facing dairy farmers and the urgent need to fix the problem of low milk prices. USDA officials thanked us for the event, saying they had appreciated our comments, and that they had listened. One went on to claim the solution was providing more capital, and that the USDA just needed to offer more loans and that then farmers needed to apply for them. The only other option was to go organic.

Set off by these remarks, I was the second one to the microphone and stated that while I knew we were not supposed to get mad at this event, I was already mad. I let the USDA officials know that a loan was a curse. I reminded them that in order to retire debt you first needed profit, and that most farmers were operating well below their cost of production. I also stressed that the most important issue is the lack of farm income, and that efforts needed to be made to insure fair markets with parity prices so that there is actually a gain for farmers from farming.

On the subject of organic, I also let them know it is not a cure all. In the weeks prior to Farm Aid I had cut, raked, and baled all sorts of hay of which I could not sell a single bale. On second crop we made large square bales (probably 1000# each) that we sold for \$35 - barely enough to cover the baling cost and the organic certification. That is certainly no way to pay bills or make a living. *Continued pg.3*



*Joel Greeno with Old Friends at Farm Aid - Bristow, Virginia*

We then attended another USDA meeting devoted to dairy with Mike Schmidt and Brad Pfaff. They were also glad to hear from us and found very interesting what we had to say. I reminded them that our late NY friend, John Bunting, had made it pretty clear that the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) priced our milk - not farmers themselves - and that market collusion needed to be dealt with. But, true to form, they stated that all they could do was refer to the regulations manual and - after all - there is margin insurance, and we all know what a big help that has been for dairy (not)!

At a subsequent Farm Aid coffee social, different speakers told what they believe needed to be done to actually solve the farm crisis. Steve Etko with the Midwest Dairy Coalition was one of the moderators. During closing remarks I took time to reflect upon the discussions surrounding the Department of Justice anti-trust hearings about agribusiness control of commodity markets held across the country back in 2010. At one such session a DoJ official said "the law is not the law anymore." When asked to elaborate, he explained that if vertical integration fed people for less then the DoJ could stand in the way

of the "greater good." Now that Krogers is building its own chicken farms in CO and Walmart may soon be running its own dairy farms, we could well be on our way to that total vertical integration future we have all feared.

This year Farm Aid was held in Bristow, VA. This was where I first attended Farm Aid seventeen years ago. It was good to see old friends and be part of many great conversations - in fact, it took weeks for my voice to fully recover. I got to be on Willie's Roadhouse on Serious Satellite Radio with Brittney Howard of the band, Alabama Shakes. On air we talked about the hardships of farming, whether one is organic or conventional, and the underlying purpose of Farm Aid to offer struggling farmers help. After the show, Brittney told me it was one thing to come and play the concert, but it was quite another to understand what inspired Farm Aid from someone who is a family farmer!

Going back to the topic of "cheap" industrial food, I recently had lunch with my daughter at her school. The meal put before us was almost unrecognizable. The hot dogs were a gray/green color - completely

strange. The vegetable medley was a pale purple color - also bizarre. Most of it ended up not being eaten and just thrown away. Learning is difficult enough, but to not be able to eat and then try to learn is even more difficult. Some schools have found major gains in student achievement just by improving their diet. After eating good food, troubled students became better students - imagine that! Talking with our own Mary Lippert, she confirmed that in the school where she works once they started sourcing food locally, consumption went up, there was less waste, and students were happier and learned more. It reveals a lot about what's wrong in our society, and what a simple solution having a good just food system can be for the many problems we now face.



*Joel Greeno with Brittany Howard Lead Singer with Alabama Shakes one of many performers who performed at Farm Aid. Both were interviewed on Willie's Roadhouse on Serious Satellite Radio*