

# Defender

The Newsletter of the Family Farm Defenders

Summer 2013

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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 JOHN KINSMAN

RAW MILK TRIAL FARMER GUILTY OF JUST ONE COUNT  
A JURY AQUITS LOGANVILLE'S VERNON HERSHBERGER  
OF THREE CHARGES. (ASSOCIATED PRESS)



**D**airy farmer Vernon Hershberger was found not guilty of charges alleging he sold retail food, produced milk, and operated a dairy plant without proper state licenses." (See article on pages 10&11 with details of the trial.) The Sauk County District Attorney (D.A.) refused to press charges against Vernon. (There is a story why she refused to charges; ask me about that.) The Sheriff said he would refuse to take actions against Vernon if asked to do so, thus the State of Wis. D.A. & DATCP (Dept. of Agriculture Trade & Consumer Protection) have pressed charges.

Vernon's farm is 7 miles from my farm, we have been friends for many years. Vernon, his wife and children have always been upbeat and confident that God would see that justice would prevail. At one of the pretrial hearings he was asked who his attorney was? He placed his hand on his bible. This infuriated the state officials as they realized they had to change how they proceeded with their prosecution. The jury had to be impressed to see the 10 well mannered confident children with their mother, as the trial ended and the jury left to deliberate their decision.

The Wisconsin State Journal obviously did some research for their May 29 "Our Opinion" editorial; quote- "That many people -especially children -became sick and died from drinking raw milk a century ago." In other words they could not find any record of any deaths for the past 100 years! Today- June 2 The WI State Journal - "Hershberger is in new trouble with state officials, who have asked for a Monday -June 3 - in a Sauk County court room to send him to jail for admitting to selling products in his store, etc." This is a foolish move by the angry state officials to get revenge and if successful, will spark world wide outrage by Vernon's supporters. He always said he would go to jail if need be! (Continued on pg. 3)  
See associated article on pgs. 10 & 11

## Fair Trade More Important than Free Trade

The guest opinion by Rep. Ron Kind in the March 13 issue of *The Country Today* (“Wisconsin farmers deserve access to global markets,” Page 6A) deserves a response. Kind quotes statistics by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection that Wisconsin is the No. 1 producer of cheese in the U.S. and No. 2 in the nation for cheese exports. He lamented the fact that even though we have trade agreements with Canada and Russia “the threat of non-tariff trade barriers, such as non-science based sanitary and phytosanitary issues and protectionist actions, are very real.” What Kind neglected to say is that Wisconsin is also No. 1 in the U.S. when it comes to antibiotic, hormonal and other drug residues in our exported dairy and meat products. These drug residues are far above the allowable “safe” limits for human consumption not only in Canada and Russia, but also the European Union, Japan, South Korea and many other countries. But when our partners refuse to budge on these completely justified “non-tariff trade barriers” the U.S. threatens them with World Trade Organization sanctions.

Kind’s support of unsafe food exports through the likes of the Trans Pacific Partnership and the U.S.-E.U. Trade Agreement will not only destroy the farmers in these countries but also their economies. These forced trade

policies are unethical and immoral and are no way to make friends around the globe.

Kind should remember that these free-trade deals will hurt U.S. farmers and consumers too because the subsidized dumping by corporate agribusiness goes both ways. For instance, the U.S. has been a dairy deficit nation for more than a dozen years now — in fact, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture we now have more than 265 tariff categories just for dairy imports. One of these questionable imports now flooding the U.S. is milk protein concentrate. MPCs are a major component in the production of glue and undergo no Food and Drug Administration food-safety testing. In 2012 alone the U.S. imported more than 240 million pounds of MPC and casein, much of it from New Zealand through its dairy giant, Fonterra. WTO-style trade deals like the TPP force countries to export and import such products no matter what their domestic needs. Unnecessary shipment of these food items also requires enormous amounts of fossil fuels that add to our foreign oil dependency and worsen climate change.

There are winners and losers in all of these so-called free-trade agreements. The winners are the 1 percent of the wealthy at the top, the losers are the rest of us. Why would anyone expect anything but a race to the bottom in farmgate prices, workers’ wages and environmental standards by implementing the TPP? We need only to look at what happened in

the years following passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement when the U.S. dumped subsidized corn below Mexican farmers’ cost of production. Two million Mexican farmers were forced to leave their families and their land to risk their lives migrating to the U.S. in hopes of finding work. In the U.S. thousands of farmers, workers and small business people were personally devalued as they lost their livelihoods in the race to the bottom triggered by NAFTA.

The corporations pushing TPP will be taking advantage of the huge supply of cheaper labor in the Pacific Rim. The recent exposé of technology giant, Apple, using suppliers where large numbers of workers have committed suicide jumping off the roof of their sweatshops reveals the horrific conditions these workers are forced to endure and with which no worker anywhere should have to compete. What is the payoff in passage of TPP for politicians like Kind?

We should repeal existing disastrous agreements — like the Korea-U.S. one — and stop the TPP and the U.S.-E.U. deals before they are enacted. We could all be winners if we worked together in constructive cooperation for policies that promote fair trade instead.

*Posted: Wednesday, April 17, 2013 9:27 am [http://www.thecountrytoday.com/opinions/guest\\_opinions/article\\_e6a31fce-a76a-11e2-b84e-0019bb2963f4.html](http://www.thecountrytoday.com/opinions/guest_opinions/article_e6a31fce-a76a-11e2-b84e-0019bb2963f4.html)*

# Strengthening the Food Chain: Farmers and Workers Unite, Find Power in Numbers

BY SIENA CHRISMAN, WHY HUNGER

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**B**ob St. Peter and his wife, Juli Perry, farm four acres in coastal Maine, growing vegetables, herbs, flowers, rabbits, chickens, and sheep to feed their family and their neighbors. They grow food in ways that build rich soil, nurture wildlife, and nourish their community. But “at the end of the day,” Bob says, “we’ve been bewildered at how hard it is to produce food to feed people.”

Not because of the intrinsic challenges of weather, pests, or the hard work involved, but because of the colossal wall of systemic market forces stacked against the profession of farming — and especially against farmers starting from scratch who want not to grow commodity crops or sell vegetables to high-end restaurants, but simply to feed people.

Bob’s not the only one fighting this uphill battle; so, too, are the small-scale dairy farmers wondering if each day milking their 40 cows might be the last; ranchers watching their options for a fair price on their cattle dwindle as meatpackers consolidate; farmworkers making sub-poverty wages for backbreaking work in the fields; and food workers unable to take a sick day without fear of losing their jobs.

“I sell my chicken for \$4 a pound — because that’s what it costs me to produce it,” Bob says.



*Bob St. Peter and his wife Juli Perry and children on the March for Right, Respect and Fair Food.*

“But people think that’s expensive, because you can get chicken at the grocery down the road for 79 cents a pound.

When Bob looks at the supply chain leading to 79-cents-a-pound chicken, he sees contract poultry growers deep in debt to huge corporations, chickens pumped full of antibiotics and growth hormones, workers with crippling injuries from keeping up on the poultry processing line, and consumers exposed to increasing food-borne disease outbreaks. When food is sold for prices that ignore these external costs, everyone in the line of production suffers — and those, like Bob, who are trying to produce food in a way that is good for the land, workers, and local economy, can barely survive.

“As a small farmer,” he says, “I’m competing with a system that produces food based on slavery and exploitation.”

Voting with your fork — buying chicken raised in ways you believe in, or knowing the name and growing practices of your kale farmer — helps to support the farmers you’re buying from, but it doesn’t change the challenging context in which they’re struggling to make a living.

“Wanting access to healthier food,” as so many people do, Bob says, “isn’t the same as creating the infrastructure to provide it.”

Bob points to a “frontline of people who want to feed the world” rebuilding that infrastructure from scratch — new farmers like himself, farmers and fishers from old families who fear they will be the last to work the land or the sea, farmworkers and food workers putting in long hours to feed their families. They face many of the same problems — but as often as not, they are divided against each other.

Farmers facing rising costs of fertilizer or equipment look for savings by cutting workers’ wages; farmworkers are under such pressure from farm owners to meet a production quota that they feel they cannot take breaks without fear of losing their jobs. *(Continued on pg. 5)*



**Also joining the March for Rights, Respect and Fair Food**  
***FFD VP Joel Greeno, Siena Chrisman - WHY Hunger, FFD President John Kinsman***

What if instead they worked together? Farmers coming together with farmworkers, sharing lessons learned about how to transform their industry and hold major corporations accountable. Farmers and food-industry workers talking to consumers about the economic and policy issues shaping the system — and encouraging them to vote with their political power as well as with their fork.

It was with this goal in mind that Bob, Juli, and their two daughters hit the road in March for the Farm Labor Reality Tour. For Bob, it was imperative to connect with farm laborers, learn about their struggles and see their achievements firsthand, and strategize with them on opportunities for solidarity. The family traveled from Maine to the Midwest to meet with dairy farmers from Wisconsin-based Family Farm Defenders, and then

to Florida to participate in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' two-week, 200-mile March for Rights, Respect, and Fair Food. What they found along the way was that across the food chain, workers are eager to connect. In Milwaukee, the family joined striking food-service workers on the picket line, and Bob spoke at a town hall forum on immigration reform — an issue important to many farm and food workers.

In Minneapolis, Bob was part of two panel discussions with dairy farmers, labor rights advocates, students, and urban farmers. He learned about a campaign targeting big Minnesota dairy farms to stop wage theft, and for the first time truly understood how a system that pits farmers and workers against each other can also unite them to work for common goals. In Florida, Bob's family walked the whole 200 miles of

the March for Rights, Respect, and Fair Food with the CIW. The march drew thousands of people calling on grocery giant Publix to help end farmworker exploitation by joining the innovative Fair Food Program.

The program — a collaboration between Florida's tomato growers, major retailers, and farmworkers — sets the standard for social accountability in the domestic produce industry by guaranteeing basic rights like payment for time worked, access to water, shade, and bathrooms in the fields, and the right to work free from sexual harassment — all rights regularly denied to farmworkers.

McDonald's, Burger King, Taco Bell, and eight other major fast food corporations and food companies have signed onto the Fair Food Agreement, which has begun to dramatically change the lives of farmworkers in Florida's



## The March for Rights, Respect and Fair Food in its Final Day

*Photo: Jake Ratner Just Harvest*

Conversations begun in the blueberry fields were broadened and formalized in the following months through a peer mentoring relationship between the two organizations and Family Farm Defenders, supported by national grassroots support organization WhyHunger.

Inspired by the success of the CIW's Fair Food Campaign, and interested in building a campaign for fair prices for dairy farmers, Maine and Midwestern farmers visited Immokalee to learn more, while the CIW saw the relationship as an opportunity to learn about the challenges facing small farmers and build new alliances for their campaign.

After a year of partnership and solidarity building, Florida made for an appropriate final leg of the tour. Just as the CIW made a splash in Maine, Bob and his family — and Wisconsin dairy farmers who arrived to march the final few days — drew attention in Florida. While alliance building is nothing new to the CIW, the

presence of independent farmers — taking hard-to-spare time away from their cows or spring planting because they believe they share a common struggle and common fate — was particularly notable.

On the final mile of the march, dozens of CIW members, faces weathered from years in the fields, carried a CIW banner to Publix headquarters. A column of more than 1,500 people of all ages, races, and backgrounds stretched behind them. The CIW has demonstrated the power of students, faith leaders, and food justice organizations standing alongside some of the most marginalized people in the food system. That power that has drawn concessions from some of the biggest corporations in the world, but much more remains to be done.

"Farmers and farmworkers won't be divided against each other any longer," said Bob at the closing rally of the march. "For too

long we've been fighting over crumbs. We want a bigger piece of the pie." The 6,500 miles of the Farm Labor Reality Tour shone a bright light on the harsh realities of a system that lets consumers pay 79 cents a pound for chicken without knowing about all the exploitation that goes along with it. "We need a new direction for the food movement," Bob says. "We need to figure out how we're going to address human rights and fair wages, so that the people who are providing basic foods for our country can have a decent, good life."

The CIW march and the connections made on the tour make clear who will lead the way. "As farmworkers, food workers, and family farmers, we have a natural affinity," Bob says. "And once we all get together, we're unstoppable."

*Siena Chrisman is the Programs Communications Manager for WhyHunger. She*