

## **Remembering a Family Farm Defender and Champion -- John Kinsman, Presente!**

By Carol Schachet January 21st, 2014 Photo by Nic Paget-Clarke



John Kinsman was far more than a Wisconsin dairy farmer, though he proudly was that. He was a pioneer of organic and sustainable farming in the United States and a tireless advocate for global food sovereignty. John Kinsman died yesterday, on Martin Luther King Day, after a long life of struggle, humor and compassion. A fourth generation farmer, John founded Family Farm Defenders to empower farmers to speak for and respect themselves in their quest for social, economic and racial justice. A 2012 profile in *The Progressive*, describes some of his accomplishments:

*He's locked arms with Native Americans like Winona LaDuke in their struggle. He founded the activist group Family Farm Defenders in 1994. He marched with his friend the French farm leader Jose Bové of anti-McDonald's fame in "The Battle of Seattle" in 1999. He's even sailed with Greenpeace. How he managed all this*

*while running a dairy farm in central Wisconsin, near tiny Lime Ridge, and raising ten children with his wife, Jean, may be the most improbable thing of all about Kinsman.*

For us at Grassroots International, we had the wonderful opportunity to work with John over the years, most recently through the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, where he shared his wisdom and connected the struggles of farmers with those of farmerworkers, indigenous communities and urban communities of color impacted by the injustices in the food system. We had the honor of nominating his organization Family Farm Defenders to receive the Food Sovereignty Prize in 2010. During his acceptance speech, John declared "I'm a peasant farmer... The inspiration I've gotten from peasant farmers around the world makes me proud to say that." He also liked to say he was a peasant farmer to differentiate himself from food corporations that are now trying to call themselves "family farmers," just as Monsanto is trying to call itself "green."

That was just one way he stood in solidarity with the global movement of small farmers, and also pointed out the distinction between corporate-driven agriculture and family farmers. Family Farm Defenders is a member of the National Family Farm Coalition and through it the Via Campesina, the international movement of peasants and farm workers.

Another of our favorite memories of John is wearing a black-and-white cow suit, protesting dairy prices in front of the Commodities market in Chicago, along with his colleague John

Peck and others. In a post on the Family Farm Defenders website, Peck remembers his friend's impact: "John has literally touched the lives of thousands of people as a grassroots pioneer of organic sustainable agriculture and globe-trotting advocate of food sovereignty for decades."

We know he touched our lives. We will miss his bright smile, generous heart, clear analysis and sunny spirit. John's legacy humbles us and also challenges us to continue to build toward his powerful vision.

John Kinsman, Presente!

<http://grassrootsonline.org/news/blog/remembering-family-farm-defender-and-champion-john-kinsman-presente>

