

## 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*)



*Joel Greeno & his two daughters attended the Midwest Renewal Energy Fair.*

This summer we have witnessed a shocking level of violence - the fatal police shootings of Philando Castile in MN and Alton Sterling in LA followed by a sniper killing five officers in Dallas and another gunman killing three more in Baton Rouge, and now a black healthcare worker, Charles Kinsey, being shot by police in North Miami, FL while trying to take care of his autistic patient. Outside of the U.S., the situation is hardly any better - whether it is the coup attempt and government crackdown in Turkey or the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. The problem, I think, is that too many people jump to conclusions and don't take the time to just sit down and listen to each other. No

one should fall victim to someone else's paranoia or prejudice, and the perpetrators of such systemic violence - whether public servants or private citizens - need to be held accountable for their actions.

### One thing we ALL have in Common

One thing we ALL have in common - and that could help bring us together in these troubled times - is that we need to eat every day. Those of us who have the privilege of being producers often take for granted that we can just go to the garden or open up the freezer or cupboard and enjoy something we planted or preserved. Others don't have that luxury, and one of the overriding goals of food sovereignty is that everyone should have fair access to eat what they need for a good healthy life. But when one is stuck in a poorer marginalized community and you do not have such opportunities, what are the options left to you? For many folks in our cities or certain areas of the global south meeting basic needs is not so easy to come by, and the rest of us who often take clean water, good food, and decent shelter for granted need to learn about and understand the sacrifices others have to take to make sure their own families can survive. What is the footprint we leave behind that affects the ability of others to make it in our country and our world? Our choices do make a difference when it comes to access to land, employment, and the capacity of other communities to thrive, too.

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### Midwest Renewal Energy Fair

I and my daughters, Abigail and Anna Marie, were able to attend the Midwest Renewable Energy Fair for the first time this year from June 17th - 19th in Custer, WI. On the way we passed through many old industrial towns like Wisconsin Rapids, Nekoosa, and Stevens Point. We were shocked to see so many brand new offices and shopping centers closed with weeds growing up in their parking lots.

Elected officials, like Wisconsin's own Rep. Paul Ryan, tell us that the problems of America can be fixed, and that we need to be more solution oriented - but what does that mean? Certainly, the folks in Ryan's hometown of Janesville might have something to say about the wisdom of pushing "free trade" led to the shutting down of their GM auto plant and the loss of hundreds of good middle class unionized jobs. History has shown us that the solution too often involves throwing away entire communities. And those who are left behind are often reduced to inferior choices - where can one get decent groceries anymore, is this food even good for me to eat? It seems like the current system is not really generating real solutions. Are industrial style livestock confinement operations improving the rural economy or making things worse? What about frack sand mines - are these enriching or destroying our rural communities?

### Advance Wind & Solar Energy

At the Energy Fair we discovered amazing advances in wind and solar technology and got to visit a wide array of groups and learn about all sorts of new products. The FFD booth was very busy, next to the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice (WNPJ) and Midwest Action

of Mining Alternatives (MAMA). Volunteers from the Wisconsin Farmers Union Camp Kenwood did a great job staffing the kids' area, and Abby and Anna Marie enjoyed the hands-on experience of building a cob mud wall - it proved a challenge to hose the mud off the kids afterwards. FFD vice president, Tony Schultz, co-owner of Stoney Acres Farmer with his partner Kat Becker gave a lively performance talk at the Sunday breakfast, doing his own version of a reality TV show with a skit involving a big farmer, a small farmer, and a county extension agent. The whole thing can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5M6lyouavA>

### Echo Valley Farm Tour

On the 5th of July my daughters and I were able to tour Echo Valley Farm near Ontario, WI ([www.echovalley-farmwisconsin.com/](http://www.echovalley-farmwisconsin.com/)) and had the opportunity to meet students from Taiwan who were interested in dairy farming. Echo Valley was formed 15 years ago as a place for people to retreat to nature and learn about sustainable agriculture. Today the farm includes its own bakery that makes pizza and cheese-cake, operates its own sawmill for lumber, and hosts a series of cabins, meeting spaces, and amphitheater for use by families and groups. Being right next door to Wild Cat Mountain State Park, Echo Valley offers a rustic "Driftless Wisconsin" experience that also fosters cross cultural exchange and solidarity work so we can take better care of one another.

For the kids there were also newly born guinea hens and ducklings to play with, as well as home made apple butter that barely survived the trip home. The appetite for fresh farm made apple butter was pretty impressive! The Taiwanese stu-

dents at Echo Valley were very keen to know more about sustainable livestock - can a farmer actually feed their own animals and provide most of their own inputs? Conventional dairy operations in Taiwan rely too heavily on expensive imports from the U.S. This was another opportunity to listen and share, exchanging ideas and breaking down stereotypes - you really do not need a million dollar milking parlor to be a successful dairy farmer!

### More Farmers not Less!

At work, I get to listen to people all the time who seem to only have an extreme response to the chaos around them. How can someone be proud to fly a confederate flag and not see how this is contributing to a climate of racism today? Maybe if everyone hosted a community potluck and invited new people over beyond their current circle of friends and family it would lead to some heartfelt discussions and healthier relationships. There are serious problems in our world, and those of us involved in Family Farm Defenders, La Via Campesina, National Family Farm Coalition and other like minded groups, know there are answers, too! One of those answers is that we need far more farmers, not less - such as Donald (Jahi) Ellis, Polly Dalton, and Oren Jakobsen who won this year's John Kinsman Beginning Farmer Food Sovereignty Prize. And our farmers need to be far better paid. Once farmers are better paid they can buy things, and once farmers begin to buy things again, people will need to make things. Then more people will get jobs that pay well and will in turn want to buy their own things - that is how to fix our economy. Then we can all enjoy and share the wealth we produce with dignity, justice, and respect