

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)



Farm Aid 2019 Returns to Wisconsin!

Activities began in Lake Geneva on Sept. 19th at the Riviera Ballroom. Movers and Shakers from across the U.S. gathered to discuss the Topic: Forward from Here.

One might ask where is Forward from Here?

Well, that would be a good question, given that the people who care for the land and feed our people seem to be engaged in an endless battle for survival. Many great minds have struggled with this idea. One can hope that the paths we choose lead us to a bridge that connects us with other people are engaged in a just and sustainable future.

We heard from Rev. David L. Ostendorf (a longtime FFD member) about "Creating a Just Country from Solid Ground". He spoke of many years of effort to maintain the integrity of Rural America. Yet, extremism continues to undermine those efforts and take us backwards. It is sad how through our history, other religions have been blamed for our problems - along with people of color and other political parties.

The time has come to work together to raise up society and to create hope for a better future.

At Farm Aid we heard from some of the tribal leaders of Wisconsin. They spoke of their struggles to keep their communities together - of their amazing efforts to protect their wisdom and knowledge - about how hard it was to protect indigenous seeds and their traditional ways. They spoke of their efforts to fit into the broader Farm Aid community, and of their ongoing struggle to protect the people who care for the land.

Continued on pg.3



Lining Up for Farm Aid 2019 - Tractorcade Arrives at Alpine Valley

After a great lunch mostly supplied by local farms, we had more discussions. We heard from Sarah Lloyd, dairy farmer active with the Wisconsin Farmers Union and longtime FFD member, about supply management and efforts to unite dairy farmers around a common message. Also on the Farm Aid panel was Jerry Volenec, who spoke of the hardship of trying to survive as a dairy farmer today. He spoke of what it took to get him to realize he couldn't just work harder on his own to solve systemic problems. We also heard moving discussions from Venice Williams (Alice's Garden Urban Farm), Monica White (UW-Madison Professor and author of Freedom Farming) and Christine Neumann-Ortiz (executive director of Voces de Frontera) on how to keep our communities nourished, while protecting the environment.

On the evening of Thurs. Sept. 19th - Family Farm Defenders held a Tractorcade Chat

To discuss this direct action tactic, past and present. David Senter, president of the American Agriculture Movement (AAM) told us about the amazing 1979 tractorcade to Washington DC. The AAM realized markets were consolidating and undermining parity and that the Capper Volstead Act was losing its

effectiveness. Farmers across the country were organized and converged upon the nation's capitol from multiple directions, traveling at about 25 mph. Communities fed them along the way - each night it took a couple of hours just to get everyone parked. Usually by morning a supportive fuel company had showed up to gas up everyone's tractor so they were ready for another day's travel. That's solidarity.

When the lead tractor, flying the AAM flag, rolled into D.C. there were 60,000+ farmers and allies ready to camp out in D.C. for three months. Their main objective was parity - that commodity prices should cover cost of production adjusted for inflation to insure that farmers receive a living wage. Family farmers in D.C. back then were a little more mischievous just to make their point! You can watch a good video about the 1979 AAM Tractorcade here: Farmers Stand Up: Tractorcade Protest of 1978-1979, by Henry Marks

Farmers Stand Up:

Tractorcade Protest of 1978-1979, by Henry Marks 11-year-old Henry, grandson of John Hansen, recounts the history of the 1979 DC Tractorcade in this award winning. I then spoke about the more recent

2011 Pull Together Tractorcade to Madison, WI protesting Gov. Scott Walker's austerity budget, union busting, and in support of a potential recall election. Over 150,000 people were there to meet the farmers with their tractors - the largest protest in state history!

Lining up for Tractorcade

It was cold as tractors gathered at the Alliant Energy Center that morning to head up to the WI State Capitol, but 50+ tractors showed up (along with a manure spreader, a combine, and a fire truck) to brave the weather and make a point. Some folks had traveled over 100 miles from Bear Valley in the Driftless Region. We said to Gov., Walker, we do not believe in your policies or your views for the state.

We rolled up to the State Capitol that morning with a clear message: do not blame the public sector for the state's problems, don't defend corporate agribusiness and factory farms, and don't trash our state's water. The excitement grew over the next few weeks, mostly fueled by a stirring speech by FFD's then vice president, Tony Schultz: Wisconsin Protests: Tony Schultz, Speaks up for farmers, March 12, 2011 Wow, what a day!

Continued on pg.4