

## 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)

**W**e survived 2017. Many believed it to be the end of times with the reign of our 45th President, but despite all the rhetoric and drama we survived. Not to the liking of many of us, but – nonetheless – we survived. Well, most of us at least!

Having just come off the joyous Christmas season – of caring, giving, love and peace – how quickly we were all jolted back into the realities of life. Given the theme and reason of the Christmas season you would think we could have gone into 2018 with a more hopeful attitude and perspective.

We know that the holidays come with their own reasons for stress and anxiety, but let's look a little deeper. Many articles and reports about our ongoing farm crisis came out last year - what do they have to tell us?

For one, we have pretty much lost sight of the principle of open competitive markets and fair farm prices ever since President Reagan ended the last remnants of federal parity policy. Since then we have seen massive losses in every sector of agriculture, including up to half of all U.S. farmers going under just in the 1980s. The losses have continued through to today, with little or no relief in sight.

The US has 94 agricultural districts.

Last year, Western Wisconsin's agricultural district had the highest number of farm bankruptcies of anywhere in the nation. Maybe this could be translated into the fact that it also has the highest population of dairy farmers left in the nation. Dairy has now had several years of bad milk prices in a row, leading to this steady demise. Trying to survive on 25% - 30% of parity comes with its challenges.

This number of farms filing bankruptcy is by no means that only way farms went out of business. Plenty of farms went out of business the same way they have for decades. They just plain quit and sold out. At least land still has value...

Of course, that any of these farms manage to survive is in large part due to the fact that farmers love to farm! This also leads us to the reality that when farmers are pushed out of other agricultural sectors, they attempt to continue for a while longer as corn or bean farmers before they finally give up. Many already have the equipment and think "Why not?" But, in an already flooded commodity market the outcome is inevitable.

According to the Agricultural Policy Analysis Center at the Univ. of TN, lower prices with higher costs meant the average U.S. corn farmer actually LOST almost \$45/acre last year. Meanwhile, corporations are laughing all the way to the bank.

The next reality is especially shocking and deeply disturbing.

Our nation's farmers committing suicide at the second highest per capita rate for any occupation in this country - second only to those serving in the armed forces. Why are the people defending our country and feeding our country driven to take their own lives?

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**Joel Greeno's Free Range Cows - 2013**

*Photo Source: Sienna Chrisma*

Not an easy question to answer. Could it be due to untenable working conditions?? Maybe it's the poor pay?? Or is it lack of quality health care?? Most likely it's all of the above. In a recent survey, Wisconsin Farmers Union learned that the biggest concern among family farmers was lack of health care and the rising cost of health care. We've known for many years that among the primary causes of farm foreclosure is a medical emergency. Given that mental health care is lacking everywhere, maybe it shouldn't be so surprising that farm suicide is also growing problem. With accidents being listed as one of the leading causes of farmer death, can we be so sure they are all accidents??? Hmm...and now we have to deal with a looming opioid epidemic across Rural American, too.

So it's now 2018 - a New Year with a chance for a new start, a new attitude. Let me propose that as Family Farm Defenders we go on the offensive for once - looking to the future in

a positive proactive light. We have innovative solutions to these problems. Grassroots direct action campaigns are part of the answer, and there are many more. We need all hands on deck! Who's up for the challenge? Are you???

I have been part of the Family Farm Defenders for 21 years now. It has become like family. We laugh together, cry together, and get it done together. What we are able to accomplish is like a giant spider web, where all things are interconnected. We will continue to expose the bad, so we can overcome it with the good. By doing what is right and just, we can and will succeed.

If you have any proactive ideas on how to save family farm agriculture, please feel free to share your ideas with Family Farm Defenders. Join an amazing team of volunteers working on solutions for protecting family farm agriculture on land and sea, for the environment and the good of all.

There are many great events coming up this year:

- The Organic Farming Conference
- National Family Farm Coalition Meetings
- U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance Meetings
- La Via Campesina's International Day of Peasant Struggle
- Family Farm Defender's Own John Kinsman Beginning Farmer Food Sovereignty Prize Award Ceremony
- Farm Aid Concert

This is just to name a few.

So mark your calendar, plan to participate and be prepared to become part of creating the giant web of greater good!