

## **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*)

I spent Father's Day weekend back in June with my daughters, Abigail and Anne Marie, representing Family Farm Defenders at the Midwest Renewal Energy Fair in Custer, WI. FFD executive director John Peck, gave a great workshop on tackling climate change through climate justice and food sovereignty that led to a lively discussion with about 75 people present. This year's keynote speech was by the co-founder of Tesla, JB Straubel, and drew dozens of electric vehicles from all over the country. Abigail and Anne Marie helped with the running of the Family Farm Defenders Info Booth, and Abby worked the crowd hard selling Fair Trade Cold Brew Just Coffee. We were able to share the message of Family Farm Defenders with hundreds of people and had another great weekend of camping in Custer.

Congratulation Family Farm Defenders!

We are now official members of La Via Campesina! It was an honor and a privilege to represent North America in the 7th International Conference of La Via Campesina held in the Basque region of Spain in late July. The energy was intoxicating with over 800 representatives from peasant movements and their allies from over 70 countries reaffirming their commitment to the peasant struggles and social justice. Youth and women met for the first three days of the conference, addressing the concerns that faced them in their own assemblies. The youth even held their own protests against their marginalization from the IVC leadership, which ended up in a decision that the youth should be granted their own seat on the International Coordination Council (ICC). I was so proud of our youth for their strength and determination on this issue, and the professional manner in which they pressed their issue at the conference.

The women's assembly continued their ongoing discussion around the issues of violence against women. In the end we all received t-shirts with the logo recognizing the issue of violence against women and their struggles. In the opening ceremony of the conference, Elizabeth Mpofu, the General Coordinator of La Via Campesina from Zimbabwe, made the following statement: "We are all one. We are all in the struggle together. We must ask ourselves one question: Are we on the right path? Do we farm using the right practices? Do we buy goods and services in the right places? How we make these choices will decide our future." Very profound words with which to start our conference.

And this really is the question we must ALL ask ourselves - do we farm using the right methods? Are we organic or conventional? Where do we shop? Do we buy local? Do we support Walmart instead? Do we buy bottle water from Coco Cola or Nestle? Or do we support the right of everyone to clean water as a public good? If we truly want a just food/farm system that works for everyone, these are the types of questions we must ask ourselves. During a segment of the conference program pertaining to the political climate of our regions, I read the following statement on behalf of North America: *Continued on pg. 3*

"It is humbling to stand before so many great people - people who have worked so hard to protect the people who care for the land and waters.

My friend and mentor John Kinsman, who had worked with so many of the founders of the La Via Campesina for many years, - the people who had the vision and the dream of an international organization of farmers, ranchers, farm workers and fisher people, who had the insight to think through the process of a fair and democratic system that would represent all the peoples of the world. This process continues to evolve as La Via Campesina members from across the world come together here in the Basque country. The people who care for the Earth should be justly compensated for their labor, and all the peoples of the Earth deserve access to healthy nutritious culturally appropriate food. It was always the dream of John Kinsman for Family Farm Defenders to be an official member of La Via Campesina. It is an honor and a privilege on behalf of John Kinsman and the broader Family Farm Defenders family to accept this official membership in La Via Campesina."

Throughout the course of the conference, I was able to attend several informative workshops. One was on agroecology, which spoke about our efforts to farm properly to deal with climate change and to challenge the corporate takeover of our seed supply. I attended another workshop on Alliance Building, and was able to share the work of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) as an effective U.S. example and urged member groups to target specific corporations all at the same time. Think of the impact we could have with over 200 million LVC activists worldwide all having the same campaign at the same time against the same targets! Whether it be:

Monsanto, Dow, Coca-Cola or Nestle. We could seriously magnify our impact and make an incredible difference.

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*Joel Greeno (far right) with other members of the La Viva Campesina North American Delegates.*

At one point during the conference, we also met with public officials from the Spanish region of Catanbria. Some of them asserted that the loss of farmers was a "natural process" to which I and other LVC leaders from Greece and elsewhere strongly objected. We hear the same arguments all time here in the U.S. - but the loss of family farmers in NOT "natural". It is the consequence of corporate greed and government neglect and must be reversed.

On our final day in the Basque Region, we held a mass rally in Bilbao marching from the Plaza Mayor to the Plaza Nueva. For those of us who were part of the FFD delegation to Portugal and Spain back in 2003, this was the same route followed by the massive peace rally opposing the impending Gulf War in which we participated, including John Kinsman and our Basque host and LVC leader, Paul Nicholson. So it was very fitting and emotional closure to ten days of solidarity in the Basque region.

**Too Close - A Call to Action**  
When I first saw the Aug. 11-12th events in Charlottesville, VA on the news, I would have guessed that it

had taken place in another country. To learn that this was happening her in the U.S. was completely shocking. This is a "Call to Action" for Family Farm Defenders. If we wish for the life of family farmers to improve, we must also oppose those that harbor racism, prejudice, and hate. For it is the very same type of people that once promoted slavery that now dominate multinational corporations intent upon controlling our entire food/farm system. It is time to promote real change in all sectors of our society. If we wish our youth to grow and prosper as our future farmers, then we must oppose violence against women, we must oppose the Israeli occupation of Palestine, we must oppose US military occupation everywhere, and we must oppose the World Trade Organization and its related "free trade" agreements, (NAFTA, TTP, etc) that aim to exploit us and our communities. If we are to honor our commitments to La Via Campesina and the principles of Food Sovereignty, we must - with all our strength and all our might - resist these divisive tactics and fight for Justice and Equality- not just in our communities but in all regions.