

John Kinsman - Family Farm Defender Champion

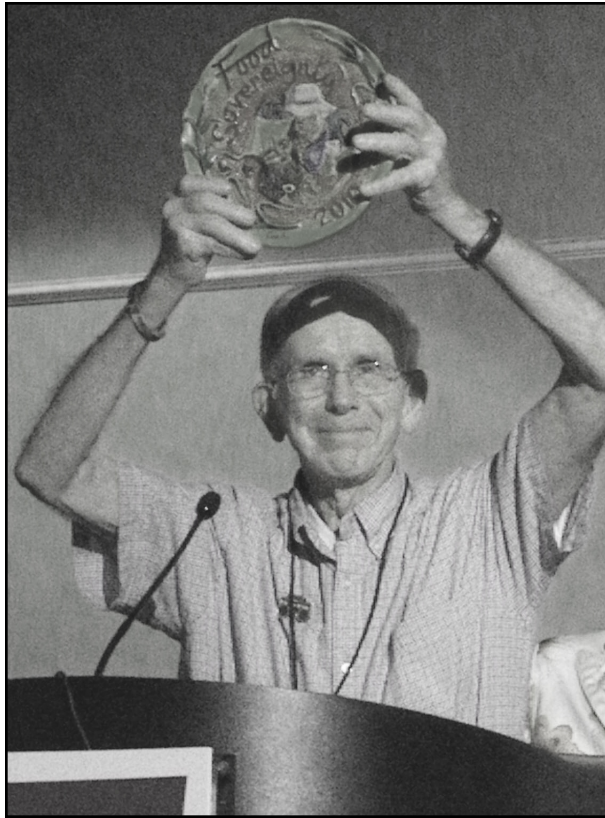
Carol Schachet - Grassroots Internal

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. He was a fourth generation farmer who 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*, described some of his accomplishments:

"He 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 Bove of anti-McDonald's fame in 'The Battle of Seattle' in 1999. He 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 with the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, where he shared his wisdom and connected with the struggles of farmers with those farmworkers, 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



**Family Farm Defenders
Food Sovereignty Prize
2010**

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 like 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 is just one way he stood on solidarity with the global movement of small farmers and also pointed out the distinction between corporate-driven agriculture and family farmers. Family Farm Defender is a member of the National Family Farm Coalition through 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 FFD Executive Director John Peck and others. We know he touched our lives. We will miss his bright smile, generous heart, clear analysis and sunny spirit. John's legacy hmbles us and also challenges us to continue to build toward his powerful vision.

The Farmer Who Took on Corporate Globalization

John Nichols Reprinted from The Nation Magazine 1/26/14

Kinsman was a dairy farmer—with a herd of thirty-six cows that he grazed on eighty acres—he always introduced himself as such. Yet he was, as well, an epic activist with deep roots in the Catholic social justice tradition and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. He was a pioneering advocate of the ideals that would come to underpin the international slow-food and food-sovereignty movements, and one of the great global organizers of popular resistance to the economic inequality and injustice that extends from corporate-defined and corporate-driven globalization.

Hailed by Grassroots

International as "a pioneer of organic and sustainable farming in the United States and a tireless advocate for global food sovereignty," Kinsman helped generations of younger activists come to understand the threat that corporate monopoly, oligarchy and plutocracy—words John regularly employed—posed to their health, their livelihoods and their democracy.

Kinsman's knack for explaining in practical terms how corporate greed threatened sustainable farming, good food, safe water, small farms and small towns—as well as his passionate faith that the struggles of working farmers had to be linked with struggles for labor rights, civil rights and human rights—made him an

international figure. As the founder and president of Family Farm Defenders, as the secretary of the National Family Farm Coalition, as a key leader of La Via Campesina, the largest international umbrella organization of farmers, fishers, foresters, hunters, gatherers and indigenous peoples, he was a definitional figure in the framing of a popular response to free-trade economics that placed profiteering above humanity.

It was not uncommon for John to milk cows in the morning and then get on a plane and fly to demonstrate with displaced farmers in Mexico, to sail with Greenpeace, to brief farmers from Mali about fights against Monsanto and the genetic modification of food, or to explain trade policies to the trade unions of Portugal. In 1999, when unions, environmental organizations and civil society campaigners organized in Seattle to block the World Trade Organization's expansion of the corporate "free trade" model, Kinsman was at the center of everything that happened. Outside a McDonald's in the city center, thousands of activists cheered as Kinsman and his friend José Bové, the French farm activist and former presidential candidate, distributed fresh cheese from real farms—and then explained how corporatization and globalization of food production threatened the livelihoods of the farmers who produced the safest, healthiest and

most delicious food in the world. That was classic Kinsman. Bringing farmers together with workers and human rights activists, making all the connections and explaining that what is at stake in any trade agreement is more than just money: It is the quality of the food we eat, the water we drink and the lives we aspire to. And he never stopped. In the last months of his life, John was organizing farmers to block the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal that President Obama and Republicans in Congress are now advancing. "As Congress considers the TPP, we need to express our opposition—not only to convince our elected officials that this will just lead to more economic chaos on top of the current crisis, but to also let our friends across the Pacific know that they are not alone in opposing free trade deals that are only designed to profit the 1 percent," he explained. "Those of us in the 99 percent will end up losers if we do not...stop the TPP. We could ALL be winners if we worked together in constructive cooperation for a new global economic system based upon fair trade instead."

That new system, with greater respect for democracy than corporate power, is still in the making. But when it comes to be, we would do well to remember the farmers like John Kinsman who planted the seeds and nurtured the dream.