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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 JOHN KINSMAN



The commodity traders at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) are starting to get the message. John Peck and I were joined by many of our Chicago FFD members, as well as our new friends with *Stand Up Chicago*, for our annual protest against price fixing outside CME's headquarters on April 18th - part of La Via Campesina's International Day of Peasant Struggle. This was the first time there was no real police presence or restrictions on where we could leaflet. The traders and staffers of the CME were eager to take our literature. We had lots of help, and at the height of the protest our numbers had grown to about 50 supporters.

One CME trader who was very knowledgeable about dairy pricing wanted to talk to a real dairy farmer - an opportunity I was able to provide! We eventually

agreed that cost of production for a conventional dairy farmer was around \$20 per hundred weight of milk, but I added that in order for such a farmer to live in dignity he/she needed at least \$30. He did not argue with that. Our only disagreement was when I stated that the consumer need not pay more for milk at the store, if those now taking too much profit in the middle took a fair share instead. He went on to say that the current "market" price for milk was \$15 per hundred weight and was likely to go down further. We had a long respectful discussion but ran out of time since we had to move along to a food sovereignty talk with international students at the nearby Chicago Cultural Arts Center.

People often wonder what's for dinner? Well, if you look at the industrial agribusiness menu there are two new "yummy" items that just came out of the closet. Your specials this month are mad cow hamburger or pink slime meatloaf. The old standbys - milk protein concentrate (MPC) laced cheese products with salmonella spinach and/or salmonella cantaloupe on the side - are still available. MPC is usually used in the production of glue, but it also makes for a cheap cheese extender, which is why the U.S. doubled its MPC imports in 2011. MPC imports lead to a dairy "surplus" and a convenient excuse for processors to pay farmers less while making more profit. It is just another example of the "benefits" of free trade - such as the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) which would allow New Zealand to dump even more MPC on the U.S. market.

This menu looks like a joke, and I wish it was. But it is not. I was in England for a week shortly after the last of several million cows were slaughtered in the Mad Cow (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy BSE) fiasco. I spoke with traumatized farmers who were forced to kill their beloved cows which were sometimes left for days in their farmyards until there was enough room at the crematoriums. For years the British authorities tried to cover up Mad Cow cases until they reached epidemic proportions. The USDA, state departments of agriculture, and cattle organizations are making the same mistakes in covering up the situation here in the U.S. (*See related Mad Cow Articles pg 4 & 5 & 6 in this issue*).

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CME Shareholder Meeting

On May 23rd, Joel Greeno, John Peck, and I made a return visit to Chicago, this time to attend the CME shareholders meeting! We each had stock issued by Amalgamated Bank (courtesy of Stand Up Chicago) which allowed us to participate. Many of the usual shareholders were surprised at this year's turnout and were even more surprised when nearly half those in attendance turned out to be activists. A Unitarian minister set the tone for the comment period with criticism of the CME's tax dodging efforts, followed by an Iraqi war veteran, and many other concerned Chicago residents. Joel Greeno was able to share his remarks twice about CME dairy price fixing. Security removed the rest of us, but he was invited to stay and continue for a few more minutes, after which he got a business card from one of the CME staffers for a follow-up conversation. The 1% were visibly agitated as the chanting of the evicted 99% in the room next door filtered into their proceedings! Later I was able to speak further about how commodity speculation at the CME hurts farmers and consumers before the People's Share Holders Meeting, after which an estimated 8,000 protestors marched to the doors of the CME itself. For more coverage of this amazing event, check out the *Stand Up Chicago* website: www.standupchicago.org

Tony Azevedo, President of the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA) recently sent a letter from the alliance to major milk processors such as Organic Valley and Horizon (a subsidiary of Deans) to raise the milk price for farmers by \$5 per hundred weight. A copy of the letter can be found in the Winter 2012 issue of Integrity, WODPA's newsletter. Tony also noted "our farmers are in dire economic straits and need an immediate \$5 increase just to survive." Tony ships his milk to Organic Valley and his present base price is \$14.50 per hundred weight plus quality and component premiums. A reputable CPA analyzed the expenses and prices for WODPA for 2010 and found that economic returns for organic farmers were actually LESS

than that for conventional milk producers by \$1.50 per hundred weight. Yet, according to a Dec. 29, 2011 New York Times article there is a shortage of organic milk across the country, especially so in the Southeast and Northeast. Through the entire dairy crisis, demand for organic milk has continued to grow.

One of the headlines of the May 23rd issue of Country Today reads "History in the Making: Milwaukee's First Cheese Factory to Open Soon." Bob Wills, who owns Cedar Grove Cheese in Plain, WI is putting the finishing touches on Clock Shadow Creamery, a cheese plant named for its proximity to the Allen Bradley Clock Tower a few blocks away. Bob stated "everybody is talking about local foods, but a lot of it is coming from 250 miles away. To me the advantage of local is for people to be able to see what you are doing and for you to be able to make foods that are really appropriate for the community." Bob feels the production at the Cedar Grove Cheese factory in Plain will work well the new plant in Milwaukee. You can read the entire article on the Country Today website: www.countrytoday.com

The Brooklyn NY Food Conference on May 12th drew a crowd of 5,000+ people. John Peck and I were invited by Christina Schiavoni of WHY Hunger to participate in several workshops on food sovereignty, global trade, and industrial agriculture. Joining us on one panel was a powerful representative from the Garifuna community of Honduras. The Garifuna emerged from a history of resistance that united indigenous peoples and runaway slaves, but now they face new threats - namely land and other resource grabbing. The woman told of the rape and murder of family members, and urged the listeners to convince the U.S. government to pressure the Honduran regime to stop the injustices. Another panelist, an immigrant from Mexico, broke down in tears as she described the horrors suffered crossing the border into the U.S. These graphic accounts moved all of us and reinforced the need for international solidarity.

Our FFD booth at the Organic Farming Conference held in La Crosse in late Feb. was as popular as ever. There was a huge crowd at this year's event and we had a non-stop stream of visitors. Also in Feb. we conducted a workshop on food sovereignty at a Progressive Wisconsin gathering held at Wisconsin Heights High School. And in April FFD teamed up with our local Fair Trade Neighborhood project to share a literature table at the Sauk County Earth Day festival held on the UW Baraboo campus.

FFD Annual Meeting

Our annual FFD meeting was held in Chicago over the weekend of March 16 - 18th, thanks to the hard work of Amy Mall, Sherwin Ovid, Seva Gandhi, Harishi Patel, and Jeffrey Frank - amongst many others. We began the weekend with an interesting tour of urban gardening, aquaculture, and unused old buildings as agricultural incubators. One of these sites, the Plant (www.plantchicago.com/) hosted a food/farm film series our first evening, and that was followed the next night by a community dinner and food sovereignty talk at the Jane Addams Hull House Museum (www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull). We voted to add Bernard Bernaud, a livestock farmer, organic inspector, and French teacher from South Dakota to our FFD board, as well as Christina Schaivoni with WHY Hunger in NYC. Christina also did a fine job facilitating our board retreat and strategy session.

Madison Workshop Lastly on June 2nd another FFD board member, Patty Lovera, who works with Food and Water Watch in DC, came to Madison along with her Iowa-based colleague, Matt Ohloff, to facilitate a workshop titled "Effective Messaging for Grassroots Organizing." While this workshop focused on fighting factory farms, the skills we learned are also relevant to other ongoing rural struggles over high voltage powerlines, fracking sand mining, high capacity wells, etc. Add large numbers of media interviews and community tours and that takes up much of my "spare time." Oh, yes, I farm, too.