FFD President’s Message

BY JOHN KISMAN

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 from 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 police presence or restrictions on where we could leaflet. The traders and staff of the CME were eager to talk to us and hear 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 they needed at least $30. The trader, who had no idea what was necessary to produce a food item, asked me to speak further about how commodity speculation at the CME hurts farmers and consumers before the People’s Share Meeting. He had a lot of questions, which I think 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 through their pro-corn/soy farm lobby. John Peck was able to share his remarks twice about CME dairy price fixing. Security remained the rest of us, but he was invited to 250 miles away 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 there are two new “yummy” items that just came out of the specialty. Your usual standbys - milk protein concentrate (MPC) laced cheese products with salmonella 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 Cow (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy BSE)iasco. 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 department and cattle feed companies are making the same mistakes in covering up the situation here in the U.S. (See related Mad Cow Articles pg 4 5 6 6 in this issue). Continued on page 3

CME Shareholders Meeting

On May 23rd, Joel Greeno, John Peck, and I made a return visit to Chicago.

Our FFD booth at the Organic Farming Conference held in La Crosse in late February 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 High Schools. And in April FFD teamed up with our local FairTrade 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, me, Matt Ohloff, and Hiroshi Kanno amongst 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 an event the day before our FFD Annual Meeting, and that was followed the next night by a community dinner and food sovereignty talk at the Jane Adams Neighborhood project to share a literature table at the Sauk County Earth Day festival held on the UW Baraboo campus.

Madison Workshop

Lastly on June 2nd, John Peck, 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, etc. Add large numbers of media interviews and community tours that takes up much of my “spare” time. Oh, yes, I farm too.

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 conquest, which united indigenous peoples and runaway slaves, but now they face new threats - namely land and other resource grabbing. The woman told us how her 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 by crossing the border into the U.S. These graphic accounts moved all of us and reinforced the need for interna-tional solidarity.

See www.standupchicago.org for more on this amazing event, check out our Facebook page, and I made a return visit to Chicago, Wisconsin gathering held at Wisconsin High Schools. And in April FFD teamed up with our local FairTrade Neighborhood project to share a literature table at the Sauk County Earth Day festival held on the UW Baraboo campus.

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