

that were then dumped along the railroad tracks. Such rural protests had already spread across the country and compelled President FDR to pass the Agricultural Adjustment Act - one of his first New Deal programs - establishing a federal market price for basic agricultural commodities and setting a precedent for farmer-controlled supply management - which sadly, has yet to be realized.

### **Fast Forward to the 1960s**

Once again, Wisconsinites from all walks of life worked together to demand racial justice. John Kinsman, an organic dairy pioneer near Lime Ridge and founder of Family Farm Defenders, started Project Self Help and Awareness to foster inter-racial exchanges between rural farm kids in WI and their counterparts in Mississippi. These relationships flourished over decades, leading directly to 2006 when WI farmers delivered a dozen donated tractors and other implements to their colleagues with the MS Association of Co-ops to help them recover from Hurricane Katrina. When Obreros Unidos organized a migrant farmworker march from Wautoma to Madison in 1966 they found much support in the small towns along the way - the same was true when Father Groppi organized a "Welfare Mothers" March from Milwaukee to Madison in 1969.

### **1980's Native Folks Under Attack**

In the 1980s, when native folks were under attack by racist hate groups for exercising their treaty rights, a diverse WI coalition emerged to bear witness at the boat landings and engaged in constructive dialogue and popular education to shift a broader public opinion. For more of these episodes of Unity in Struggle, read Patrick Jones' book [Selma of the North](#) and Rick Whaley/Walt Bresette's book, [Walleye Warriors](#).



### **Farm Labor Tractorcade**

Without this tradition of Solidarity we would have never experienced the historic Capitol Occupation and statewide Cheddar Uprising of 2011, which culminated in the state's largest protest ever on Sat. March 12th - when 150,00 + people gathered to greet the Pull Together Farm Labor Tractorcade in support of collective bargaining rights and against austerity budget cuts. Nor would we have seen groups like Family Farm Defenders and Wisconsin Farmers Union standing with Voces de la Frontera in 2017 to say "No Hate in the Dairy State" and publicly oppose ICE efforts to detain, abuse, and deport undocumented farm/food workers that are now such a vibrant and integral part of our society.

### **Corporate Agribusiness Update**

The brittle vulnerability of corporate agribusiness was one of the first supply shocks felt by many as the pandemic came to grip the world in early 2020. Streams literally ran white as farmers were forced to dump their milk without any buyers and piglets were euthanized in their pens as packing plants cancelled their contracts, while still forcing their sick employees to show up for work or get fired. Meanwhile, bigbox retailers were rationing their inventory, limiting

consumer purchases to one gallon of milk and one pound of bacon at a time. As online sales jumped, Amazon workers were expected to work even harder on behalf of the world's richest billionaire, Jeff Bezos. For many, the abusive treatment and crass exploitation of essential workers was simply intolerable. Thus, it was hardly any surprise when dozens of labor unions and social justice groups, led by Cooperation Jackson, called for a May 1st General Strike against the disaster capitalism that was using the pandemic to extend its reach. Fortunately, communities can democratize and relocalize their economy to bypass the corporate bottleneck, and we certainly saw this happen across the foodshed. With a 60% jump in Food Bank visits as unemployment rates skyrocketed, the Wisconsin Hunger Taskforce earmarked over \$1 million in scarce funds toward buying milk direct from family farmers to feed those in need while Second Harvest set up an "Adopt a Cow" donation program to help fill their milk gap. Sassy Cow Creamery in Portage County even installed a fridge outside their door so that anyone that lacked milk could help themselves. So-called "Freedges" are popping up in communities all across the U.S. to provide donated food to those in need - in New York City there are over 60 now installed on public side walks and available round the clock thanks to volunteers with the anarchist collective, A New World in Our Hearts. When not demanding justice for Breonna Taylor, who was shot dead by Louisville police in her own home on March 13th, family farmers and local food activists behind New Roots have been expanding their Fresh Stop Markets to get more healthy produce to low income folks in their community.

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**The Chefs are Stepping Up**  
Chefs are also stepping up to address Pandemic food insecurity while also tackling systemic inequality, transforming their restaurants into volunteer community kitchens. In Chicago, Chef Roberto Perez of Urban Pilon, Chef Fresh Roberson of Fresher Together, Chef Karla Morales of Amor y Sofrito and Chef Kwamena of the Let Us Breathe Collective have become local pillars of the Everybody Eats Mutual-Aid Meals program, supported by the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization. In Minneapolis, when the Gatherings Cafe was forced to close in March due to the Pandemic, it was taken over by native chefs and started delivering meals to elders in the Twin Cities area, featuring delicious indigenous ingredients. According to Brian Yazzis, who is also serving up native food to water protectors during the Standing Rock protest, the food is medicine. Adrian Lipscomb, owner of the Uptown Cafe in La Crosse, WI, launched her own 40 Acres and a Mule Project in March to help re-establish the tradition of African-American farming in the Driftless Region of WI, which in the 19th Century hosted hundreds of black settlers that had moved north with hopes for a bright new life after the Civil War. As of Sept. 2020 this GoFundMe campaign had raised nearly \$130,000 to acquire land for a just transition toward a more diverse agriculture and greater Food Sovereignty.

### **Grassroots Campaigns Emerge**

With millions of unemployed renters facing eviction (and farmers confronting foreclosure), other groups have also taken up the challenge to redistribute and decommodify land and shelter. Grassroots campaigns against speculative land grabbing are gaining steam. In Sept.

the Orange County, CA Employees Retirement System (OCERS) decided to divest \$64 million from the UBS AgriVest Farmland Fund, while students, staff, and faculty at many colleges across the U.S. are confronting TIAA - one of the largest pension funds and land owners in the world - on the same issue. Homeless advocates, who have been occupying fifty vacant publicly owned properties in Philadelphia for months, just declared victory as the city agreed to transfer the homes to a community land trust under control of Philadelphia Housing Action. Immigrant farmers (90% are women) with the Somali Banta Community Association recently acquired a 99 year lease to a 107 acre plot in Lewiston, Maine thanks to the Agrarian Trust, with similar "Agrarian Commons" efforts underway cross ten states putting 2,400 acres into the hands of marginalized farmer. On the Menominee Reservation in northern WI, the nation wide tiny homes movement is gaining fresh momentum by offering a safe transition for those recovering from domestic violence and/or substance abuse, with a unique indigenous twist - all the building materials are provided by the Tribe's own communal lumber operation, drawing from forest managed under the Seventh Generation Principle.

### **Solidarity During the Pandemic**

Even some usually "quiet" people have demonstrated amazing solidarity with this moment. When Amish in Sugarcreek, Ohio heard in April from the Cleveland Clinic that there was a dangerous shortage of protective equipment at the hospital, they organized a sewing frolic and within two days produced 12,000 face masks for essential healthcare workers. Mennonite farmers were so upset by the May 25th police mur-

der of George Floyd that they travelled to Minneapolis to participate in the Black Lives Matter Protests. When news reached Ireland in March that native reservation in the southwest had become one of the worst Pandemic "hot spots" in the U.S. over half a million dollars was donated by residents of the Emerald Isle to the Navajo and Hopi Families COVID 19 Relief Fund. Apparently, the Irish had not forgotten the generous \$170 donation that the Choctaw Nation had made to victims of the Irish Potato Famine way back in 1847. This was reminiscent of the indigenous Sami delegation visit to Standing Rock, ND back in 2016 and their subsequent grassroots campaign that forced the Norwegian State Pension Fund to divest \$58 million from the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).

### **Don't Fall to "Divide & Rule" Tactics**

Now is not the time to fall victim to the weary "divide and rule" tactics of those who claim to have power over the rest of us. Whether you are supporting food sovereignty re-efforts to hold police accountable and shift more public funds to vital social services; whether you are pushing to end gerrymandering and resist voter suppression leading up to this election and beyond; whether you are preparing to join the future protests against extreme fossil fuel extractions schemes and taking other actions in support of climate justice; whether you re supporting food sovereignty effort to reclaim food as a basic human right and not leave it in the hands of the hunger industrial complex there is welcome home for you in the growing Solidarity Movement. And if you choose to join us, you may also find many old and new friends and allies along this high road to a better world.