



Highlighting Agroecology

As a member of La Via Campesina, the National Family Farm Coalition encourages and promotes the practice of agroecology — a way of life that honors traditional knowledge for growing and harvesting food while building an economy based on sustainability and reciprocity. Immediately following NFFC's winter meeting, board president Ben Burkett and Julie Wheeler (Missouri Rural Crisis Center youth farmer) went to Florida to participate in the first US-based agroecology encounter, or *encuentro*. Blain Snipstal, Via Campesina youth leader and farmer, helped to plan and lead the *encuentro*, which he describes below.

Campesino—a–Campesino Agroecology Encounter

Blain Snipstal

From 12-16 February in Fellsmere and Homestead, Florida, the Farmworkers Association of Florida, in partnership with the Rural Coalition, hosted the first Agroecology Encounter in the U.S. and for the La Via Campesina North American Region (Mexico, United States and Canada). This *Encuentro* marked the culmination of several years of collaboration and exchanges among some U.S. members of La Via Campesina's' North American Region, the Farmworker Association of Florida (La Asociación Campesina de Florida / Asosiyasyon Travayè Latè nan Florid), along with the Rural Coalition (Coalición Rural) and several U.S. and international allies, notably the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil. The US Food Sovereignty Alliance also provided financial support.

The *Encuentro* served as a catalyst to lay the foundation for us to build a strong peasant-based agroecology process across North America. It will link to the struggles of our international brothers and sisters, inspiring local communities and allies alike with practical examples of the transformation needed to heal Mother Earth and confront the destruction caused by capitalist industrial agriculture.



Juan Concho, FWWF, discusses soil health.
Holly Baker photo.

The purpose of the *Encuentro* was to provide an inviting, inclusive space for women, youth, elders, and families from farming communities, from within the U.S. and internationally, to share and learn from each other about agroecology, food sovereignty, and social transformation. A creative and collective space, using *misticas*, cultural events, our cultural roots and traditions, workshops, discussions and debates was created to guarantee an authentic social movement experience of agroecology.

We structured the internal dynamics of the events into three main categories – Political Training, Agro-ecological Training, and Cultural Expression. Peer-led workshops were offered to transfer practical knowledge for sustainably cultivating organic produce while healing and enriching the soil. These included topics such as natural pest, disease and nutrient control; natural, organic, plant-based fertilization techniques; and companion planting and polyculture. There were also many workshops and small group opportunities for political and social discussions in which community members and allies shared perspectives on the local, regional and international contexts of exploitation, destruction, poverty, and hunger created and maintained by the dominant model of corporate controlled agriculture and food production. Together we explored ways that a social-political movement can promote agroecology, establish and expand worker-controlled cooperatives, and build community gardens to demonstrate a successful alternative to conventional agriculture across the North American region.

This *Encuentro* has strengthened our commitment to, and our belief in, agroecology as a transformative process, and as a key pillar in building food sovereignty while healing and protecting Mother Earth. It has also strengthened our confidence in collective work as the foundation for social, economic, and ecological transformation. As the culmination of a multi-year process, it is the inspirational beginning of the next phase to advance building agroecology and food sovereignty regionally. *(cont. p. 7)*

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Family Farm Agenda Spring 2015

The Family Farm Agenda is published three times annually by the National Family Farm Coalition, a nonprofit providing a voice for grassroots groups on farm, food, trade and rural economic issues to ensure fair prices for family farmers and fishers, safe and healthy food, and vibrant, environmentally sound rural communities here and around the world.

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NHAF Farmers Fighting Drought in California — NFFC Interviews Chukou Thao

Tom Dermody (NFFC intern): What is the biggest challenge that National Hmong American Farmers, Inc., is facing right now?

Chukou Thao (NHAF executive director): Drought — 2014 was the fourth consecutive year, and a lot of our farmers hit rock-bottom. We finally had rain in November and December which led to erosion problems in January, and still in no way can make up for all the water we've been forced to pump in recent years.

TD: Did you have USDA assistance to drill wells?

CT: Wells drilled by small scale farmers simply aren't reaching far enough to tap groundwater. Even if farmers have a decent amount of money, drilling companies are so overburdened they often can't come for several days, and during certain times of year this can endanger entire crops. Socially disadvantaged farmers are rent-dependent, and drought has made it nearly impossible for them to secure enough to pay rent, which promotes land grabs in the Valley. *(cont. p. 4)*

Organic Farmers Don't Want or Need A Checkoff

Jim Goodman, Family Farm Defenders

The "organic industry", represented by the Organic Trade Association (OTA), wants to make some money, supposedly for promoting organic food in the marketplace and for more research related to organic farming. So the go-to place is the paycheck of organic farmers.

Promoting organic food is good, so is more funding for organic research, which has always been the ugly stepchild of conventional agricultural research, but a national checkoff on organic producers to raise money for these efforts is not the solution. Since a checkoff would be operated through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), any comparison and claims that organic food is superior to conventional food would not be allowed — that is a fact.

It makes more sense to let processors promote their own brands with their own money instead of jumping on the sweating backs of farmers.

As for research, since a checkoff would be placed on all organic commodities (I hate calling organic food 'commodities' because it is food, not a profit tool for industry), from apples to eggs, meat to milk, who would have more voice in using that research money — organic giant Dairy or a farmer with two acres and hoop house? How about getting a percentage share of federal agricultural research dollars and dedicate it to organic research? USDA knows what percentage of food production is organic — that seems like a good percentage, to start.

From my experience with the dairy checkoff (remember the milk mustache ads?) it did not sell more product or raise farm income, and most consumers viewed the ads as little more than silly. Since the dairy checkoff was set up in 1983, per capita consumption has steadily dropped. All farmers did was give their money to an already bloated dairy industry that was more concerned about paying outrageous salaries to executives than it was about farmers' profitability.

Commodity checkoffs were never intended to increase the profitability of the farmer, although farmers were led to believe that. Checkoffs, paid by farmers, are put in place because their paychecks are an easy target, an easy source of funding for the industry to use as it sees fit. The beauty of it, to industry, is that the farmers have no voice and are required by law to pay.

Family Farmers Seek A Level Playing Field, Not Free Trade Deals

Betsy Garrold, Food for Maine's Future

[In a Feb. 24 Bangor Daily News Op-Ed](#), Virginia Manuel, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development state director for Maine, stated that rural economies needed "trade promotion authority" in order to "compete on a level playing field" when it comes to international trade and export of U.S.-grown food and manufactured goods. As the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Central American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization have proven, this is pretty far from the facts on the ground — unless your idea of a level playing field is one that is dirty, polluted and economically ravaged.

The background for this discussion is the impending abdication of Congress of its constitutional authority to oversee all foreign trade deals. Trade Promotion Authority, also called Fast Track, would give President Barack Obama overarching authority to sign trade deals with little congressional oversight, something a constitutional scholar such as himself should know is not at all what our founders had in mind.

What does this mean for small farmers? We know about the devastation of the manufacturing base in the American Midwest after the above mentioned trade deals took effect. Companies scurried to move their plants to places with lower standards of living, loose or non-existent environmental protections and no history of organized labor protecting poorly paid workers. If this is what we want for our small family farms, then by all means let's sign the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, both of which, like NAFTA and CAFTA, [gut our own sovereign courts' ability](#) to defend our soil, water, air and workers from abusive lawsuits brought by multinational corporations. These lawsuits are not decided in a U.S. court of law but by an international tribunal composed of three judges looking only at the trade rules for their decision.

In a May 2013 article on food imports to the U.S., [Public Citizen's trade watchdog stated](#), "Smaller-scale U.S. family farms have been hardest hit by the import influx caused by deals like NAFTA and the WTO. About 170,000 small U.S. family farms have gone under since NAFTA and the WTO took effect, a 21 percent decrease in the total number. After the WTO required elimination of various U.S. price support and supply management policies, small farmers were also hard-pressed to survive the increasing year-to-year volatility in prices paid for commodities, making investment and planning more difficult than before the WTO." The National Family Farm Coalition is watching these trade deals closely and has reported on the Obama administration's aggressive push for Fast Track trade authority.

Small farmers across the country are organizing to tell Congress that what may be good for big agribusiness firms is definitely not good for struggling, small family farms across the country. Here in Maine we are fortunate to have a young, vibrant group of farmers who are working to grow food, rebuild the local food infrastructure and feed the people of Maine. Their livelihood does not depend on exports, but they are subject to the same vagaries that affect small-scale farmers everywhere. If the market becomes flooded with cheap imported food of questionable quality, they may well find it impossible to compete and will leave the land, just as countless others have been forced to do from Iowa to Chiapas.

Again from Public Citizen, "U.S. corn exports to Mexico in the three years after NAFTA soared 377 percent above the level in the three years before the deal. In 2013, the United States exported 26 times as much corn to Mexico as before NAFTA. But when the flood of U.S. corn in Mexico caused corn prices to plummet 66 percent for Mexican farmers, 2.5 million farmers and agricultural workers in Mexico lost their livelihoods, many of whom resorted to migration. In NAFTA's first seven years, the annual number of people emigrating from Mexico to the United States more than doubled." Talk about unintended consequences.

The same thing would happen to Maine growers as cheap and questionable "organic" food floods the market from China. We must protect our family farms and help them grow their businesses to keep the rural economy growing and supporting all the people who live and work in towns and villages across the state and the nation.

TPP and Fast Track Update: April 18 — National Day of Action

On March 25, WikiLeaks released a draft text of the TPP's 'Investment Chapter', which provides stark warnings about the dangers of "trade" negotiations occurring without press, public or policymaker oversight. It reveals that TPP negotiators have agreed to many radical terms that would give foreign investors rights unavailable to domestic firms or unsupported by domestic law.

This document serves as a reminder of how vital stopping TPA, also known as "fast track" authority, will be in the coming months. NFFC, as part of the Citizens Trade Campaign, will continue to fight at the federal level, but it is just as important to keep the fight going at the state level. NFFC encourages all our member groups to participate in the National Day of Action, occurring on April 18. If possible, schedule a meeting with your representatives over the Easter/Passover recess. We now have the document proving that TPP is far from a "good deal", and our elected officials need to hear that message loudly from their constituents. You may read the TPP chapter [here](#). Public Citizen has provided an analysis of the draft which you may read by clicking [this link](#). You may also get the most up to date information on National Day of Action events by signing up at <http://bit.ly/1EKig4g>.

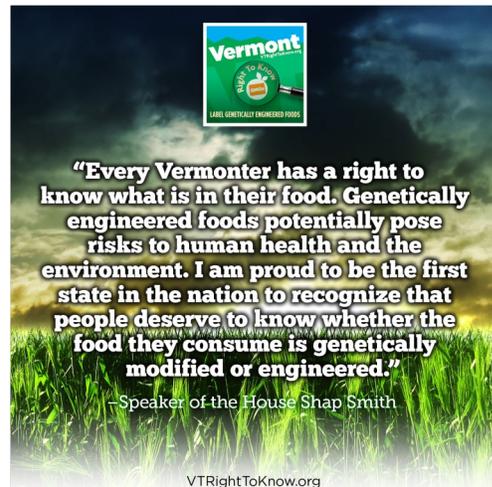
Water Quality and GMO Labeling Top NOFA-VT Priorities

Maddie Monty, Northeast Organic Farming Association –Vermont

If there's one policy issue that has been making waves in Vermont's farming community in early 2015, it is water quality. In his inaugural address, Governor Peter Shumlin called for changes to common agricultural practices and stricter enforcement of water quality regulations. These changes would center on accessing Vermont's Current Use Program, which would be based off compliance with accepted agricultural practices and water quality regulations. Organic farmers are well prepared for these proposed changes, as many of these practices are already being utilized on their farms. These regulations will provide our organic farmers with a unique opportunity to be leaders on water quality issues from whom fellow family farmers countrywide can draw strength in their quest to protect our shared natural resources.

Vermont's GMO labeling law is slated to take effect in 2016, and our Attorney General is working busily to craft rules to guide its implementation and enforcement. The AG has requested public comment on the process; NOFA-VT and other members of Vermont Right to Know Coalition are providing comments to ensure that the law we fought so hard for comes to fruition. The AG is also busy defending the law against a suit brought by corporate interests.

Additionally, Vermont's GMO labeling law is under threat at the federal level via the DARK Act (Denying Americans the Right to Know). This bill, introduced by Rep. Pompeo (R-KS), is officially called the Safe and Accurate Labeling Act, but it prevents states from passing legislation to label GMOs. Although the DARK Act has received little support on Capitol Hill so far, we hope NFFC and fellow members will remain vigilant with us to ensure that all states retain the right to label GMOs in their food.



NHAF Farmers Fighting Drought in California — Interview with Chukou Thao

Cont. from p. 2

Chukou Thao: Big Ag also secures — grabs — water more readily. Renters are enticed by leasing premiums, and as the drought worsened, landowners relied on more "verbal contracts", which they've sometimes tried to dissolve. Recently, NHAF was forced to threaten a land owner with litigation before they would agree to abide by a verbal contract for the remainder of the year. This is a disturbing and increasing trend for Hmong farmers, who often rely on farming as their primary and sole source of income.

Tom Dermody: Are you supporting specific legislation?

CT: Nothing effective has been proposed at the state level. The urban areas are facing greater "voluntary" measures, while farmers are taking more than their fair share of the hardship. The feds are just as unhelpful; poor interstate water management is partially to blame. Crop insurance is not offered for the majority of crops Hmong farmers grow, or is simply unaffordable. USDA Rural Development is not effectively targeting farmers, but instead, directs funds to constructing homes and supporting infrastructure.

TD: What positive activities have helped or encouraged NHAF farmers?

CT: The Farm to School Program has been an empowering success for Fresno communities. From a cultural standpoint this program is essential: parents are more engaged with their children's schools, and young people now prefer apples to candy or chips, which is changing consumer culture slowly, but surely, at the grassroots level. We're hoping area schools will transition from classroom demonstration programs to community gardens in the near future. Having EBT access at the farmers market has been rewarding for farmers and community members, which we plan to highlight whenever regional SNAP director, Dennis Stewart, visits our operation. It touches so many lives in a positive way, and diversifies local commodity options that are culturally appropriate. The EBT payment is satisfactory, too; it covers or exceeds the cost of production.

TD: Aren't you holding your annual meeting in Fresno soon?

CT: We'll hold our sixth annual meeting on April 30, focusing on ways to support socially disadvantaged farmers by connecting our worlds and growing our available resources. Farmers from Laos and South Korea will join us, as well a group of Latina/Latino farmers. This will also be a kickoff to forming a rainbow coalition to provide a powerful voice for small-scale, socially disadvantaged farmers. All NFFC members would be welcome!

From the President

Ben Burkett, Federation of Southern Cooperatives

"2015 is gonna be a good year!" Several members, including me, stated that at NFFC's winter board meeting in DC. It seems the time is ripe for everyone to come together to make real and lasting change in our food and agriculture system.

The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund held its annual Small Farmers Conference in early February. More than 100 farmers, landowners and advocates gathered in Albany for USDA workshops and to hear Georgia native, Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden, present the keynote address. We also welcomed Cornelius Blanding as the Federation's new executive director, as Ralph Paige has stepped down after 38 years. Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA) noted that his legacy would "serve the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/LAF well for years to come."

NFFC had a very good board meeting this year, with great meeting space and facilitation, delicious food, and some new faces, including two participating by Skype. We confirmed several concrete steps for our campaigns, and some committees have already met by conference calls. We are still opposing fast track, the TPP and T-TIP, as well as any new herbicide-resistant GMOs. We are also advocating for a GMO labeling law that serves the consumer, not the biotech industry; for the enforcement of legislation that protects our waterways; and for policies that keep family farmers farming. Raising sustainable funds for the coalition and for all our member groups will receive more focus this year, as well.

After the winter board meeting Julie Wheeler and I traveled to Florida to represent NFFC at the first Agroecology Encounter in the US. It was an excellent opportunity to share stories and practical knowledge to help us focus on agroecology as a path toward social and political change. I hope we can sustain the connections made there to energize us for the work ahead. The Federation would like to host the next encounter in Alabama or Mississippi.

The Mississippi Association of Cooperatives held its 43rd annual meeting in Brandon, MS, last month. It was a very successful meeting, with sixty members from seven different cooperatives attending.

NFFC is participating in several events this year, which are listed in the calendar on the back page. I am especially looking forward to traveling to Chicago for Family Farm Defenders' action at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange on April 17.

We ask all our member organizations to participate on at least one issue committee, and to keep in touch through their legislative updates, newsletter articles, and event information. For this to be a good year, we all have a lot to do!



Rural Vermont Launches 30th Anniversary Series

Mollie Willis, Rural Vermont

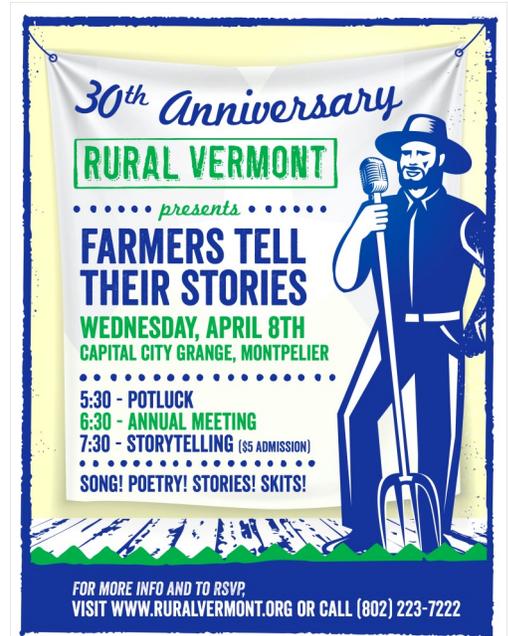
To honor a rich and gutsy thirty-year history, and to connect the dots between good public policy and good food, Rural Vermont is launching a year-long "[Farmers Tell Their Stories](#)" series. The first event is on Wednesday, April 8, at the [Capital City Grange](#), located at 6612 Route 12 South on the Montpelier/Berlin line. Farmers and friends will take the stage and present a variety show featuring their personal and collective experiences through story, poetry, song, and skits!

Preceding the storytelling will be a potluck at 5:30 and Rural Vermont's Annual Meeting at 6:30. The storytelling program begins at 7:30 and there is a \$5 admission for this portion of the event. Whether you've been a Rural Vermont member since the beginning or you're hearing about the organization for the very first time, we look forward to sharing this special event with you! Everyone is welcome.

The storytelling will honor some of the people and accomplishments that make up Rural Vermont's long history, as well as expose the dark underside of the local food movement and offer solutions for creating a fair food system that truly represents and supports the needs and interests of *all* Vermonters. The program will provide plenty of food for thought, along with humor, hope, inspiration, and an invitation for everyone to play a role in defining Rural Vermont's *next* thirty years.

The audience will learn about Rural Vermont's earliest days from the organization's founder and current Senator Anthony Pollina, then be transported to 2006 with Board Member Emeritus Dexter Randall and previous director Amy Shollenberger for a high-stakes vote during one of Rural Vermont's most contentious campaigns. Someday Farm's Mara Hearst & Maria Reade will talk turkey (and chicken) about the challenges their farm faces as a result of Vermont's poultry law, and how this experience is inspiring them to take action. Folks can expect to be both entertained and shocked when some of the current-day issues stifling our farmers and our food system are highlighted in an original song composed by farmer-musician Jonathan Falby and a skit written and performed by farmer-puppeteer Zach Brandau. And we'll be reminded of the triumphs and struggles that have defined Rural Vermont through a poem performed by farmer-lyrical artist Jeffrey "Frey" Ellis and based on content provided by the Rural Vermont community.

To learn more about Rural Vermont and their farmer stories, or to RSVP to their event, visit <http://www.ruralvermont.org/>.



You Can't Be Neutral in a Moving Sea

Shira Tiffany, Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance

In 2014 I applied to be a JOIN [Fellow](#) to gain skills to facilitate communities accessing their power. Two years earlier at Garfield School in Northern California I tutored Leonardo, a 4th grade student who immigrated with his mother from Michoacán, Mexico, and who never ate school lunch. He showed me the hamburger on a soggy white bun, moist from the condensation inside the microwaved plastic wrapper with a list of ingredients neither he nor I could pronounce and explained that it wasn't "real food". The industrial food system feeding Leonardo and millions of children like him is based on practices of economic and environmental injustice, profiting from unfair and dangerous working conditions in slaughterhouses, chemical intensive farming, and unhealthy animals treated with antibiotics on factory farms.

Garfield is one of three schools in the district where all students receive free lunch because many of them live below the federal poverty level. As a member of the American public, I am fueling this food system with my taxpayer dollars. Howard Zinn's quote, "You can't be neutral on a moving train," inspires me to honor my responsibility to work to change even huge seemingly immovable systems. We have the same amount of power and responsibility for serving this burger to Leonardo as his mother.

I knew and cared about corporate interests exploiting the food system. But how is the fight of family fishermen and fishworkers part of that broader story? I didn't know many stories of family fishermen and fishworkers or of corporate interests in the seafood supply chain. My intuition told me that hearing these stories would spark that same sense of complicity in an unjust system.

In the past four months as a community organizer with NAMA, my experiences have answered my question about why the struggle of family fishermen, fishworkers, and allies matters to me. And why it might matter to you.

The same issues of economic and environmental justice that plague agriculture are at the core of the seafood industry. Corporate interest is pushing for catch share policies which privatize the ocean and favor high-volume, low-value fishing (*cont. p.7*)

Campesino-a-Campesino Encuentro Encounter

Cont. from p. 1

Lastly, we organized ourselves into small groups to allow for deeper and greater participation of all present. We asked each group to develop a slogan for the encounter, and many powerful themes evolved through this process. To end, I will use the slogan developed by the small group, Che Guevara: **"AGROECOLOGY! FOR THE PEOPLE, FOR LIFE, FOREVER!"**



Cassia Figueiredo-Bechara of the MST leading a mística.
Photo by Holly Baker.



Participants who completed the Encuentro. Photo by Holly Baker.

You Can't Be Neutral in a Moving Sea

Cont. from p. 6

at the expense of marine ecology and access for community-based fishermen. Walmart, through the [Walton Family Foundation](#), has spent over \$20 million promoting catch shares. Walmart supports political policies supporting these practices because they profit from selling the final product. Seafood is part of the same industrial food system we pay into to feed Leonardo.

A couple of months ago I sat in a circle of 25 folks whose previously bundled faces were now brightly lit in Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores' (CCT) office in New Bedford, MA. Scanning the circle I recognized a few faces from an earlier gathering of fishermen, fishworkers, and student allies, but didn't see Antonia, a worker in a fish processing plant, who had quietly shared her story a few weeks earlier.

Antonia had immigrated to the US and was supporting her children back home by working 100 hours a week at \$8/hour, with no overtime. She and her co-workers are fighting for fair and safe working conditions. Their campaign, Pescando Justicia/Fishing for Justice, coordinated by CCT, had just taken action against NORPEL (Northern Pelagic Group LLC) and we were at CCT's office to debrief. Some workers had attempted to negotiate with NORPEL management while other workers and allies paced the sidewalk of Fish Island [chanting](#), "El pueblo unido jamás será vencido. The people united will never be defeated." I learned that four workers had been fired that night for demonstrating and that Antonia was taken to the emergency room after she was shoved by the secretary as she walked off the job.

In the opposite corner of our CCT circle sat Drew Fournier, a UMass-Amherst student and Real Food Challenge advocate collaborating with fishermen and fishworkers to determine a sustainable seafood purchasing policy for UMass Amherst's administration. This circle was an answer to my question. A meaningful chapter in the story of food justice just illuminated for me what I had initially learned in the Garfield cafeteria. This circle was part of the larger story of fishermen, fishworkers and allies fighting for food access, and economic and environmental justice!



Workers at fish processing plant NORPEL and members of Pescando Justicia/Fishing for Justice Campaign. Shira Tiffany photo.

CFA – Breaking Beans and Making Waves

Cara Meyer, Community Farm Alliance

With any big, marked occasion comes a tendency to look back at where you've been and forward toward where you might go. Community Farm Alliance is proud to be celebrating its 30th anniversary advocating for Kentucky's family farms, and we're surely evaluating our past while sculpting our future.

It was with this sentiment that we decided to capture our community's experiences surrounding local food and farming in Eastern Kentucky. Our goal was to document the stories of people using these tools as building blocks to a bright future in the mountains. The new initiative would be called Breaking Beans: The Appalachian Food Story Project.



Miner Shane Lucas seeks new livelihood as a family farmer in central Kentucky.
Angela Mullins photo

Over the past six months, five community fellows collected 40-plus stories from people working along the food value chain. Producers, market managers, restaurant owners – you can find a little bit of everyone in the Breaking Beans collection. With published pieces reaching an average of 2,000 people each, Breaking Beans is making big waves.

We learned a lot in the first phase of our story-telling experiment. Each of our Fellows came away with long lists of prospective interviewees — far more than they possibly had time to interview. This speaks to the number of people already working in the food value chain and the potential for more to join this work.

One particular story featuring farmer, miner, and CFA Board Member, Shane Lucas, reached approximately 12,000 people! This story's success reflects the mood of the area – people are looking for (and finding!) ways to stay, even if coal moves out.

This spring, Breaking Beans's second phase begins. Two of our fellows will continue collecting new stories, exploring more creative techniques and examining additional elements of our food system. Their work will infuse food and farming more deeply into the conversation about Appalachia's future.

During this next stage, we are looking to team up with other people, organizations and businesses working in the Eastern Kentucky region. We're currently pursuing alliances and fostering partnerships, so get in touch if you've got an idea for a Breaking Beans collaboration utilizing any of the goals mentioned above.

If you haven't already, take a look at the work of our Breaking Beans Fellows: Karyn Knecht, Angela Hatton Mullins, Sister Kathy Curtis, Maggie Bowling, and Mark W. Kidd (<http://cfaky.org/tag/breaking-beans/>). Keep your eyes out for the release of more stories in the upcoming weeks and months, through which we'll continue utilizing our rich history to build a brilliant future.

Reflections on My First Four Weeks

Erika Inwald

As some of you may know, I am the new Emerson Hunger Fellow who will work with NFFC until August. Although I just started on March 4, I have already learned a lot about the organization and about the policy-making process.

An early realization was that there is an endless amount of information to read about our issues. Just when I think I have read everything available about a subject, I learn about another article. From GMOs to TPP and TTIP to water safety, much of my time has been focused on tracking these important issues so NFFC can stay informed to take appropriate action. This is one task that I will tackle throughout my time here.

Besides the research and reading, I have had the opportunity to attend quite a few Senate and House hearings. My two main observations so far are: Congress is not all bad, and Big Ag is very active in DC.

Before coming to DC I had a negative view of Congress, thinking that no legislators shared my views and that they ignored requests to make decisions that actually helped our communities. Throughout the hearings, though, I learned that Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) really wants to help and empower people, and that Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) is very critical of trade agreements.

My second observation is less positive. Big Ag had such a large presence at some of the hearings. The Waters of the U.S. hearing had a panel with Farm Bureau and National Cattlemen's Beef Association representatives, and many Farm Bureau supporters in the audience. Sadly, many people think that Farm Bureau speaks for all farmers, but there are many farmers who do not share their ideology and who need their voices heard. I am really excited to help the NFFC in any way I can to make sure that the public and our government representatives hear these voices.



Erika Inwald at recent DC event



Director's Take

Katherine Ozer

A new Congress came to town in early January pledging to get things done, in contrast to years of political gridlock. The House and Senate agriculture committees have held several hearings, primarily blasting USDA and EPA on their actions on trade, COOL, GMOs and Clean Water rules. The appropriations committees held annual hearings to review the budget requests submitted to Congress in early February. In late March, just before the congressional recess, a budget resolution was passed with the House proposing cuts of \$1 billion from the Farm Bill over 10 years. Although a relatively small amount — \$100 million per year — this would require the House Agriculture Committee to re-open the Farm Bill, which could result in major changes. The Senate budget resolution does not assume any changes in the Farm Bill. A conference to negotiate the differences will take place in April, setting the stage for the appropriations process to determine the actual funding levels for discretionary programs. Policy riders could be placed on funds to restrict the ability of USDA and other federal agencies to implement important regulations and functions, such as COOL (country of origin labeling) and the GIPSA (Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration) rules.



Kathy Ozer, Jim Goodman and Betsy Garrold visit Rep. Pingree (center right; D-ME) post-meeting

As Spring comes late to DC, pressure from a broad coalition of grassroots organizations has meant that fast-track (Trade Promotion Authority/TPA) legislation has not yet been introduced. This significant stall reflects bi-partisan opposition to the White House in their advocacy for finalizing the free trade agreements under fast-track. With IATP, NFFC is co-drafting a letter to Congress describing concerns around food sovereignty, pricing, transparency and GMOs. We plan to send this letter by April 10 due to rumblings that fast-track legislation could be introduced mid-April.

The DARK (Denying Americans the Right to Know) Act was introduced by Rep. Pompeo (R-KS) and Rep. Butterfield (D-NC) in mid March. We endorse labeling genetically modified foods but understand that this bill — called the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act — would prevent states from passing their own, more stringent labeling legislation. To show your opposition, sign a petition at <http://www.justlabelit.org/action-center/take-action/>, or contact your legislator (the Capitol switchboard number is 202-224-3121).

Responding to proposed rules during comment periods offered by government agencies enables our members' voices to be heard before rules are implemented. NFFC's Dairy Committee has submitted important comments to USDA on dairy pricing issues and is now considering comments to the government's proposed dietary guidelines, which suggest consuming less meat and dairy without considering the sources of vegetable proteins and grains. We urge everyone to offer comments and concerns before the May 8, 2015 deadline, at <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2015/comments/writeComments.aspx>.

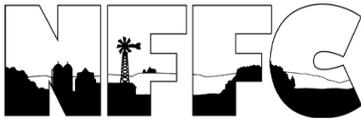
We have not given up efforts to educate Congress - legislators as well as staff - on important issues. Fair competition in selling livestock, particularly freedom from retaliation and retaining county of origin labeling, remains essential, as does the need for non-GMO seeds and labeling for GMO foods. The U.S. should not allow the threat of WTO rulings to dictate our food labeling, food safety or, ultimately, our food sovereignty.

NFFC, IATP and the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment will co-host a briefing on agroecology with Hilal Elvar, Olivier de Schutter's replacement as the UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

Sadly, one of our strongest food sovereignty advocates, Brother David Andrews, passed away in early January. NFFC had worked for many years with Brother Dave in his role as executive director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and at Food and Water Watch. He was instrumental in organizing a UN meeting at which farmers, economists, de Schutter and Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) presented insights on the Right to Food. In early March, NFFC and Food and Water Watch hosted a celebration of Brother Dave's life then shared stories with good food and drink. His kindness and wisdom will be greatly missed.



Brother Dave (holding Family Farm Defenders banner, left) with John Kinsman and others at the WTO negotiations in Seattle



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Index of Topics:

- P. 1 Agroecology
- P. 2 NHAF issues; FFD (Organic Checkoff)
- P. 3 FMF and NFFC Opposing TPA/FTAs
- P. 4 NOFA-VT (GMOs/water); NHAF cont.
- P. 5 President's Note; Board Mtg. Photos
- P. 6 Rural Vermont's 30th; NAMA
- Advocacy
- P. 7 Agroecology cont.; NAMA cont.
- P. 8 CFA's Farmer Stories; EHF review
- P. 9 Director's Update
- P. 10 Reader Request and Calendar

Request to Readers

Please let us know if you would like to discontinue receiving the hard copy of our *Family Farm Agenda* by calling the NFFC office (202.543.5675) or emailing lisa@nffc.net.

You are welcome to receive the newsletter in hard copy or the link by email, but if you care to support the printing and mailing of your newsletter, a donation of \$10 a year would go a long way towards that:

<https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/1910>

Thanks for your interest and support!

-- 2015 Spring-Summer Calendar --

- April 8, Montpelier/Berlin, VT: Rural Vermont launches "Farmers Tell Their Stories"
- April 15, Washington, DC: ROC-United DC action in response to National Restaurant Assoc. meeting
- April 17, Worldwide: International Day of Peasant Struggles
- April 16-17, Chicago, IL: Family Farm Defenders' Food Sovereignty discussion and CME action
- April 23-25, Berkeley, CA: Resource Reform Committee/ US Food Sovereignty Alliance meeting and Occupy event
- April 30, Fresno, CA: NHAF annual meeting
- May 4, Wash., DC: Release of film, *After Winter, Spring*
- June 24-27, San Jose, CA: US Social Forum
- June 25-28, Philadelphia, PA: US Social Forum
- July 15-18, Billings, MT: WORC's Principles of Community Organizing Workshop
- September 15, Pittsboro, NC: RAFI's 3rd annual Crop Hop
- September 19, site TBA: Farm Aid's 30th Anniversary Concert