



This issue is dedicated to the memory and inspiration of
John Kinsman, 1926-2014

Note from the President

Ben Burkett

In February, Daniel Teague, Charles Houston and I represented the Federation of Southern Cooperatives at NFFC's winter meeting, which had a smaller attendance than usual, but lively discussions. I look forward to the opportunity to serve another year as the president of the National Family Farm Coalition, and am also very pleased to welcome the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) into NFFC's family of members.

NFFC has been working with La Via Campesina to promote 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming. I attended the European Union's celebration in Brussels last November, and Kathy Ozer recently attended a conference there to ensure that our voices are heard in the EU-US free trade agreement negotiations. Recently I represented the interests of Canadian and US family farmers in Quebec.

Just as the 2014 farm bill was signed into law, the USDA's agriculture census was released. This year's data reinforced the serious situation in which many farmers find themselves. It is published every five years, and my home state of Mississippi lost more than 3,000 farms in that time, many of which were mid-size farms. We are trying to keep our family farms afloat but have to get the next generation involved for the sake of agriculture.

We also feel deeply the loss of John Kinsman, to whom we are dedicating this newsletter for his efforts to promote food sovereignty and save non-genetically modified seeds.

Farmers become sharecroppers when they cannot save seeds from year to year. The USFSA is releasing a report on April 17 that encourages readers to save and share seeds; we hope this will influence policymakers to protect seeds and help family farmers to remain on their farms.



John and Ben on a farm during the
 2012 regional LVC meeting

Seed Survey and Report

Farmers worldwide face the loss of seeds their families and communities have planted for hundreds or thousands of years. As multinational agribusinesses absorb regional seed companies, they eliminate many non-GMO varieties and close facilities, narrowing options for growers. Furthermore, free trade agreements have forced some farmers to stop growing seeds for non-commodity crops, contributing further to their scarcity. In 2013, the Rights of Mother Earth Work Team of the USFSA (U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance) developed and distributed a survey on saving seeds, which 70 growers from diverse backgrounds and interests answered. The work team compiled the results and responses into a report, for which the goals are to:

- Document cultural traditions and practices related to seeds
- Educate others about keeping seeds and the politics of seeds related to Food Sovereignty
- Debunk the myth that genetically modified seeds will feed the world
- Explore interest in seed banks and a Seed Keepers Network
- Strengthen the Food Sovereignty movement in the United States

The USFSA plans to release the report on April 17th, Via Campesina's International Day of Peasant Solidarity.

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Family Farm Agenda Spring 2014

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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Director's Note

Kathy Ozer, NFFC

As Spring arrives, Winter 2014 will be remembered as one of the most brutal for farmers and fishers across the country. Persistent cold, deep freezes, record snowfall, and the late spring are wreaking havoc for farmers, fishers and their communities.

The long-delayed farm bill was signed into law on February 7. While the Agricultural Act of 2014 fails to establish fair pricing systems for farmers - whether grains, commodities or milk - it does extend and fund critical programs such as Minority Outreach and Education (Section 2501), beginning farmer programs, livestock disaster, and others that start to build local and regional food systems. It cuts SNAP, although far smaller than the House farm bill and also fails to require USDA to convene the dairy pricing hearing as the Senate requested. A victory during the final days of the House and Senate conference was the defeat of efforts to gut the GIPSA provision and Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) - both important wins from past farm bills.

The President's FY 2015 budget, USDA's farm bill implementation, and the appropriations process in Congress determine how provisions in the farm bill impact growers out in the fields. NFFC continues to work with other coalitions and allies to raise issues during the appropriations process and submitted letters to the House and Senate Appropriations committees (<http://nffc.net/index.php/house-approps-2014-letter/>). Efforts to scuttle the COOL law and rescind contract fairness provisions within GIPSA are the highest priority of the NCBA (National Cattlemen's Beef Association) and National Chicken Council, which are using the courts and appropriations process to accomplish this goal. We are coordinating efforts with allies in DC and across the country to ensure that the FY 2015 appropriations bill does not include the appropriations riders of past years. Chris Leonard's expose' on Tyson, The Meat Racket, reaffirms the urgency of change in this system.

Retaining important rules and regulations within the US remains a struggle, and the fight over pending trade agreements and fast-track authority brings these issues into the international arena. There is growing public support for local and regional food systems yet the White House, USDA and many in Congress continue to promote free trade agreements supporting the myth that exports benefit farmers and their communities. The ongoing negotiations around the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP, a.k.a. NAFTA of the Pacific Rim) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP or US-EU agreement) continue to threaten important regulations and food sovereignty. Within the US, the fight to defeat or withhold fast-track authority for the Obama Administration provides the best opportunity to halt the free-trade agenda. TTIP negotiations were held in March in Brussels and will continue in May, likely in Washington, DC. NFFC is part of a strategy with European allies to expose the true costs of a failed trade model and continue to build US farmer and food justice-based opposition to fast-track to hold our members of Congress accountable. These allies have asked to see more active, public, nationwide resistance to the agreement to help bolster their efforts. Any protests you can organize in your community would be of great service to our efforts here in the U.S. and internationally.

The GMO Question

Jim Thomas, Share-Life Farms, www.sharelifefarms.com

There is a lot of debate today about the safety of our food - organic vs. 'conventional', GMO vs. non-GMO. There are strong advocates on all sides, but we rarely hear from someone with first-hand experience of some concerns in this debate.

Born on a farm in the fifties, I started driving tractors almost before starting school during the transition to today's 'conventional' farming. I used to go to the field with a 1941 A John Deere and its two-row front-mounted cultivator to destroy the weeds growing between the rows of corn, which was only about six inches tall. You had to drive so slowly and carefully to avoid covering up the corn; farmers rarely cultivate corn today. We talked about the warning labels on those chemicals as a government requirement because we didn't think they were really that dangerous. When a sprayer tip would stop up I could take it off with my pliers, put it up to my mouth and blow on it as the other farmers did. However, my boss did tell me to stay out of the smoke while burning chemical sacks because he knew of a hog that died after being exposed for just a few minutes.

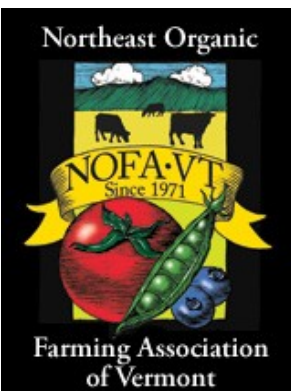
As a newly married young man, I'd finally realized my dream of farming on my own, but after the birth of our first child my wife started experiencing unusual health symptoms; sometimes her legs would shake so badly she had to sit down to keep from falling. Soon afterward, I heard a speaker comment that all life comes directly or indirectly from the soil - if we have sick soils we will have sick plants, animals, and people. I started questioning whether the good Lord really intended for us to poison our environment to succeed as farmers. We began a cross-country search for the cause of my wife's illness. Eventually a clinic in Texas determined that her immune system had been severely damaged, probably from low-level, long-term exposure to farm chemicals. She had driven trucks to the grain elevator for her family's wheat harvesting business and regularly passed orchard farms - known for their heavy pesticide use. While her illness is considered rare we learned that there were thousands of sufferers nationwide with similar backgrounds; one had grown up on an Australian ranch dipping sheep into a solution to deter external parasites, such as lice and ticks.

I am amazed at the government response to reports of chemicals in our food, which often suggests: 'Don't worry; a little bit of poison won't hurt you!' Even applicators trust that the chemicals they spray over fields stay where they dropped them, despite watching dust fly for a quarter mile behind a pickup on a gravel road. Folks likely think this way because they haven't lived with someone whose immune system is so damaged that she cannot live normally in society, but I have. They probably never had to move because a farmer released formaldehyde while disinfecting buildings three miles away. They may have never slept inside a hot tent, a cold mouse-infested bus, or out in the yard just because of their wife's health, or driven someone 75 miles through a snowstorm to a hospital because she couldn't ride in the ambulance, but I have. Maybe if more policymakers had experienced or even witnessed these situations they would have a different opinion on the indiscriminate use of agrochemicals today. Perhaps our focus on finding cures for major diseases would change to finding their causes; we may even discover that a little bit of poison over a long period of time can hurt you. I see some of the same warning signs from GMO consumption that I've experienced from chemical contamination. While we could stop the damage from chemicals by stopping or possibly curtailing their use, I'm not sure that that would resolve the question about GMO safety. A GMO advocate once said that no one had died from eating them; likely no one died from smoking one cigarette but millions have died from their effects. Do we really want to follow the same course, or can we change before it's too late?



Jim, Sr. and Jim, Jr. (r)

Photo Credit: Dan Hemmelgarn



NFFC Announces New Member: NOFA-VT

NFFC is excited to welcome new member NOFA-VT (Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont), a nonprofit association of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system for the benefit of current and future generations. They were founded in Putney in 1971, making it one of the oldest organic farming associations in the United States. NOFA-VT strives to increase the acreage of certified organic land in Vermont while also increasing the access of local organic food to all Vermonters. We look forward to working with them to promote food sovereignty in Vermont and across the US!

Read their blog NOFAvore at <http://nofavt.wordpress.com/>

Young Family Farmer and the North American Youth Collective

Julie Wheeler, La Via Campesina Youth Collective/Missouri Rural Crisis Center

This January La Via Campesina (North American Region) met in Florida and I was lucky enough to attend as NFFC's Youth Delegate. It was an amazing opportunity to meet people and find out about rural struggles across the continent. We were hosted by the Farmworker Association of Florida, a group that represents migrant workers in the state. This conference was life-changing for me through the people met, friends made, and the feeling of solidarity among all involved. So much was learned - it is hard to summarize.

The overarching issues for the region were new trade agreements, the spread of genetically modified crops, pesticide and chemical use, resource grabs, and the rights of migrant workers across the food system. Most, if not all, of these issues are the result of corporate takeovers in our governments and everyday lives. To fight these problems, we must fight the corporations behind them.

In the States, we know about the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in the works that would threaten country of origin labeling, and speed up or require approval of GMO crops in all the countries involved. Similar measures are also being written in Mexico and Canada involving the Pacific nations and the European Union. These are being pushed as a flattening of trade barriers to boost the Gross Domestic Product of all countries involved, when it is more accurately the destruction of consumer information and trade regulation that allows us all to decide what we buy, from whom and where.

Genetically engineered crops have taken over agriculture in the States and Canada, so much so that it is nearly impossible to find any seed in heirloom or organic form. This situation is now looming in Mexico, and being fought tooth and nail with as little success as we have had. This is one more thing that strips peasants and agriculture workers of any sovereignty and makes them slaves of the corporations that hold the patents for all available seed. It takes away our ability to choose our seeds and contributes to a rise in pesticide use which has skyrocketed since the Biotech revolution. Pesticides are now seen by many as necessary to grow crops and make any profit. The looming introduction of crops resistant to 2,4-D and dicamba, a known carcinogen, is dangerous not only to consumers, but to people who live, work, or farm near the sites where these chemicals are used.

Resource grabs are just as widespread, referring to the monopolization of land, water, seeds, and any other resources needed for a community to sustain itself. These have been fought here in Missouri, I know, for several years. I was shocked, however to learn that such exploitation is being fought worldwide!

The plight of the migrant worker, however, was the most upsetting issue that was discussed. It was especially apparent because our hosts were a group of migrant workers who shared their harrowing stories of exploitation with the group. Coming from a conservative Midwest family, I had been blind to the realities to which these workers are subjected.

The youth delegation has not historically been a strong piece of La Via Campesina in North America. We discussed how to strengthen our collective, and communication is key. It is important that the member groups strengthen their youth involvement as well. Having young people involved is important for any group. They are the future; they can bring energy, new perspectives, and ideas to the movement.



Youth Delegation at the North America LVC regional meeting in Florida

Photo Credit: Dan Kretschmar



Mistica banners from the LVC regional meeting



NFFC Announces New Blogger: Jim Goodman

NFFC is pleased to announce Jim Goodman, Family Farm Defenders and Farms Not Arms member, as our guest blogger. Jim has written for CommonDreams, The Cap Times and other progressive publications. He was an IATP Food and Society Fellow and now serves on the Green Shadow Cabinet. He and his wife Rebecca own and manage a 45-cow organic dairy in the driftless region of Wisconsin.



Tribute to John Kinsman, Son of the Soil (1926-2014)

John Peck, Family Farm Defenders

One of the great voices for peace and justice passed away on January 20, 2014. John Kinsman spent his last days at his farm outside Lime Ridge surrounded by family and friends, gazing out the window at a forest he had planted half a century before. Wendell Berry, in his "manifesto" for the Mad Farmer Liberation Front, talks about growing trees that one will never harvest and counting mulched leaves as profit. By this calculus, John Kinsman was among the wisest, wealthiest people I've ever met. Who knows how many seeds he planted, physically and figuratively, over his 87 years?

I first met John as a graduate student back in 1992. He was picketing outside Memorial Union at UW-Madison, warning students about the experimental rBGH-induced ice cream served by Babcock Hall. In this respect, John was among the first to raise the alarm about the insidious dangers of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and his foresight expanded to opposing global free trade, the military industrial complex, factory farming, carbon trading, land grabbing – name the issue, and John was probably involved in some way. Being so deeply self educated, John was often mistaken for a professor and he would invariably laugh about his hard won "B.S." degree.

As a PhD candidate in UW's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences I learned from John how far the once proud land grant college had strayed from its original mission, and joined Family Farm Defenders, the grassroots organization that John had founded. He taught me about La Via Campesina, the largest umbrella organization for farmers, fishers, hunters, gatherers, foresters, herders, and indigenous people in the world. John knew La Via Campesina's seven principles of food sovereignty almost by heart; they guided his activism. He loved to call himself a peasant since he figured it was a label that corporate agribusiness would not co-opt. The 1999 trip to Seattle with John for the WTO meeting was followed by travels to Portugal, Mali, Oaxaca, and Mozambique - they were always an adventure since he would find common ground with kindred spirits, often on a farm tour or over a good meal.

Multicultural organizing was another hallmark of John's social change work, which began with the 1960s civil rights movement. Through Project Self Help and Awareness, John and others brought African American children from the South's violent turmoil to respite with Midwest host families, then arranged trips for rural Wisconsin kids to witness the realities of racial injustice in the South. This solidarity and reciprocity sprang back to life after Hurricane Katrina when Family Farm Defenders



We hold him in our hearts and soul...
The work is harder as we must continue to
walk in his light; his passions is ours to bear.
We love him dearly.
- Savi Horne,
Land Loss Prevention Project





dispatched volunteers, food, medicine and other relief supplies, tractors and implements to Mississippi farmers and their families. A similar FFD "hay lift" brought truckloads of surplus fodder to desperate ranchers in Oklahoma and Texas during the 2011 drought. John's indefatigable "do it yourself" attitude spoke volumes about his belief in the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity.

John won many awards over the years for his inspirational work, building bridges between disparate communities. He won the WNPJ Lifetime Peacemaker award back in 2008 and, with FFD, received the 2010 World Food Sovereignty Prize at the Food, Culture, and Justice Conference. He shared the stage with the likes of Winona La Duke, Willie Nelson, Frances Moore Lappe, Jim Hightower, and Vandana Shiva, and was very involved in the National Family Farm Coalition, Organic Consumers Association, Veterans for Peace, and National Catholic Rural Life Conference. In his later years he promoted food sovereignty through the Fair Trade Neighborhood Project that brought family farmers and urban consumers from different faith communities together. Being a WWII veteran, he also realized that an excellent way to achieve peace was to recognize the therapeutic and regenerative capacity of farming for those who had suffered conflict.



I'm proud to have known John as a friend and as a mentor. He touched thousands of people's lives as a far-sighted pioneer of sustainable agriculture and a globe-trotting advocate of food sovereignty. He taught me how to place culture back into agri-culture; how to see the intrinsic value in the earth and the immense dignity of those who steward nature. For these gifts I will always be grateful.



Honoring Fisheries Activist & Malaysian Airlines Passenger Chandrika Sharma

Brett Tolley, Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance

NAMA was greatly disheartened to hear that Chandrika Sharma, a tireless advocate for the human rights of small-scale fisheries and gender equity, was one of the 239 passengers on the Malaysia Airlines plane that disappeared while crossing the South China Sea.

Before learning the tragic news I was unfamiliar with the full depth of Dr. Sharma's work, but knew of her role as the Executive Secretary for the International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF) and that ICSF's organizational values were an inspiration for NAMA. Sharma was a true Revol-oceanary. I want to pause for a moment to honor some of the ideas she championed.

Human Rights: A human rights framework should be the foundation of fisheries management as it is key to building the base for individual and collective action required for positive change.

Community Access: Small-scale fisheries play a BIG role around the world and account for over half of the globe's wild-caught seafood, yet are continually threatened by industrial fisheries and the gentrification of coastal communities from tourism and industrial development. Fisheries are a model of food production and we must ask ourselves: ***what kind of food production model do we want? It's clear that small-scale fishers and farmers are best poised to produce food most sustainably now and into the future.***

Women Fishers: Women account for more than half of the global workers in small-scale fisheries. Caring for these fisheries requires us to strengthen and protect women's rights to secure access to land and fish resources for processing, trading, and food. We must also look at the social barriers that discriminate against women and prevent us from achieving gender equality.

Dr. Sharma's work was bigger than fishing communities and ocean health. It's about promoting a world with more peace, justice, and human rights for all – something to keep in our minds and hearts especially now.

To offer support to Dr. Sharma's family, her colleague Ramya Rajagopalan has kindly offered to pass on messages to her family [ramya.rajagopalan@gmail.com].



Chandrika Sharma,
International Collective in Support
of Fish Workers

What's wrong with pricing milk at the farm?

Arden Tewksbury, Progressive Agriculture Organization

This article is an excerpt from the full story in the Wisconsin State Farmer newspaper. For the complete op-ed, see the NFFC blog.

Another Farm Bill has passed without any consideration of a new pricing formula for American dairy farmers. While the prices paid to dairymen are escalating some people will say, "See, we don't need a new pricing formula." However, I remember that so many times we have seen milk prices escalate, but a sudden drop of prices always seems to follow. Yes, the people in charge always seem to find a way to have the prices fall. Maybe this time the prices to dairy farmers will stay reasonable for a longer period of time than usual. Certainly with the Class I price in Boston reaching \$26.90 per cwt. (hundred weight) there is a bright side to look at now. However, the milk supply management program contained in the Farm Bill is not sufficient to prevent a possible escalation of milk production.

Senator Collins from Maine and Senator Gillibrand from New York are still trying to hold hearings in an attempt to give dairy farmers an opportunity to present testimony to price milk in a different method. We have always said that the time to develop a new pricing formula is when the prices are at a reasonable level (like now), not after they crash.

It's time for a pricing formula that allows dairy farmers a chance to cover their cost of production, plus a reasonable profit. However, along with a new pricing formula, there must be a milk supply management program that would be implemented *only* when some dairy farmers over-produced more than the real market can bear. If exports of dairy products hold up, then that would be great.

We strongly think the supply management program contained in the Federal Milk Marketing Improvement Act is the way to go. However, it's time that reasonable people sit down to develop a program that is feasible and acceptable, giving credence to the dairy farmers' cost with a supply management program that lets a dairy farmer produce milk while acknowledging that dairy farmers who over-produce milk beyond the needs of the market must pay the fiddler. It might not be our plan, but it's got to be somebody's!

Now is the time to act!

Could Citizen Monitoring Networks Curtail Fracking Operations?

Michael Traugot, Farms Not Arms

Farms Not Arms has been working with the Fukushima Response Campaign and Safecast to set up a global network of citizens monitoring nuclear radiation. After the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Safecast recorded the movement of radiation plumes over Japan by fastening radiation detectors and GPS monitors to cars, sending readings from wherever the cars were driven. The release of their recordings and data compelled the Japanese government to release some of their own data.

The Fukushima Response Campaign [FR] has trained people in northern California to take Geiger counter readings to send to Safecast. An initial radiation plume migrated when Fukushima first exploded in March 2011; the crippled plant continues to pour millions of tons of contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean. So far no large plume of Fukushima radiation has reached the U.S. West Coast but many feel its arrival is inevitable; a small rise in radioactive cesium was noted immediately after the explosions. FR plans to establish a benchmark of existing background radiation and has helped to organize a monitoring network, while Safecast is building a set of global data points. Hopefully this activity will prompt more government intervention as most agencies have been lax in their oversight.

FR and Safecast have also focused on debunking false, mistaken or exaggerated reports of radiation spikes, which erode the credibility of reports exposing the real danger of crippled reactors. As the citizen monitoring network grows, it is highly probable that more radiation sources will be discovered.

A citizen monitoring network might assist the communities dealing with fracking across the U.S. A new documentary, "Fracking the Eagle Ford Shale: Big Oil & Bad Air on the Texas Prairie" was recently released by Inside Climate News, the Center for Public Integrity and The Weather Channel. Residents report incidents of burning eyes, choking, and shortness of breath, but the cause has not been proven due to the lack of hard data on the toxic chemicals released by fracking. Energy companies at fracking operations are supposed to monitor the air, but the report notes that one monitor is 20 miles away from the nearest Eagle Ford site! A citizen monitoring network could establish a 'clean air' baseline then record and analyze emissions to produce a map of exposure data points, making the case for curtailing or shutting down the operations.

Drilling for oil has been known to bring up radioactive material from the depths, and radioactivity tends to collect in oil pipelines. It is possible that elevated radiation levels would be detected around fracking operations, especially in settling ponds for materials returned from thousands of feet below ground. Has anyone checked materials in the collecting ponds of fracking operations for radiation? A Columbus Dispatch story mentioned detecting radiation levels **45 times the federal drinking-water standards** in creek mud near a Pennsylvania fracking wastewater treatment plant. While the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection is inspecting other sites for radiation, Ohio is not.

I am no expert on screening the environment for all toxins, but the technical expertise is available for at least some of them. Citizen monitoring empowers us by making the unknown known, and by educating the public on the real state of the environment in which we live and which we are re-creating all the time.

TIAA-CREF Doubled Investments: Engaging Teachers at Farm to Cafeteria

Rachel Nagin, NFFC

This April, I will present a lightning talk, "Is Your Pension Fund harming your Farm to Cafeteria Program?" at the Farm to Cafeteria Conference in Austin. We hope that this presentation will spread the word, encouraging public employees in the room to take action. We will ask that pension holders shift their accounts into the social choice fund - a simple shift that will, at least, keep our allies and potential allies from inadvertently displacing family farmers. No single pension holder or investor can profit directly from TIAA-CREF's farmland investments as those profits feed into TIAA-CREF's general fund.

Unfortunately, based on their most recent March 2013 report, TIAA-CREF's land investments have doubled globally and now total \$4 billion. In the US, they own land in California (oilseeds, wine grapes, oranges, lemons, almonds, avocados); Illinois (corn, wheat, soy); Mississippi (cotton, corn, rice); Arkansas (cotton, corn, rice); Washington (wheat, grass, apples, wine grapes); Ohio (wheat, corn, soybeans); Wisconsin (fruit, vegetables, cranberries); Indiana (soybeans, wheat, corn); Louisiana (cotton, corn, rice); Florida (oranges); and Oregon (wine grapes).

Stay tuned for updates from the Farm to Cafeteria Conference on the NFFC blog.

Frack Hits—Threats to Groundwater

Jill Morrison, Powder River Basin Resource Council

There's a daunting challenge facing the oil and gas industry: frack hits, which occur when the hydraulic fracturing (fracking) operation from one well intersect another wellbore, causing hundreds to thousands of gallons of oil, gas, water and fracking fluids to spew. [A wellbore is the hole drilled to assist the exploration and recovery of natural resources including oil, gas or water.] These incidents have been documented in New Mexico, Montana, North Dakota, Texas, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Canada, and yes, Wyoming.

In late 2013 Powder River Basin Resource Council contacted the Wyoming Oil and Gas Commission (WOGCC) to assess their experience dealing with frack hits and their regulatory response to them. At the January WOGCC meeting, Supervisor Grant Black confirmed that only one frack hit that resulted in a spill had been reported in Converse County. WOGCC did not levy a fine because it was contained by a berm, and has taken no action to prevent future frack hits.

The online news service *EnergyWire* conducted an investigation which revealed, through reports and seashore interviews, more than 10 cases of frack hits resulting in spills ranging from 300 gallons to 25,700 gallons. Several spills were described as geysers throwing oil and fracking fluids from wells ranging from 3,000 feet to nearly two miles apart.

Frack hits could also result in aquifer contamination, especially when well cement is not up to standards. *EnergyWire's* investigation quoted Michael Beck, a consultant and president of Surface Solutions Inc., "Cement is not 100 percent perfect, it cracks." Experts claim that the risk for groundwater contamination is particularly high when frack hits communicate with older or abandoned wells, propelling liquids by high pressure outside the steel pipe casing of the producing well through a bad cement job, allowing the frack fluid or water brine to enter groundwater aquifers. Beck told *EnergyWire* that aging cement is like "...a layer of bubble gum wrapped around the steel pipe casing... It separates from the wellbore with time, especially in areas where geology is sandy or swampy and provides a pathway to the groundwater aquifer." In New Mexico, an Encana Corporation frack hit resulted in a spill that damaged an adjacent operator's seven older oil wells. Federal regulators in New Mexico now require operators to temporarily shut down producing wells while new wells are being fracked. Operators are installing cast iron plugs to prevent fracking fluid from shooting up the wellbore, damaging older wells. Last year, after more than 20 frack hits in Alberta, Canada, resulted in spills, blowouts, and evacuations, regulations were implemented to reduce the number of frack hits and to protect groundwater resources. One regulation prohibits fracking within 650 feet of a water well, and operators are required to employ various safety measures should a frack hit occur.

Wyoming shares many of Alberta's ingredients for catastrophe: increased fracking; a deep oil boom; and frack jobs clustered close to many older or orphaned wells. We certainly aren't immune from the potential for damage and contamination; with at least one reported case and rumors of other frack hits, Wyoming should implement preventative measures now.



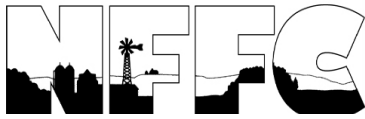
Fracking site in Wyoming
Photo Credit: Jill Morrison

Keeping up with the Appropriators: Monitoring the Farm Bill

Tyler Mac Innis, Emerson Hunger Fellow

In February I joined NFFC as an Emerson National Hunger Fellow. For the last month, I have attended hearings on the Hill to monitor the appropriations process for the USDA's FY15 budget proposal and listening sessions at the USDA on the Farm Bill implementation process. I have learned a lot over the past few weeks and have come to realize that the legislative process is far less glamorous than it sometimes appears outside the Beltway. The appropriations process is often a crucial chance for witnesses to educate appropriators of the importance of critical programming. Unfortunately, I have seen that time used as a chance for politicians to ideologically rail against programs without considering its merits and impacts on the lives of everyday people.

So far it has been difficult to get specifics of the Farm Bill implementation from USDA. They have launched a new website, www.usda.gov/farmbill, which they will update as more information becomes available. We do know that ranchers will be able to apply for disaster assistance beginning April 15 and other programs should begin to roll out over the coming months. Beyond that, USDA has been very hesitant to publicly announce timelines before they have all the details. I plan to provide regular legislative updates on the NFFC blog, and encourage you to keep up with our posts there!



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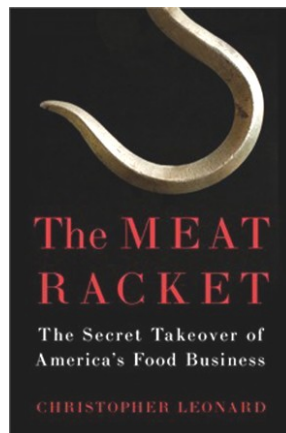
Good Reads

On February 18, Christopher Leonard's new book, [The Meat Racket: The Secret Takeover of America's Food Business](#), was released. Leonard, a former AP agribusiness reporter, investigated the consolidation in the meat industry and the subsequent effects on farmers. Most of the book is a critical expose' on Tyson Foods, using the company as a case study to examine the larger, systemic problems.

Leonard takes an historical view, with his analysis and narrative beginning in 1929. It carries through to present-day industrial scale and contract farming.

[The Meat Racket](#) is on a book tour with the next discussions on April 23 in Kansas City, MO, and April 25 in Saint Louis. He will also be here in DC on May 5 at Busboys and Poets. For more information visit www.themeatracket.com. Leonard has also been interviewed on NPR (links available at the NFFC blog).

Consider asking your local bookseller or library to order copies of the book. It is an excellent read from a strong ally in mainstream media!



-- Calendar --

May 5, 2014 - Chris Leonard, [The Meat Racket](#), at Busboys and Poets, Washington, DC
May 15, 2014 - Rural Vermont Annual Celebration, Chester, VT
May 19-23, 2014 - TAFTA Negotiation Round
May 30-June 1 - Left Forum, NYC
June 12-13 - New England Food Summit in Pawtucket, RI
June 27-29 - WORC: SolWest "Energy for Sustainable Communities," La Grande, OR
July 18-20 - Praxis Project: Roots & Remedies 3: *Connect. Plot. Build. A National Gathering*, Detroit, MI
July 23-26 - WORC: *Principles of Community Organizing Workshop*, Billings, MT
TBD - NFFC Summer Meeting
Let us know about your upcoming events!



Dena, Ben, and Blain (l-r) at the North America LVC regional meeting in Florida