

# NFWM

# Newsletter



## National Farm Worker Ministry

Related to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Standing with Farm Workers  
in the struggle for Justice

Summer 2002 • 438 N. Skinker Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63130 • 314-726-6470 • NFWM@aol.com • www.nfwm.org • Vol. 28, No. 1

## THE MINISTRY IN ACTION...



Fair Food, Not Just Fast Food - Taco Bell (Story: Pg 5)



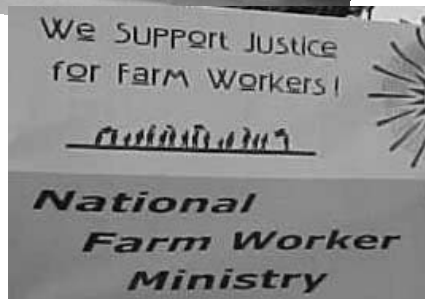
It takes three policemen to deal with one Joan Preiss.



Steve Witte directs Oregon Farm Worker Ministry in support of PCUN. (Story: Pg 2)



NFWM's Mary Dutcher calls for Immigra-



Remembrances of friends who helped build our movement. (Story: Pg 6)



Students take on Mt. Olive in North Carolina. (Story: Pg 6)



NFWM Board members, Maggie Pipes & Gen Cassani, SSND, and UMC Rev. Larry Wayman support PictSweet workers and SB 1736. (Story: Pg 3)

Long-time NFWM Board Members Jeanne Giordano & Olga Sierra Sandman. Jeanne's shirt reads: (front) "You can't scare me" (back) "I was picketing before you were born."



## NORPAC BOYCOTT SUSPENDED !!!

PCUN's ten year boycott of NORPAC, the Willamette Valley food processor, was suspended in February when the union and the company reached an historic agreement and began negotiating. NORPAC products include Santiam, Flav-R-Pac, and Westpac.

Unlike other businesses in Oregon, agricultural employers are legally exempt from having to bargain with unions. The leverage from the boycott, particularly through the campaign on college campuses with food service providers, brought NORPAC

to the table. The agreement is intended to open up organizing on NORPAC member farms.

Even with an agreement in process, no one expects elections to be easy. The Oregon Farm Bureau has provided training for growers and supervisors on anti-union tactics and workers on some farm have been threatened with deportation and violence if they support the union.

Oregon Farm Worker Ministry is working with PCUN on an accompa-

niment program – sending people of faith to visit the fields along with union organizers to help ensure that workers are not intimidated and understand their right to organize.

PCUN is eager to make the process work. "If growers really want labor peace, and they want to work toward making agriculture in Oregon more sustainable and marketable, a partnership has to be built," said Ramon Ramirez, President of PCUN. "The last thing farmers and farm workers need is another protracted fight." ~



Photo by: Lori F. Khamala

### OREGON FARM WORKER MINISTRY

Thanks to the fundraising work done by NFWM Board members Verne and Rosie Cooperrider, Oregon Farm Worker Ministry (OFWM) has been able to employ a staff person for the past two years. Steve Witte assumed the position of OFWM Executive Director in November of 2001 and has been busy ever since.

Steve works to inform and involve faith organizations in Oregon in the farm worker struggle for justice. OFWM works closely with Northwest Tree Planters and Farmworkers United, better known by its Spanish acronym (PCUN), Oregon's only farm worker union. Steve arrived on the job at an exciting time in PCUN's history, with the suspension in February of the ten year boycott of NORPAC and the accompanying legislative struggles.

In support of Oregon's farmworker movement, OFWM has organized marches, held a vigil on the capitol steps in Salem, and stationed an informational booth at the Cinco de Mayo celebration in Portland. It has supported PCUN by helping with the sale of blueberries picked at Nature's Fountain Farm, which works under a PCUN contract. OFWM also brings religious and community leaders to PCUN to accompany organizers in their visits to farm workers and to labor camps.

Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Steve moved to Oregon four years ago. Commenting on his reasons for becoming involved in the farmworker movement, Steve said, "My philosophy is that no one is free as long as others are oppressed. Upon arriving in Oregon and seeing the conditions under which farm workers live, I realized that the issue of farm worker rights is an issue of civil rights, and that the rights of workers are being ignored and abused. From a moral and ethical standpoint, I had to do something." ~

### NFWM OFFICE TO OPEN IN DELANO, CA

Francisca Olvera, OLVM is the newest NFWM staff person. In August, she will open a NFWM office in Delano, CA. Francisca has been serving on the NFWM Board of Directors as the representative for her Order, Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters.



Photo: Lori F. Khamala

Francisca speaks at PictSweet Rally.

Born in Mexico, Francisca has 21 years of experience training and organizing in religious communities and for social change. She has worked with farm workers in Florida and Texas. ~

### NFWM SUPPORT COMMITTEES IN ACTION

NFWM Support Committees are active in Tampa, Pinellas County and Sarasota, FL as well as in Chicago, IL and Orange County, CA. The volunteer run committees hold fundraisers and educational forums, produce newsletters, arrange delegations, find housing for marchers, organize rallies and leaflet at supermarkets. NFWM is grateful for the hard work of the committee chairs, Marvin Mills, Dwight Lawton, Maria McCourt and Tom Miller, along with the committed activists who work with them. For information on upcoming events, such as the Orange County dinner on Sept. 7 or the Sarasota dinner on Oct. 7, on regular meetings, or on starting a committee in your area, contact NFWM. ~



## NFWM BOARD MEMBERS PROTEST PICTSWEET'S ANTI-UNION TACTICS AND CELEBRATE THE SUCCESS OF COASTAL BERRY CONTRACT

### NFWM Board Marches on PictSweet in Ventura, CA

NFWM Board members and staff from around the country began their May Board Meeting with a rally at the PictSweet mushroom plant in Ventura, CA to support the United Farm Workers' (UFW) call for PictSweet management to negotiate a fair contract with its workers.

Demonstrators waved union flags and signs as cars traveled along the highway fronting the plant. We heard speeches from local clergy and NFWM Board members and activists; from the District's Assemblywoman, Hannah Beth Jackson; and from one of the plant's long-time employees, Bauldelio Aguayo.

NFWM Board member Rev. Gene Boutilier led the group in a rousing series of songs and chants as four Board members strode up PictSweet's drive to ask for a meeting with Reuben Franco, plant manager. The delegation was stopped at the gate by a sympathetic security guard but no one from the company would speak with them. After the entire group of demonstrators did an orderly, single-file march up the drive to the gate, Mr. Franco did speak by cell phone to NFWM Director Virginia Nesmith. Board members left the gathering determined to spread the news about the PictSweet boycott and to fight for SB 1736. ~



Photo: Lori F. Khamala

Protesters at PictSweet plant in Ventura, CA, march to plant entrance.

### And in Contrast...

### "Historic" Meeting with Coastal Berry Managers and Farm Workers



Following the PictSweet demonstration, the group convened at the UFW office, where they heard from UFW Regional Director Lauro Barajas, several of the UFW members who pick strawberries for Coastal Berry in Oxnard, and Coastal's Oxnard manager David Murray. Long time NFWM Board members were greatly impressed by the historic occasion, where company management and workers made a joint presentation about what they are each doing to make the union contract work to the benefit of both parties. All were moved by the candid discussion which highlighted the need for a team approach rather than an oppositional one and the importance of mutual respect. ~

*NFWM Board members are always willing to put themselves on the line for farm workers - demonstrating, boycotting, etc. Board members also promote companies that have signed contracts and turned their energies toward making it work. We can't help but wonder why intransigent companies can't learn from the ones who have realized the futility of the fight. Farm workers will persevere in their struggle for justice and we will persevere with them. ~*



### SB 1736 - ACTION NEEDED ON CALIFORNIA LEGISLATION

Since 1975, the year California enacted the Agricultural Labor Relations Act to protect the rights of farm workers to unionize, workers have voted to be represented by the UFW at 428 California farms, yet only 185 contracts have actually been signed -- often after years of strikes, boycotts, and acrimony between the union and company.

A bill now being considered in the CA Assembly would change that. SB 1736 would allow for binding, third-party arbitration of agricul-

tural labor contract negotiations. It would enable employers and farm workers to resolve their differences in a reasonable period of time through a neutral arbitrator and prevent the delaying tactics often used by companies.

The bill has been passed by the CA Senate and by the CA Assembly Labor and Employment Committee. It is hoped that it will be passed by the majority of the Assembly. However Governor Gray Davis has not committed to signing the bill. ~

**ACTION:**

**WRITE GOVERNOR DAVIS**, First Floor, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814. - URGE HIM TO SUPPORT SB 1736.

Contact NFWM for a sample letter or visit the UFW web site at [www.ufw.org](http://www.ufw.org).

### PICTSWEET BOYCOTT SUMMARY

In 1975, workers at the Ventura PictSweet plant voted to be represented by the UFW and received a contract in 1980. In 1987, United Foods purchased the plant and the union contract became null. Under the new ownership, medical insurance and pension benefits have been reduced and wages have increased only marginally.

Workers petitioned for a new contract in 1999; however, the company has not negotiated in good faith and refused UFW offers to go to arbitration. Further, current tactics used by the company are clearly aimed at intimidating the workers who support unionization. In 2000, the UFW called for a boycott of PictSweet mushrooms and frozen vegetables.

## NORTH CAROLINA NEWS

Recent events in North Carolina brought the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) sponsored Mt. Olive Pickle boycott to public attention in a big way during the third anniversary of the boycott's National Week of Action. The week was marked by several well-attended events throughout the state. We held a NFWM-sponsored, inter-denominational Prayer Vigil in Durham and participated in FLOC "Pickle Pickets" at Kroger stores in Raleigh, Durham and Greenville and at an Ingles store in Asheville. The pickets included human billboards, signs, flags, chants, delegation visits to the managers and marching in front of the stores – we were vocal and visible!

The highlight of the week's events was the public announcement by Duke University President Nan Keohane of the University's endorsement of the Mt. Olive boycott. Student activists on the campus were instrumental in convincing Duke to make the endorsement. In her statement, President Keohane said, *"We do not believe that a trademark or product owner can absolve itself of the responsibility for the conditions under which its products are manufactured, when such production is contracted or sub-contracted to another entity."*

Letters to the Editor - Try this in your Town.

In other news, an article in the Durham Herald-Sun about the 100th anniversary of the birth of John Steinbeck and his book, [The Grapes of Wrath](#), prompted NFWM board member Joan Papert Preiss to write a Letter to the Editor about present day farm worker conditions in North Carolina and the Mt. Olive boycott. Mt. Olive CEO, William Bryan responded with his own letter. Several more letters from other readers followed. ~

- Joan Papert Preiss, NFWM Board Member

### MT. OLIVE BOYCOTT SUMMARY

Mt. Olive Pickle Co. is one of the largest producers of pickles in the U.S. Migrant farm workers in North Carolina who harvest cucumbers used by Mt. Olive are fighting for basic rights such as, improved wages, housing and sanitary conditions, and a grievance process that enables them to address concerns without fear of retaliation.

While these workers are employees of the growers contracting with Mt. Olive rather than direct employees of the company, Mt. Olive has the power and responsibility to negotiate a contract, in the same way that the Campbell Soup Company did in the 1980s. Mt. Olive Pickle Company is refusing to negotiate a contract with FLOC and, without coverage under the National Labor Relations Act, the workers have no opportunities under the law to force them to do that. So farm workers have called on the "court of last resort," the support of concerned consumers. An active boycott of Mt. Olive Pickle products has been underway for the past three years.



Finale to the Week of Action for the Mt. Olive Boycott. Raleigh, NC

Photo: Lori F. Khamala

**BOYCOTT  
MT.  
OLIVE!**



Photo: NFWM Student Action

Since joining the NFWM staff in North Carolina last year, **Lori Fernald Khamala** has organized prayer vigils and camp visits, given talks, developed worship resources, and assisted in numerous FLOC activities. Lori graduated from the Quaker affiliated Guilford College, studied in Guadalajara, Mexico and spent a year as an intern with

with Farmworkers. Two of her projects

### SISTER COMMUNITIES & LABOR CAMP VISITS

The Sister Communities Program, a joint project of the NFWM and the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry, partners North Carolina congregations with migrant labor camps to form cross cultural relationships, reduce farm worker isolation, expose church members to farm worker realities and move them to action.

Church delegations (six are signed up already) visit their sister labor camp twice a month during the harvest season. Together they eat traditional meals, visit recreational sites, or just make a trip to the grocery store. The program also provides opportunities to get involved with farm worker issues after the summer. ~

### UUSC WORKCAMPS

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee sponsors "Workcamps" each summer around the country. This year, the UUSC has partnered with farm worker advocacy groups in NC, including NFWM, and UU congregations to hold two farm worker Workcamps in Eastern North Carolina during July. Each week-long workcamp educates an inter-generational group of participants about the history and current situation of NC farm workers, gives participants a complete picture of the complexities of NC agribusiness and provides them with the tools to continue advocacy work upon their return home. Participants also interact directly with workers and engage in a construction project at a labor camp. ~