

# NFWM News & Views

Fall 2011

The National Farm Worker Ministry ~ together with farm workers harvesting justice.

## NFWM Around the World



Oregon

Photos in Oregon by Alexandria Jones

Photo from Oxfam America's "State of Fear"



North Carolina



Photo by CIW



Florida



Photo by Mac Uriata

London



California



Photo by Jocelyn Sherman, UFW



YAYA



# NFWM Supports the United Farm Workers of America

## *California: The Long Road to Victory*

Three summers ago a pregnant teenager, Maria Isabel Vasquez Jimenez, died of heat exhaustion working the fields of California. There were laws on the books meant to protect workers from the heat; but still workers were suffering, still workers were dying.

As UFW President Arturo Rodriguez said at the time, "Unless farm workers can find a more effective way to protect themselves, these needless tragedies will continue."

That more effective way is to work under union contract, free of intimidation. But even the laws of California giving farm workers the right to organize do not ensure that workers can exercise their right. Too many growers are all too often too willing to use whatever means they can to undercut the will of the workers.

So in the spring of 2011, the "Fair Treatment for Farm Workers Act" (SB 104), which would have allowed workers to organize by using the option of a majority sign-up method of voting, was sent to Governor Jerry Brown for his signature.

For weeks before the signing deadline, thousands of farm workers rallied and marched in the capitol Sacramento. They prayed; they fasted; they slept in the hallways. Thanks to NFWM's Lucy Boutte, over 70 church bells rang throughout the state in solidarity with the farm workers. But to the dismay of workers and their allies, Gov. Brown vetoed SB 104 on June 28<sup>th</sup>.

Photo by UFW



Still, the UFW did not give up. By August, farm workers had begun a 197-mile march up the Central Valley to Sacramento. Midway through the march, Gov. Brown announced his own proposal for solving the problem of growers unlawfully interfering with organizing campaigns for union representation.

And on October 9th, Gov. Brown signed SB126, which gives farm workers greater protections in organizing disputes with growers, including allowing the state's Ag Labor Relations Board to certify a union when it determines that grower misconduct affected an election's outcome.

This victory came after a long struggle. Throughout the year, NFWM's Lucy Boutte traveled to Stockton and Sacramento and points in between as she organized prayer vigils, "farm worker in the pulpits," recruited volunteers for rallies and to provide food and housing. She led legislative visits with workers and arranged meetings with the UFW and religious leaders.

**Thank you NFWM supporters for signing on-line petitions, making phone calls, and standing with the UFW in California.** As the UFW says of this victory, "We're looking forward to using his new law to change the lives of farm workers up and down the state."

## *Ruby Ridge Workers Seek Justice*

On August 27th, NFWM took its national board meeting to the streets, following farm workers from Ruby Ridge Dairy and joined by local allies on a march through downtown Portland, OR and across the Willamette River to a Darigold processing plant.

The chanting, sign-waving crowd rallied on the steps of the plant as we attempted to deliver a letter to the plant's management from NFWM. We were there to call on Darigold to intervene with Ruby Ridge on behalf of the farm workers.

Darigold is a large cooperative that markets the milk that Ruby Ridge produces. Ruby Ridge workers called on the UFW to be their union representative over 2 years ago to help secure better working conditions. Ruby Ridge owners responded to the workers' attempt to organize by fiercely retaliating against them with firings, decreasing wages, threatening workers' with a weapon, and lawsuits.



Photo by Alexandria Jones

BVMs Carol Cook & Mary Martens call for "Dignity for Dairy Workers"

Darigold demands high standards of its Co-op members related to the quality and safety of its milk. NFWM believes it should demand the same high standards regarding the treatment of dairy workers. But Darigold wouldn't even open the door to us in Portland. Nor did they respond to a second letter from NFWM Board members, or to the 200 people who rallied in front of their Seattle offices in October.

Jenny Lee, who attended the Seattle rally along with other students from the Olympia chapter of NFWM-YAYA, said, "We want the workers at Ruby Ridge to know that we will support their struggle until they are victorious."



# Update on FLOC Campaign for Tobacco Workers

The dozens of farm worker supporters attending the Reynolds American Shareholders meeting in May were surprised when Reynolds new CEO, Daniel Delen, announced in his opening remarks that Reynolds was open to the idea of joining other stakeholders in addressing farm worker issues in its supply chain. Mr. Delen had replaced former CEO Susan Ivey and his remarks seemed to indicate a shift in the company's position. Or did they?

Delen was referencing a recommendation from the report, "State of Fear: Human Rights Abuses in North Carolina's Tobacco Industry," released by Oxfam America and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC). The report is the result of face-to-face interviews with men and women who work the fields and with other stakeholders in North Carolina's tobacco supply chain. ([link to report from nfwm.org](#))

Shortly before the Reynolds meeting, FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez led a delegation, including NFWM's Executive Director Virginia Nesmith, to London for the British American Tobacco (BAT) Shareholders meeting. BAT owns 42% of Reynolds stock, itself purchases tobacco from North Carolina and appoints directors to the Reynolds board. They met with BAT's corporate responsibility director and its CEO Richard Burrows, and spoke at BAT's shareholder meeting. Nesmith also spoke with several religious leaders in London about BAT's role in this issue.

BAT's CEO committed to a dialogue with FLOC about the human rights abuses in the tobacco industry. Other major tobacco companies are in discussion about such a meeting. However, despite Delen's remarks at the shareholder meeting, Reynolds has not yet agreed to be part of such a meeting with FLOC.

This year's tobacco harvest in North Carolina is over. But the abuses described in "State of Fear" will be there next year unless there is an agreement between the industry and the workers which creates a process to end them. *Support renewed efforts to get Reynolds to the table; and watch for action requests about this.*

## from State of Fear:

The research team spoke with hundreds of farm workers throughout the season ... Two common themes emerge from these interviews.

The first is a deep sense of responsibility that makes these men and women desperate to work and provide for their families, whether those families were with them in the camps or, more often, back in their homeland. **The second is a strong sense of fear that dominates the workers' lives.**

## Why a Campaign is Needed

Photo by David Anderson



The "State of Fear" Report assesses the tobacco industry impact on the human rights of farm workers in the fields of North Carolina. It cites problems in numerous areas such as:

### *The right to fair wages;*

- one in four workers interviewed said they were paid less than minimum wage.

### *The right to safe and healthy working conditions;*

- a majority of workers reported symptoms of green tobacco sickness, as a result of absorbing nicotine into the skin;
- others cited the lack of clean fresh water to help prevent heatstroke, and of being sprayed with pesticides in the fields.

### *The right to adequate housing;*

- nearly all the workers described problems such as overcrowding, lack of ventilation, worn out or no mattresses, bed bugs, rodents, inadequate toilets and showers with no privacy and the lack of laundry facilities (despite the need to wash pesticide laden clothes after work).

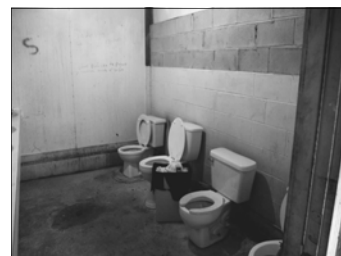


Photo by David Anderson

A delegation of religious leaders convened by NFWM saw all of these housing conditions first hand on a recent visit to North Carolina. Members of the National Council of Churches Justice and Advocacy Commission and representatives of the United Methodist Church and the Alliance of Baptists visited two area labor camps with FLOC staff. They met with workers from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras in crowded bedrooms or standing outside. There is no place to receive visitors in the camps these workers call "home" for months or years. Several workers said they haven't seen their families in over five years.

Photo by David Anderson

Visits such as this remind us how broken our agricultural system is and how critical it is, as the "State of Fear" concludes, to engage corporations who control the money in restructuring this industry.



## YAYA (Youth & Young Adult Network) Support Farm Workers

### ... in North Carolina ...

Last May, YAYAs took two rental cars from Florida to North Carolina to support FLOC at the Reynolds American Shareholder Meeting. They attended the meeting inside, picketed outside, and Juan Barredo addressed the rally crowd in a nearby park.

During this trip, the YAYAs also helped a farm worker family build a chicken coop and they spent a day with FLOC visiting a tobacco labor camp and engaging in extended conversation with the workers there.

Trips like these are a great way for young activists to gain organizing experience as well as learn first-hand about farm worker issues around the country. We are grateful for the generous support of a NFWM board member which made it possible for YAYAs to acquire proxies and attend the shareholder meeting.

### ... just a few of the many activities in Florida ...

On October 22, 20 Orlando YAYA members and others joined in a peaceful demonstration at a Publix in Orlando as part of the CIW's Supermarket Week of Action.

Tampa Bay YAYAs, the newest chapter, organized a film screening, participated in the inauguration of a soccer field for farm worker families in Dade City; and began working with the Pinellas Support Committee and their Christmas toy drive.

### ... in Oregon ...

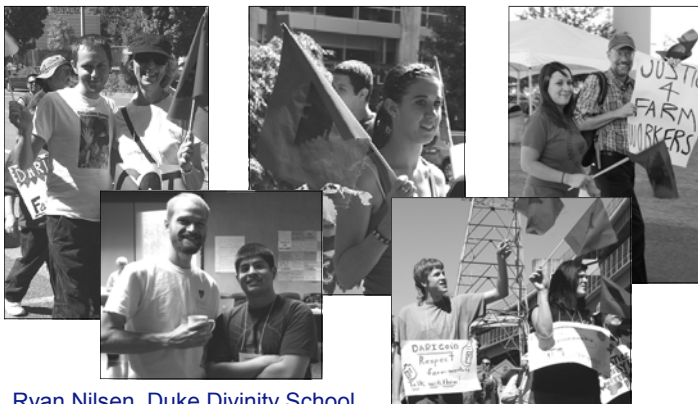
A highlight of NFWM's Portland Board meeting were the many young activists participating and pitching in to help the meeting run smoothly.

Photos below by Alexandria Jones

Jimmy Dunsten,  
Tampa YAYA

Katherine Bell, Disciples of  
Christ Farmworker Cttee

Lariza Garzon,  
YAYA Coordinator



Ryan Nilsen, Duke Divinity School  
Intern & Octavio Garcia-Ruiz,  
SAF Summer Intern

Drew Beres & Jenny Lee,  
Olympia, WA - YAYA

Visit: [http://nfwm-yaya.org/to\\_learn\\_about\\_NFWM-YAYAs](http://nfwm-yaya.org/to_learn_about_NFWM-YAYAs) .

## Orange County Interfaith Committee



The Orange County Interfaith Committee to Aid Farm Workers (OCIC) held its 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Fundraiser for NFWM on September 18<sup>th</sup> at St. Mark Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, CA. The event was a great success, raising \$5,000 for NFWM. The keynote speaker was Dr. Michael Conroy, author of *Branded! How the Certification Revolution is Transforming Global Corporations*. Thank you to OCIC's Chairperson Suzanne Darweesh and all the OCIC members!

OCIC supported FLOC by leaf-letting at Chase Banks and with a rally and delegation to the Los Angeles office of the British Consulate (above photo). OCIC members have also rallied outside of Trader Joe's in support of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers; and they continue to support the UFW.



## Pinellas Support Committee Sacrificial Soup Supper

The great folks of the Pinellas Support Committee of NFWM will hold their 27th Annual Sacrificial Soup Supper on November 12 in Clearwater, FL. The event is a fundraiser for NFWM. This year's keynote speaker will be journalist and historian Nano Riley, author of the book, "Florida's Farmworkers in the 21st Century." For more information about the PSC, contact its Chairperson Maria McCourt at 813-961-8777.

## United Church of Christ Marches on Publix



The United Church of Christ (UCC) has actively supported the farm worker movement since the early days when César Chávez called on people of faith to step out onto the picket line. This past July at their General Synod in Tampa, Florida, the UCC were at it again. 400 attendees took time out to march to a Publix supermarket to rally in support of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Campaign for Fair Food.

NFWM Board members Olgha Sierra Sandman and Edie Rasell were there; as was NFWM staff Bert Perry, a UCC member, who served as a marshall for the march (photo above).

## Looking for Food You Can Feel Good About Buying?

We are at a moment of crisis and opportunity in agriculture. There is growing concern about the safety of our food, the effect of toxic pesticides on people and the environment, and the treatment of farm workers on whom the industry relies. NFWM is among the founders of a groundbreaking initiative to address these concerns.

NFWM, UFW, FLOC, PCUN, Oxfam America, Farmworker Justice, Pesticide Action Network of North America, the Consumer Federation of America and Center for Science in the Public Interest are developing a certification system for agricultural products that meet specified standards regarding better conditions for farm workers, improved food safety measures and reduced pesticide use. Certified compliance with the standards will yield a label clearly identifiable for you, the consumer.

An accompanying program, AgLEADR, will provide farm workers and farmers with the training they need to ensure compliance in all areas of the standards and in communication and conflict resolution skills.

The involvement of industry partners is key to the success of the project, currently called the EquiTABLE Food Initiative (EFI). Bon Appetit and Calvert Investment Fund have committed to EFI and other members of agribusiness, retail and food service industries are in conversation with us.

You won't find EquiTABLE products in the store yet. But we have great partners at a growing table. We will keep you posted so you can help create the demand for food which helps realize our vision, that:

- Farm workers are empowered and respected in a new food system that produces healthier, safer and more environmentally sustainable food.
- The Initiative is trusted by and benefits workers, growers, retailers and consumers and is the food industry norm.
- Growers and farm workers enjoy viable careers, are fairly compensated and are an integral part of vibrant rural communities.

*Si Se Puede!*



Ramon, Ed & Erik

### NFWM Honors OFWM & Rev. Ed Brandt

During our August Board meeting in Portland, OR, NFWM honored the Oregon Farm Worker Ministry, its Board and chairperson Rev. Ed Brandt, for their long standing commitment to solidarity with farm workers in the struggle for justice.

Executive Director Virginia Nesmith presented Ed with a Certification of Appreciation. Erik Nicholson of the UFW and Ramon Ramirez of PCUN, both of whom have long histories with Ed, told stories of his courage and persistence in the struggle.

### Community Disaster Center in Pierson, FL Opens

by Roberta Perry

Three years of negotiation, planning, and perseverance finally came to fruition with the dedication of the Community Disaster Center at the Farm Worker Association of Florida's office in Pierson, FL.

After the storms, freezes, and floods of 2004 & 2005, NFWM asked members of the Pierson community what would lessen the impact of disasters on their community. It was decided that a place to store material goods, equipment for clean up, and distribution would empower the area to prepare and respond more quickly to disasters.

NFWM wrote a grant for a disaster center and Church World Service Disaster Office, encouraged by the Disaster Ministry of the United Church of Christ, awarded funds and the planning began. Jim Hanis, architect, donated his services to design the building.

Many members of the community at large, area churches, the ACLU, and people from County Emergency Management attended and testified at Pierson Town Council meetings to acquire the permit for the building.

After three more hurricane seasons had passed, the Town Council approved the permit and work began. We dedicated the Community Disaster Center with a ribbon cutting, blessing of dedication, wonderful dancing by



Dedication ceremony October 23, 2011

the youth, and delicious food provided by the community. Some of those who attended this grand event were the Director of Emergency Management for the County, the President of the ACLU, Red Cross, a County Councilmen and many of us who worked on the project.

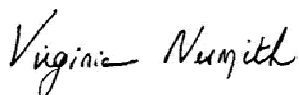
The Farm Worker Association, NFWM, and CWS thank all of those who toiled to make this Center and the Celebration possible.

Dear NFWM Supporter,

Recently, I visited with farm workers who were harvesting sweet potatoes - earning 35 cents for a 25 pound bucket. Stooping, picking, filling the bucket, hauling it, throwing the bucket on the truck, running back, stooping. I could not do the work these men and women do to harvest the potatoes I will enjoy this Thanksgiving. Or the orange crop they go to next – climbing pesticide laden trees to fill a 90 pound sack; or the tomatoes, the strawberries, the beans ... I would hate returning to crowded, unsanitary labor camps; and I can not imagine leaving my family many miles and a border away for years - missing birthdays, baptisms, weddings and funerals.

What I and our staff can do is work with farm workers to improve their working and living conditions; and enlist your help in that – with actions, and with the essential financial support that makes our work possible. Help NFWM continue to fight for those who do the hard work of harvesting our food. Please give as generously as you can to our year-end appeal which you will receive soon. Or go to [nfwm.org](http://nfwm.org) today and give on-line.

Gratefully,



Virginia Nesmith, NFWM Executive Director

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

**Need holiday gifts?** Get *Thank a Farm Worker shopping bags* from NFWM...just \$10 each. Go on-line or contact the national office to order yours today!

Farm workers are the mostly immigrant men, women and children who work in our fields, orchards, nurseries, dairies and feedlots. Their labor fills our supermarkets, restaurants & dining tables.

**The National Farm Worker Ministry** believes that farm workers deserve adequate pay, safe working conditions and the right to address problems without fear of firing.

For 40 years, NFWM has supported farm workers as they organize for justice, empowerment & equality. We educate consumers and mobilize the public in support of farm worker campaigns.

### JOIN US !

NFWM has state offices in Florida, North Carolina, & California.

Visit our web site for state contact information or contact our national office:  
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