

NFWM News & Views

Spring 2011

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



Sign photo by
Katie Gillett.
All other photos by
Alexandria Jones.

Pictured top to bottom: Oscar Gonzalez, formerly with the UFW Foundation and now Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, US Department of Agriculture (USDA), being introduced by NFWM Director Virginia Nesmith. Max Finberg, Director, Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, USDA. Philip Tom, Director, Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, US Department of Labor.

Pictured top to bottom: Michael Livingston, Director, National Council of Churches Poverty Initiative. Christine Chávez, Farm Worker Coordinator in the USDA. Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice, addressing those gathered.

NFWM Meets in Washington, DC

NFWM board members and staff gathered in Washington DC at the end of January for our winter board meeting.

We met with a variety of leaders from both the NGO-world and the Obama Administration on Capitol Hill at the United Methodist Building, which had the *Thank a Farm Worker* message on the sign in front.

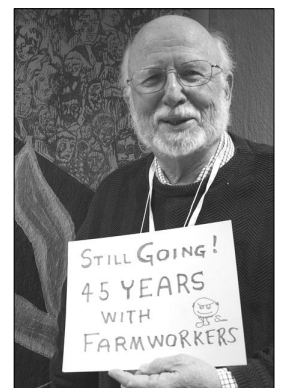
We were heartened to hear from excellent public servants committed to bringing the issues farm workers face into the government agencies and departments where they work. The Obama Administration includes more farm worker advocates than any other administration has and they actively seek to build new partnerships with organizations such as NFWM.

For example, Christine Chávez, César's granddaughter, assumed the newly created position of Farmworker Coordinator in the USDA and Tom Vilsack is the first Secretary of the USDA to ever visit farm workers. Further, the Department of the Interior has recognized

"40 acres", the birthplace of the UFW in Delano, as a national historic landmark; and the Department of Labor instituted stronger protections for H2A guestworkers and added new inspectors to help enforce all its regulations. In the afternoon, we broke up into smaller groups and visited the offices of our Senators and Representatives.

Throughout the weekend, NFWM-NC staffer Alexandria Jones took photos of those attending our meeting with their "Solidarity Statements"; to see them all, visit www.flickr.com/photos/nfwm.

Also, Katie Gillett, NFWM's Youth & Young Adult Network Orlando Chapter, taped messages to YAYA's. View Katie's video at www.vimeo.com/19691393.

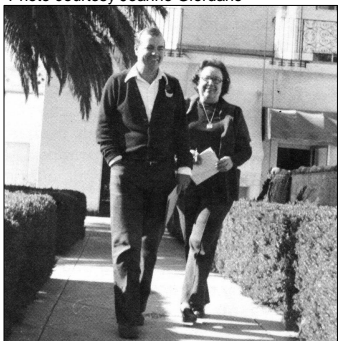


Dr. Sam Trickey, NFWM Board Treasurer and long-time farm worker advocate, with his Solidarity Statement.

In Memory of Three "Farm Worker" Women

Sue Miner

Photo courtesy Jeanne Giordano



Chris Hartmire, Director California Migrant Ministry and the first Director of NFWM, and Sue Miner.

Sue was born in Iowa on February 7, 1919. She was 92 when she died March 3, 2011 in California with her family by her side.

Sue served as secretary/bookkeeper/office manager for the California Migrant Ministry and then the National Farm Worker Ministry from 1955 to 1984. Throughout those years, she worked with a series of Executive Directors who were able to focus on the issues of the day because she was in the office, taking care of business. Sue was the one

dependable constant in the Los Angeles office for 30 years, providing needed information to supporters from around the country and serving as friend/counselor/substitute mom for many UFW boycotters who worked in the LA area. She continued to be a staunch supporter of NFWM with many an encouraging note or call to the current Executive Director and staff. Sue will be greatly missed by them and many in the farm worker movement.

Jeanne Giordano

Jeanne Giordano, farm worker activist extraordinaire, died April 18, 2011 at the age of 93.

Jeanne was a public health nurse, wife of Roy, and mother of two, who first became involved with farm workers in 1968 and remained committed to their cause ever after. She served as Coordinator of the Orange County Interfaith Committee to Aid Farm Workers and as a staff or board member of NFWM for many years. NFWM was graced to have Jeanne celebrate her 93rd birthday with us at last summer's Board meeting.

Jeanne's decades of support were illustrated by her t-shirt inscribed "You can't scare me: I was picketing before you were born." In her later years, she fooled many a store and restaurant owner, who had no idea that the sweet grandmother seated at their bar was there to chastise them for selling boycotted wine! She inspired many, including her granddaughter Jessie, who wrote in a tribute, "My grandmother taught me all of life's lessons: kindness, generosity and to fight for what you believe in."

All of us who knew Jeanne felt blessed to have her as a friend, mentor and fellow fighter. **i Presente Jeanne Giordano i**

Justice Was Not Served



On May 14, 2008, 17 year old Maria Isavel Vasquez Jimenez, after working nine hours in a vineyard on a 95 degree day, which was even hotter in the full sun and among the vines, collapsed. By the time she reached a hospital, her core body temperature exceeded 108 degrees. Two days later, Maria died.

Three California labor contractors were charged in her death; but, in the end, justice was not served.

When news came out that the San Joaquin prosecutor was going to offer a plea deal to two of the contractors, a plea deal that would not include jail time, the United Farm Workers organized a two day vigil outside the county courthouse to protest the plea agreement.

On March 9, 2011, the defendants accepted the plea agreement and were sentenced to community service, probation and a small fine. Lucy Boutte, NFWM's organizer in California, along with staffer Margarita Mota traveled to Stockton where they helped coordinate the two day vigil calling for justice for Maria Isavel. Lucy was interviewed by the Sacramento Bee. Here is an excerpt of her remarks.

"No one should die from lack of water, rest or shade on those hot, hot, hot summer days. Maria Isavel was a victim among the other 14 who have died since 2004 due to heat and dehydration....that is what brought me here to see justice. For lesser crimes people are sent to jail. For the death of a child, for the death of a 17 year old who was trying to make money to feed her family, her mother ...there is no justice. That's why we are here; and we will continue..."

Three Fat Bankers for Farm Workers

By Katie Gillett, NFWM-YAYA

Can three 20-somethings, with cigars in their mouths and wearing business suits stuffed with pillows, create social change by standing

outside a bank holding a banner and passing out fliers in an upscale Florida neighborhood for one hour? Absolutely not.



Lisa Fagaly, Cole Lee & Katie Gillett

But can these same 3 people, when placed in the context of simultaneous actions across the country, draw attention to themselves, contribute to public pressure on a major lender, and lead to a conversation between a big tobacco corporation and farm workers, whose working conditions the corporation has the power to determine? Can they help in one tiny way to support these farm workers in their struggle to improve their lives? Maybe.

And it was this maybe - this possibility - that led us to participate in the FLOC Day of Action on February 4. Cole, Lisa and I suited up and arrived at the Chase bank in College Park, FL. The public park bordering the bank, along with passing pedestrians, bikers, curious local business owners and traffic, made it a great location for bannering. Chase customers pulling out of the drive-through had to pass us, and cars stopped at the red light gave us the opportunity to hand out fliers. Our fat banker costumes generated attention and support. People drove by laughing, waving, honking, smiling, and giving us the thumbs up. We went into the bank and the branch manager took a leaflet and said she would share it with her district manager, but refused to fax it to Chase HQ.

We had a great day creating awareness about farm workers and the unethical behaviors of Chase and we learned a lesson... A true friend is someone who will dress up like a fat man and stand outside a bank with you.

"Morally Bankrupt Chase" actions have been held around the country since last December urging JP Morgan Chase, Reynolds Tobacco's chief financial lender, to stop supporting human rights abuses of tobacco farm workers and stop foreclosing on homeowners.

NFWM organized 18 actions in CA, OR & FL on March 18th, and participated in the rally at Chase headquarters in New York City, where Virginia Nesmith spoke along with Rabbi Michael Feinberg of the Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition and Michael Livingston of the National Council of Churches Poverty Initiative.

"Do the Right Thing"

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers held its spirited "Do the Right Thing" tour of the Northeast, with major actions directed to the grocery giants Trader Joe's, Stop & Shop and Publix. The tour began in Boston on February 25th, on to New York and Atlanta, and then wrapped up with 1,500 people marching on Publix headquarters in Tampa, FL on March 5th.



A group of 50 NFWM-YAYA (Youth & Young Adults) members and supporters joined the Tampa march and members of the Pinellas Support Committee of NFWM helped serve the crowd lunch.

Photo by CIW



Many long-time NFWM folks remember **Tess Browne, SCN**, former NFWM staff and board member. Tess is perhaps best remembered for the valiant, historic fight in Texas in the 1980s to outlaw "el cortito", the short-handled hoe. She lives in the Boston area and is active on many issues, including worker rights issues. In this photo, Tess is offering a prayer during CIW's "Do the Right Thing" rally in Boston on February 27, 2011.

DID YOU KNOW?

- A 40% increase in farmworker earnings would lift a typical seasonal farmworker's earnings from about \$10,000 a year to \$14,000 a year, and so above the poverty line for an individual.
- A 40% increase in farmworker earnings would at the most raise U.S. household spending about \$16 a year, roughly the price of two matinee movie tickets.

From the Economic Policy Institute, *Farm Exports and Farm Labor: Would a raise for fruit and vegetable workers diminish the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture?* by Philip Martin. Visit www.epi.org to read the full briefing paper.

NFWM Celebrates 40 years as a National Organization

A message from NFWM's Executive Director Virginia Nesmith

This year, the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) celebrates 40 years as an organization, and 90 years of history in service with farm workers. As you might expect, much has changed in that time.

NFWM originated from the work of state-based ministries providing food, clothing, child care and other services to farm workers as early as the 1920's. When César Chávez began organizing in the 1960's these migrant ministries understood the critical need for farm worker empowerment and supported those efforts. In 1971, NFWM was founded as a national faith-based organization to support farm worker organizing.

NFWM's initial mission was focused on the United Farm Workers (UFW), the first successful farm worker union. César's work inspired others to form their own organizations such as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Pineros y Campesinos del Noroeste, the Farmworker Association of Florida, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Centro Campesino, CITA, Alianza de Mujeres Activas and others.

Today, NFWM works in varying capacities with most of those farm worker organizations in their efforts to improve conditions in the fields and their communities. We've also been called to new work.

- We are part of a multi-stakeholder initiative to create standards for the treatment of farm workers, as well as for pesticide use and food safety, and an accompanying certification process which includes the workers to ensure that those standards are met. Taking advantage of the fact that consumers are increasingly conscious of how their food is grown, we hope to ultimately impact hundreds of thousands of farm workers.
- We have been given the opportunity to work with current government leaders and staff who want to use the policy arena to better protect the rights of farm workers.
- We have begun working internationally and were part of the first Global Agricultural Waged Worker conference held last year in California. Recognizing that retail industries and food corporations are global in scope and practice, farm worker organizations from 15 countries met to share stories and strategies about how we can work more cooperatively on a global level.

- We are seeking out new relationships in Mexico as the need to address problems on both sides of the border increases in the growing H2A guest worker system.



Virginia Nesmith, surrounded by crosses naming those who died from heat stress in California's fields.

Our role of educating and mobilizing religious leaders, faith-based consumers and others around the country has been critical to the victories won by the farm workers; and we have rejoiced with them in those. But it is a challenge as a small organization in a difficult economy, to move from support of one organization to several; to work not only regionally and nationally but internationally; and to take part in new work in the midst of the old.

And the challenges to justice remain strong. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has affected politicians' will to move immigration reform, despite the fact that our agricultural system would collapse if all the undocumented workers left. And those undocumented workers - whose poverty is so severe that they risk their lives to come here - are very vulnerable to abuse once here and fearful of job loss if they speak up about that abuse, much less organize for union representation.

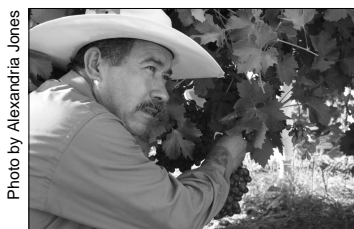


Photo by Alexandria Jones

But farm workers do continue to speak up and to count on NFWM to accompany them. Their commitment, sacrifice and hope are an inspiration to all of us - including our growing and enthusiastic group of Youth and Young Adult (YAYA) members.

So while NFWM celebrates the accomplishments of our past, we will spend some time this year planning for the future - a future we hope you will continue to share with us in the work to achieve justice in the fields. We will be in touch soon, with a more specific appeal that asks you to make a special contribution in honor of our past and in anticipation of our next 40 years.

Si se Puede!

At the White House

White House Photo



Pictured left to right: Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, Christina Chávez, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Julie Rodriguez, & Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

On March 30, NFWM Director Virginia Nesmith was honored to attend an event at the White House in celebration of "César Chávez Day". César Chávez, founder of the United Farm Workers, died in 1993 at the age of 66. Cabinet leaders and two of César's grandchildren who work with them, honored his memory with a two hour event. They spoke about the lessons learned from César's life and how those lessons still apply today. In addition to White House leadership and staff, the event was attended by people from around the country who carry on César's legacy of fighting for the rights of farm workers.

¡Si se Puede!

NFWM - NC & YAYA Welcome Interns

NFWM 's work is enhanced by the help of interns in our field offices. Alexandria Jones' and NFWM-NC's intern this semester is Bradley Ericson, Duke Divinity School. He's working on the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, setting up an event at the Divinity School and helping plan the curriculum for an Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship & NFWM joint program this summer on immigration and farm workers for all ages.



Cherie Gonzalez's son, David, at the Tampa Do the Right Thing+March.

Lariza Garzon's and YAYA's intern for the Spring semester is Cherie Gonzalez. Cherie is a student at the University of Central Florida and is working on a community organizing internship focused on immigration, updating the YAYA website, and outreach.

An Office for Farm Worker Women

Photo by Martha Blanco



Cutting the ribbon on the new AMA office: AMA's Berandina Rodriguez, Martha Guillen and NFWM's Lariza Garzon.

The Alliance of Active Women (Alianza de Mujeres Activas or AMA) opened the doors of their new office in Seville, Florida on April 9, 2011. Seville is a small farm worker community known as the "fern capital of the world."

In 2009, NFWM began a project with Oxfam America to identify issues of particular concern to farm worker women in the plant nursery industry. We conducted surveys and focus groups in three different areas of the state, including Seville. Out of the survey project came a deepening relationship with the women of AMA.

AMA is a group of farm worker women who have been educating themselves and their community about health issues, pesticide exposure, women's issues, and skills necessary for living in the U. S. While the women of AMA have drive and resolve, the work was based in the home of AMA Director Ana Bolaños whose family made room for file cabinets, supplies and visitors for years. We knew that more women could participate in the leadership of the organization if they had an office.

Thanks to support secured by NFWM from Oxfam, AMA celebrated the opening of their new office. With other support provided by NFWM and the United Church of Christ, AMA is creating a play about pesticide-related dangers that threaten both them and their community and will perform it as part of their organizing to stop pesticide abuse.

As NFWM's Lariza Garzon says, "We are very happy for the women of AMA and we hope that this office will facilitate the great work that they do. We have enjoyed working with them and will continue to support their efforts with organizing trainings and building bridges among their community, NFWM/YAYA, and supporters."



*Where's the envelope? You will notice
that there is no remittance envelope in
this NFWM News & Views. That's because
we want you to be watching
your mailbox in the near future for our
Special Anniversary Appeal - celebrating
40 years in advocacy with farm workers
and looking forward to the next 40 years.*



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

If you would like to get this semi-annual newsletter as an emailed PDF instead of a bulk-mailed hard-copy, email salan@nfwm.org, with "pdf newsletter preferred" in the subject line and your name and zip code in the body of the message.

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.**

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