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Goodman Community Center (149 Waubesa St, Madison, Wisconsin.)
John Kinsman is an organic dairy farmer and forester from Lime Ridge, Wisconsin. On the farm he purchased 60 years ago with his wife Jean, he raises 36 cows on a 150-acre farm – 80 acres of which are devoted to rotational grazing and hay production, while another 70 acres is devoted to woodland. Kinsman is president of Family Farm Defenders (FFD), a group he helped found in 1994 to promote sustainable agriculture, fair trade, workers rights, animal welfare, consumer safety, environmental stewardship and – above all - food sovereignty. He is also the secretary of the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC). Through FFD, John also works to relocalize food/farm economies and forge new economic relationships between consumers and farmers. One example of this is the Family Farmer Fair Trade Project that enables FFD to direct market cheese from Cedar Grove in Plain WI, giving farmers a fair price while providing a healthier rBGH free alternative to consumers. John remains one of the leading U.S. critics of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and is also an outspoken critic of corporate globalization. As one of the farmer leaders involved in Via Campesina, the largest umbrella organization for farmers, fishers, foresters, hunters, gatherers, and indigenous peoples in the world – he has also traveled extensively around the world to share the message of food sovereignty.
Interview with John

photo by John Peck
John Kinsman (JK): At that time, we were diversified farmers. We had cows, pigs and chickens. We raised wheat, oats and barley. And when we didn’t have enough money to buy wonderful white bread, sliced white bread, my god we had to eat wheat bread, we took it to the mill and ground it, hated it and now we love it. And we are looking for it all over. So that is part of how we lived but it was not a problem. And it was a leisurely life, believe it or not. We never worked on Sunday. Nobody in the family had to work out [off farm] to support the farm. A farm now is almost a hobby for some people. The man and the woman have to get a job to support their hobby. My parents were able to go to the world’s fair Chicago in 1933 and this is during the Depression. And I remember my grandmother came and took care of us. I forgot how old I was but not old enough to run the farm. And they did that, my grandparents went to California. And I have a picture of that, my grandma with goggles on, she and Grandpa went on a flight in an open cockpit plane in California and so on. Well, anyway it was a more leisurely time. We ate berries everyday so we picked berries. Wild berries and a few tame ones. I remember the gooseberries especially because they were prickly. And my mother canned them. And now we know that berries are very healthy. But, we had berries for almost twice a day and we ate them fresh or canned. And so, it was a good life in spite of the so-called Depression.

DT: You’ve said that you agree with a recent UN report saying “supporting low carbon and resource preserving small holder farms” is the only kind of agriculture that will cool the planet - in reference to global warming. You have farmed organically since the 60’s but you didn’t always. Can you talk about your transition to organic farming and what you have learned from this approach to agriculture?

JK: Certainly. The UW Madison, the College of Agriculture was the best friend of my father and myself. And as time went on, it was like things were changing. We were getting into technology that we had questions about but we thought we had to do it. You know the story of the frog? You put the frog in water and you turn up the heat a little bit and a little bit more and pretty soon the frog is boiled and it doesn’t even jump out. And this happened to us. And I started using herbicides thinking “well, this will save me a lot of time”. And I ended up in the University Hospital with some serious burns. They would never say what it was because of the research going on. But the doctors said, “What’s your name? What’s your occupation?” “Farmer.” “When was the last time you used herbicides or pesticides?” And the same with the med students who examined me. Same thing, exactly. So I knew what it was and yet there wasn’t ever anything in the records that said what it was.

DT: And these were herbicides that they had given you? Is that right?

JK: This was what they promoted at the University and then we started looking…and I became organic overnight. That was almost 50 years ago. And I was in that direction but we were led away from it by the research. We didn’t know that these chemical companies were funding the research and the rest so we did a FOIA search one time and found out a lot of things . . .

DT: So can you say a little bit more, just give us a sense of what your farm is like and what your farming practices are like?

JK: My passion is tree planting and farming. Because I am a sustainable tree farmer and my family have planted over a 100,000 trees, but we have no place to plant anymore because every inch that there could be planted a tree is planted already. So, it’s just a joy to see what that does to the environment and becomes the most valuable part of what could have been cleared and so on. That’s part of it. What was the rest of the question?

DT: And tell us a little bit about your dairy operation.

JK: Okay. We have 36 cows; maintain that number and it’s an intensive rotational grazing. My cows get fresh pasture, green grass and clover every 12 hours. And if they don’t get it, they complain. So, but they spread the manure, they spread the fertilizer and they carry the milk in and they carry the fertilizer out. So we have a very low carbon footprint. Many farmers, especially the factory farms think I am not a farmer. In fact, the UW College of Agriculture doesn’t consider me a farmer because I am not running the tractor 12/14 hours a day. But, my cows are doing their work. And that’s where the cheese you will have today and so on. It came from my cows.
DT: I want to step back a little bit in history and talk about some of your civil rights and anti-racist activism throughout the US and in Wisconsin, in particular. Project Self Help and Awareness or PSA is a 40-year-old organization that you became involved in very early on and played a lead role in. You coordinated other white Wisconsin families to host a visiting… hundreds of visiting Black children and teenagers from Mississippi for 3 weeks every summer. And this in an ongoing program. Can you tell us a little about the motivation behind these exchanges, this exchange program and how it related to the Civil Rights Movement?

JK: It was actually 45 years ago. And, a Black woman, Eula Washington who hosted this man, Malcolm Gissen, who was a University student and was one of the freedom riders, and she said “now we can’t end this here. We have to continue in some way because this is the first time my children have ever had a good relationship with white people”. And so, they then patched this plan that was excellent and after about… we were in the 2nd year, and after that it became so difficult, he turned it all over to me. And so it was very difficult. We did 12 round trips with an old school bus that we refurbished to bring these children matched with coordinators in Wisconsin matched with coordinators in Mississippi to give them an experience that would raise their self-esteem. That was the whole part of it was to make them feel good about themselves and to not be a hand out. It was solidarity. It was a way to make them feel that they were equal; they could do anything they wanted. And the poverty was so great the first time I was there. I stayed in a home in Carroll County in the hills. Part of the house had a dirt floor. There weren’t no… no electricity. And this was typical of many of the rural people. And so I learned a lot. I cried a lot too. But you don’t make friends by crying so… they would say why are you laughing? You wanna see me cry? So, it was tremendous. So, these 12 round trips would bring these children up we started taking adults down and college students to do Headstart work and just to immerse themselves. That’s the only way. You can’t explain it of how great it is. I could see the courage and joy that the most poverty stricken state in the union and some of the most poverty stricken counties and some of them still are to see all of these people and celebrate and make you feel good.

DT: You told me a story about how this was kinda transformative for you and an exchange you had with a woman named Rosie, Rosie May Hosey I think her name is. What did Rosie say to you?

JK: Rosie was one of the people that her children came to Wisconsin. She lived a very tough life. Just an example, one of my neighbors hosted her children and so she went and stayed with Rosie for two days. And for breakfast, Rosie borrowed a hot plate from a neighbor and warmed up some fat back. And then for the noon lunch, they went to a local Juniors convenience store and divided a bag of Cheetos. Anyways, Rosie was always a happy person. And just a great person to be with. Wisconsin Public Television interviewed Rosie and I saw the documentary film. And in it, he asked Rosie questions.

“Who are the white people that you got to know?”
She went on and named a few.
"And then there was John Kinsman, naw but he is one of us”.

I will never forget that. That was one of the greatest compliments I have ever had.

DT: Yea, that’s great. When we talked on the phone, you were telling me a little about your ancestry and saying that your ancestors were settlers. And that that was something you were critical about. And since you have done work in Wisconsin to defend Native land and farm sovereignty. Can you give us an example of these experiences?

JK: My great grandparents came by covered wagon and oxcart from the East. And they settled. But when I think about it now, there were people there. They were settlers and that’s not the way it is supposed to be. And, they took the land. The Native people, now and all over the world are… Landgrabbing is going on. And that was landgrabbing also but it was not named that. And of course, there were savages. In my grandmother’s diary, she and her younger sister who was Jeanette. She was 16 and my grandmother had just married, she was probably 20 or 21. They were going from one area to another and a band of Indians had moved in. And they went down to talk to them twice. They had no fear of these savages, so called. It was interesting. But, they were still settlers.

DT: And what were some of the exchanges or activism you had around Native land in Wisconsin?

JK: Well, we The Crandon Mine was a big mine about ten years ago proposed by Exxon in Native land in northern Wisconsin. And it would have destroyed their wild rice beds, headwaters of a beautiful river that went through the reservation. It was very destructive so we did a, a sort of a hearing. And I represented farmers of North America. The rest of them didn’t know it but
activist farmer

DT: And there is something else I am wondering... You mentioned Family Farm Defenders. I wanna jump off from Wisconsin and talk more about global work that you have done. In 1994, you were part of a group that started Family Farm Defenders. And through that group and the National Family Farm Coalition which is an umbrella coalition, you built international solidarity through another larger international network called Via Campesina, the international network of peasant farmers. And you have started to call yourself a “peasant farmer” and refer to yourself in those terms that Via Campesina has proposed. So I want to ask you about one of the groups that you have interacted with through these travels and that’s the Landless Workers Movement or the MST in Brazil. You have been to Brazil several times, met these organizers in other countries throughout the world. Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences with MST and how they influenced you?

JK: They are a group of people that in Brazil that went through bloodshed to occupy un-used land that big landowners in Brazil took over and most of what was stolen from indigenous people, through landgrabbing. And it lay idle. And they had so many privileges that they did not produce anything. So these people simply took over and settled on their own land actually. They were so well organized in what they did over the time that they found they were recognized by the government after they went through a year and a half of living in a plastic camp with only dirt for floor.

They’re impressive... The water was hauled in... that was another thing that always sticks in my mind. It was hot. It was under the trees and a man came out and set a chair under the tree and brought me a glass of lukewarm water. It was like giving a million dollars because that was all he had to offer. But, it was so grand to see that. And then we went to where they had built up the communities. Beautiful community centers. Everyone had a plot of land. There was a nice house. They had animals. It was diversified. And they are doing so well that now it’s moving, I think 300,000 people have been re-settled onto their land and are productive, producing food that the country needed. And now they are going into Africa with the same model.

Via Campesina members have visited us many times [in Wisconsin]. And so we have organized tours of our farms and local entrepreneurs and things that work and some things that don’t work. They have been a big inspiration but I have to say that it started with the Bovine Growth Hormone. How many are aware of the Bovine Growth Hormone? The first genetically engineered product to enter the food chain. Well, it came to us 30, no 27 years ago in the University of Wisconsin had a gathering of scientists and telling us that farmers are not smart enough to understand it. That’s a mistake. Some of ’em aren’t but most of ’em are.

So we could not get attention from the press, because one half of all the dairy products sold even in the University of Wisconsin cafeteria, even in their hospital came from that experimental herd. And the people did not know it. And we could not get press. And so, I had been to all these protests in civil rights era in Mississippi and so I made this crude sign that said “Are you aware that you are all guinea pigs or a product?” And I had handouts that were pretty crude at first and stood in front of the Memorial Union, the biggest concentration of students and faculty and staff. And immediately, we had international attention. There were cameras all over because of this information and the fact that we were standing up to it.

And so within six months, I was invited on a ten month, ten day tour of Europe and speak on this because at the same time the people, the farmers, they had decided not to allow it in Europe. And they said it was so exciting [for them] to see the farmers marching on the university. I
said, “Here I am”. All these students and all these other people and this big crowd [gathered on the tour]. And so, sometime if you don’t even know what you are doing, it works. And so, that’s how that got going. And National Family Farm Coalition did not accept it till Family Farm Defenders and myself had to practically drag them kicking and screaming to accept that you need to fight these things and look at what they are doing and who is paying for it? All the money and so that is the way it went.

DT: And just to clear up the names one more time for everyone, Via Campesina is the name of the international network. And that’s how John ended up in Brazil and Europe through this international network of peasant farmers. And the National Family Farm Coalition is the US representatives or chapter of Via Campesina. And they are based in DC. And that is something that John Kinsman has been deeply involved with, networking on a national level. And Family Farm Defenders is the group that John works most consistently with on a regular basis and they are based in Madison, Wisconsin.

And so through National Family Farm Coalition and Family Farm Defenders, you have done a lot. So you have done a lot of building with people on a national scale. A lot of the direct organizing and solidarity you have done has been on the scale of the US. You have sent farm equipment to farmers in the south after Hurricane Katrina. Most recently, you have been working on sending hay to farmers who have been experiencing drought in Oklahoma and Texas. And so I just want you to say a little bit about your decision to do this kind of direct service and direct action on the national scale. And any thoughts you have about food policy and what we can do here in the United States, on the turf that we exist on?

JK: Family Farm Defenders became international like I say overnight because people, we had a message that was international because we could see the connections always. I have been to every continent except Antarctica. And these people paid my way and often, John Peck’s way to go these international meetings. I was part of Via Campesina when it was being formed. I have worked with these people for 26, 27 years.

As far as locally just as an example. . . so I started, well myself and my daughter and a few others working locally around food. That was a common denominator: everybody ate food. Otherwise, it just didn’t work, it seemed like. And so we got to four local churches that were in a cluster. They had a “peace and justice committees” and the biggest thing they could do was a bake sale. They didn’t know what else to do. So, we just went on with that. And I was able to show them the “seven principals of food sovereignty”, which included “justice for workers”, which "organics" does not include. We have formed the fair trade neighborhood...so after these meetings with our local people, the Amish people were a tremendous part of it. And others, we would come home from the meeting and our heads were moving so fast at night, and we can’t sleep at night. But, this is really working. We are doing a lot of local foods; we did a community meal, last Sunday, in the community. It’s the biggest crowds we ever get. Monthly meals that we do maybe three or four times a year. All local.

DT: And recently you had a chance to go to Iowa and you bumped into um, our buddy President Obama and had a chance to talk to him. What happened in Iowa?

JK: This was the "rural economic summit and listening session" about two months ago. And we were [only] able to get another farmer Joel Greeno and I tickets because there were less than 100 people and half the staff of Obama. And somehow, I had a seat in the front, in the middle and Obama’s right there. I don’t know how I got that seat but we had fine seats...maybe he thought I should listen. It was good. They did campaign like we expected, a little bit and then they divided us into workshops sort of and different staff people like secretary of agriculture, secretary of transportation. I was in the one with Ray Lahood, Secretary of Transportation.

DT: So what did you say to Ray Lahood?

JK: So, I got his attention and I said, "I lived through the Great Depression. That was not as bad as this is." And I told him some of the things I am telling you. And I told him I had lived through a number of these economic problems, downturns and emergencies. And I said they are all politically motivated. It’s big companies buying the government. . . I also [criticized] the FTA, the Free Trade Agreement you know they are trying to [start] in Korea, Panama and Bolivia and now Columbia. I was invited to South Korea three months ago. And so I could say [to Ray Lahood that] 'I was in South Korea two months ago talking to these people. It’s going to put 40% of their farms off the land. Don’t you think it’s better that we work to cooperate instead of trying to compete? We’re competing with the whole world. How can we compete with China and India? And I know people from India. . . [like] Vandana Shiva, you know her? She says “we were self sufficient, and our population was stable before colonization”. And she said these free trade agreements
are another form of colonization’.

So I asked the whole group, “isn’t it more important to make friends than to try and compete for the lowest”? And that’s what they do. It’s a race to the bottom in prices, wages and environmental degradation. And so, with a big silence. [But] I can take as much time as I want to cuz I have lived through all the things I was talking about. And there was more of course. And so they didn’t know quite how to stop me. It changed the way this whole conversation went. A woman, a lesser staff person, a Black person said, “my father’s farm is being in danger of being lost”. [There was] Silence.

And then the Future Farmers of America were invited, the officers of three or four states because that looked good, to have FFA. And so, I was sitting next to one and I talked to him while we ate and then [someone called on him to speak] and he said, “I want to farm but I can’t because the prices are so low and the conditions are or the expenses are so high”. And he said, “Not one person in my FFA chapter is going to farm”. Of course they didn’t want to hear that. Then the guy next to me spoke out. He says, “My passion is farming. I want to farm. But, I can’t.” Not only I can’t but I am going to have to move out of the community. And they didn’t want to hear that either. So, there was a lot of good testimony.

Meanwhile, my friend Joel was in another extension where Obama came in and he gave him the whole thing. . . Joel just gave him everything. And Obama stayed there too long. Joel wouldn’t let him go. And the secretary of agriculture [Tom Vilsack] was there and Joel said, “Do you know me?” He said, “I sure do”. And he took a long detour around me that day too. We confirmed that.

**DT:** What you said about emphasizing cooperation over competition is pretty essential especially as you are describing the entire disillusion of the farms across the US and the farms across the world. I wonder what note you would like to end on?

**JK:** So what I am saying is what counts is local foods...if we all demand to know where our food comes from, if you can’t find your farmer that’s producing and know them personally...at least question where your food comes from. And we want to change policies. One woman is on our executive board, an urban woman [from Milwaukee] and they did. She asked about where does her milk or cheese come from [and if the] cows were injected with Bovine Growth Hormone. Well, the grocers don’t know. She says well, I’m sorry we will just have to go somewhere else and

buy our groceries. No, no, no, come back. And so, they came back in a couple of weeks and they changed their policy. It took two people to ask that.

I will just repeat the price of justice is internal vigilance and there will be no peace without justice. And John Peck and I have both received awards because of what we are doing and we never talked about peace but it is this kind of thing that will bring peace. You are all part of it. And you can all make a difference. It only takes one or two to rattle the whole cage. Thank you.
Writings about John

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John Kingman, Activist Farmer

How We and the World Have Changed • Tragic, Sacred Ground
An Activist Farmer

With his feet firmly planted on a small Wisconsin dairy farm, John Kinsman has been able to do battle with the agribusiness giants. And he's found time to coordinate an exchange program between white people in Wisconsin and black people in Mississippi.

by Jack Miller

Thomas Jefferson had a vision for our country in which the typical citizen would be a “freeholder,” a farmer who owned the land. He believed that such landowners and their families would be capable of keeping our country free from political and economic tyranny. Rooted in the land, they would have to answer to no one but God, conscience, and their fellow citizens. Much of his dream was a reality during the first half of our nation’s two-hundred-year history. But in the last hundred years or so, a time of revolutionary technological change, the proportion of our people who could be called freehold farmers has shrunk steadily, to a tiny percentage today. And most remaining farmers have been forced into dependence on the government-banking-agribusiness complex.

It was thus an inspiring experience to meet John Kinsman and his wife, Jean, in whose family Jefferson’s dream lives on. The Kinsmans have raised ten children (five boys and five girls), all of whom have gone to college, on a 150-acre farm, making a solid living without having to sell their souls.

While Jean Kinsman has anchored the home and been active in their local Catholic parish and community affairs, John has used their farm base to confront the agro-industrial complex – and, at the same time, to coordinate a remarkable exchange program between white Wisconsin people and black people in rural Mississippi.

At first impression, the Kinsmans’ region seems an unlikely place to have raised up an activist like John, who has been called a communist both by corporation officials and by the white Mississippi elite. It is a conservative, hilly area near the small town of La Valle, about half way between Madison and La Crosse. The Ku Klux Klan flourished in the neighborhood in the 1920s, and some of the old Klan members are still around. The best thing about the land, John says, is that it’s “too rough to lend itself to big, industrial farming, which means that the big boys really don’t want our land, and that has probably saved us.”

John and Jean are fourth-generation dairy farmers, educated through high school in the local system. When they bought their farm, it was a wreck, as was the house. With the help of their big family, they worked hard over the years to restore the land. They also built a modern, spacious, but unpretentious house that is heated with wood from their farm, which is about one-third trees. They milk between thirty and forty cows and sell high-quality breeding stock. With a big, lush garden, they have managed to eat well and prosper on a farm well below the size and scale the experts say is needed for survival.

What turned this tall, gentle farmer into a formidable activist?

“For one thing, I’ve always had a strong sense of justice,” John said as we sat on the grass of his farmyard in the beauty of late-summer dusk. “Partly this comes from my Catholic upbringing. And then, when I was a young farmer, I got seriously sick, hospitalized. And I figured out that I had been poisoned by farm chemicals. The medical people wouldn’t admit it, but there was no doubt. That got me to thinking. Since then, we have farmed without chemicals, and it has done wonders for the soil, for the animals, and for us.”

The experience also made John suspicious of the advice and claims of the corporations and of their government and university allies. He took to fighting them on a series of issues, most recently on a new technique whereby bovine growth hormone (bGH) is injected into cows to get them to produce more milk (see accompanying article). With a talent for research and organization, John has more than held his own in head-to-head confrontations with the chemical companies’
scientists.

Without the secure farm base, John says with a smile, “they would have shut me up long ago. If I had a job somewhere, they would have found a way to silence me or get me fired. But with this land, they can’t touch me.” Thomas Jefferson would have smiled too.

“What if dairying became impossible, as you’ve said yourself it might,” I asked.

“Oh, there are all kinds of ways we can make a living here, if we have to,” he said. “We can sell vegetables, fruit, firewood, maple syrup, logs, and various craft things. And the garden is our real base.”

The Kinsmans involvement in the Mississippi-Wisconsin exchange program, called Project Self-Help and Awareness, began twenty years ago through their eldest son, John D. Kinsman, who was then a student at the University of Wisconsin and active in the civil rights movement. “The best lie-detectors in the world are children,” John said, breaking into a big smile.

As we talked, the phone rang, it seemed, about every twenty minutes. Usually the calls were from someone involved in one of the exchange trips, about a dozen of which are made each summer. Organized on the basis of 16 “sister counties” in the two states, children stay with host families for two or three weeks, and many lasting friendships are thereby born. Some host families have the same children back every year and keep them for the whole summer. The project is now working with the third generation in some families.

During Christmas and Easter vacations, college and high school students from Wisconsin make work trips of five to ten days to Mississippi, making home improvements and working on community buildings.

During the summer months, the project runs two big, old buses, which have been maintained by John and the Kinsman boys in the family’s big, well-equipped garage. During our visit the garage was stacked high with cans of paint. “The paint we get donated from paint companies,” John explained. “We take hundreds of gallons down every year, and it raises the spirits of the people so much to have their places brightened up and looking good.” They also haul such things as beds, blankets, tools, building materials, clothes, books, and gifts of food and toys for Christmas – whatever there is space for in the buses and in the big trucks and vans they use in the cold months.

In nearly a generation, the project has arranged exchanges involving about 4,000 people – whites, blacks, and a few Indians (Wisconsin Winnebagos and Mississippi Choctaws).

“We have built some deep and lasting relationships with these beautiful people in Mississippi,” John said. “The poverty among our friends in Mississippi is desperate, and – in spite of the impression you get in the media – it has been getting worse. And yet they are so rich in life. They bless us enormously with their powerful Christian faith and their joy. They give us so much.

“Our society is so out of balance. We white folks here in the north are materially rich but
on our family. It develops them in ways I can’t imagine anything else doing. They’ve all been involved.”

Sometimes, the Wisconsin people have entered into serious political and economic struggles with their Mississippi friends. The most dramatic was the case of Eddie Carthan, a black farmer who at the age of 27 became the mayor of Tchula, Mississippi. The city is in Holmes County, one of the nation’s ten poorest, where Project Self-Help has been active for years.

“When Eddie was elected,” John said, “the white leaders approached Eddie and tried to persuade him to cooperate with their corrupt system. But Eddie wouldn’t have any part of it. He stuck to his plan for ‘an era of economic development’. He lived and practiced justice for all, according to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Precisely for this the white elite had him framed, accused, and condemned in our courts of law.”

Carthan and six other blacks were charged with assault for arresting a white man who was “trying to take over the police department.” Carthan finally was sent to prison on another “trumped-up charge,” allegedly making a false statement to a federally insured bank. The charge was brought by the U.S. Justice Department with the help of its enforcement arm, the FBI.

With legal help from the Christic Institute and a nationwide campaign — including a strong Wisconsin component — Carthan was given an early release in late 1983.

“In some ways, things are worse now in Mississippi and other parts of the South than before the civil rights movement in the 1960s,” John said. “Many of the civil rights workers have had to concentrate on making a living for their families. And things have gone back to segregation and Jim Crow policies. There’s a terrible political and economic repression going on, and it’s led by the white plantation owners and their cronies.”

Mrs. Mary Alice Duniop-Moore is one of PSA’s long time dedicated co-ordinators. She is a strong, hard-working leader who continually reaches out to the disadvantaged needy in Itta Bena. She is being interviewed by a television station as family farmers (some losing their farms due to the farm crisis) drove 2 huge truckloads of clothing, supplies and Christmas gifts to the even less fortunate people in Mississippi. Mrs. Moore holds a black doll handmade by women of a small Methodist church in Lime Ridge, to give to children in Mississippi. Mrs. Moore is one of 12 Mississippi co-ordinators that see that supplies and gifts go to those most in need.

culturally deprived. It is always a life-changing experience to get to know and love these people. It has changed my life, and the lives of our children and family. We notice now that we have different kinds of friends here — they’re the folks who are less stuck on themselves, who are able to see the face of God in humble people and realize their common bond.”

At the beginning, John said, Mrs. Kinsman was a little concerned about how much time the project seemed to be taking away from family life. But as time went on, “she saw what a dramatic and good effect it had on the kids, and

“We notice that we have different kinds of friends now, folks who are less stuck on themselves, who are able to see the face of God in humble people and realize their common bond.”

Although problems in Wisconsin are much more subtle than in Mississippi, John Kinsman has deep concern about the future of family farming here. “Sadly,” he said, “the press and those in power have lost interest in the ‘farm crisis’ and have moved on to more exciting things,
intimating that the crisis is over and things are
getting better for farmers,” he wrote me in a
letter earlier this year. As we talked at his farm
he said the truth is that family farming – in
Wisconsin and elsewhere – is in danger of
becoming extinct. And bGH is only one of a
series of threats in the midst of a long-standing
national policy to eliminate all but large farm
operators.

John is not naive about the way big corpo-
ratestructure have conspired to dictate our daily reality
(“Remember what one of those charts of inter-
locking directorates looks like?”) He puts the
ultimate responsibility, though, in the laps of the
very people Thomas Jefferson counted upon to
preserve a free and just society – the citizens. As
he said in the letter, in words that directly
challenged me:

We have such grand and well-thought-out theories. We keep refining and over-refining them. We feel we
must be perfect, and then more perfect, in our
philosophy and theory and in our particular lifestyle. Somehow it becomes a refuge. It doesn’t seem to
leave us any time to use our talents to help those who
are much more oppressed than we – our brothers &
sisters who are red, who are brown, who are in prison,
who are homeless, who are elderly, or who in any
way were not born into the advantages we take for
granted.

So we don’t have (take!) the time to leave our
“Comfort Zone” — to risk looking stupid as we make
some mistakes while taking a vulnerable stand with
these oppressed. They are on the battle line. If we sit
by and let them lose the battle, we have already lost
our battle. Because we are just a bit further up the
hill, and we are next on the battle line. While we
wring our hands, our best allies will have fallen because they
had no help.

By no means is John Kinsman depressed or
defeated by the challenges he has taken up. He
bubbles with enthusiasm: “What continues to
amaze me is the amount of power we as ordinary
citizens have if only we step out in action to
make our sound issues known.”

“We have such grand and well-thought-out
theories. We keep refining and over-refining them.
It doesn’t seem to leave us any time to help those
who are much more oppressed than we...”

Indeed. As a representative of the Wisconsin
Family Farm Defense Fund, John made a tour
of Europe earlier this year, meeting with farmers
and high officials. His main mission was to speak
with them about bovine growth hormone, which
the European parliament has since voted to ban.
John’s impact as a farmer-citizen is considerable; yet he presents himself as no more than he is, an
ordinary Wisconsin farmer who has been “awakened” and become involved.

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La Valle WI 53941 (608) 986-3815. The Wiscon-
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Glenn Trudell is a free-lance photographer in
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A Wonder Drug or a Threat?
Bovine Growth Hormone Raises Concern on Milk Surpluses, Safety

By Gay Gugliotta
Washington Post Staff Writer

MADISON, Wis.—The dairy farmers of America are standing on the threshold of technology's new frontier. Many do not like what they see.

Bovine Growth Hormone, or BGH, a new wonder drug capable of increasing a cow's milk output by as much as 20 percent, has provoked a bitter nationwide controversy that ultimately could affect the way Americans think about science and "progress."

The four companies that produce BGH here the drug as an enormous technological breakthrough—the first major success for genetic engineering and the burgeoning biotechnology industry.

Opponents of BGH charge that the drug will lead to massive milk surpluses, driving down prices and threatening the livelihood of small dairymen. Consumer advocates question BGH's safety, even though scientists say the drug is harmless, virtually duplicating a hormone produced naturally by cows.

Nowhere has the debate over BGH raged more fiercely than in Wisconsin, the country's top dairy state. It is here that the chemical companies have chosen to fight for acceptance of the drug, and it is here that small farmers and enemies of biotechnology have chosen to oppose it.

The issue became such a political hot potato early this year that on April 22 Gov. Tommy G. Thompson (R) approved a one-year ban on sale or use of BGH. A similar "moratorium" immediately went into effect in neighboring Minnesota.

Also responding to the outcry, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has delayed commercial marketing of BGH and asked the National Institutes of Health to make a fresh appraisal of possible dangers to humans who drink milk or eat meat from animals treated with the drug. NIH officials said their analysis is expected to take months.

"There was so much controversy over BGH that we thought it would have an adverse impact on the consumption of milk," Thompson said in an interview. "We can't play with something like that in Wisconsin."

John Kinsman
...feared effect on small farmers

But Democratic state Sen. Russell Feingold said Thompson, who is running for reelection in November, banned BGH because "when push came to shove, he could read the polls. It was a very skillful move, because now he goes down in history as the Republican governor who acted against the drug."

According to Feingold, who has led the anti-BGH fight in the Wisconsin legislature for four years, "a natural coalition" among processors, dairy farmers and consumer groups was responsible for winning the ban.

"It was clear that BGH would drive up production and end up driving dairy farmers off the farm," he said. "At the same time consumers were tired of being forced to accept products they don't want."

There are signs that consumer attitudes may have just as much to do with BGH's fate as science or economics. Robin Douthitt, a University of Wisconsin consumer economics professor, found in a May survey that 77 percent of Wisconsin consumers would prefer to drink milk from untreated herds, and that 67 percent were willing to pay as much as 22 cents more per half-gallon for it.

The study also found that 71 percent of consumers were concerned that BGH could be a health hazard. Among the farmers polled, this figure rose to 78 percent.

Even dairymen who favor the drug understand the message of such survey findings.

"You can't stop technology," said Fred Machado, who has a 1,200-cow dairy spread in the San Joaquin Valley near Fresno, Calif. "My only concern is what consumers think. If people won't drink it, I can't use it."

BGH, also known as bovine somatotropin or BST, was developed as a synthetic growth hormone by four chemical and drug companies: Monsanto, American Cyanamid, Upjohn and Eli Lilly. The drug is almost identical to a hormone produced naturally by cows, and its tests has enabled cows to produce as much as 20 percent more milk.

Research has shown that BGH will show up in milk from cows that are injected with it, but it breaks down harmlessly into its component chemical parts in the human digestive tract. Advocates of BGH also note that milk from untreated cows has natural BGH in it.

The drug does, however, affect cows. Fertility is hindered, and opponents of the drug have charged that it promotes mastitis, anudder disease, and metabolic changes in a cow's digestive system.

University of Wisconsin researcher Terry Smith said his work has found no changes in cows' metabolic systems, no excessive incidence of mastitis and a "very predictable" effect on fertility. "Since the cows are producing more milk for a longer time it's only natural that their pregnancy would be delayed," Smith said.

Nonetheless, consumer groups continue to oppose BGH, charging that the Food and Drug Administration approved it for experimental trials without ascertaining its possible effects on human health. The NIH review is intended to answer this objection.

Meanwhile, the Douthitt poll showed that the scientific debate has done the chemical producers a lot of damage. Monsanto spokesman Larry O'Neill sharply rebuked opponents of BGH for "working full time, cynically trying to alarm consumers, then pointing to that concern as a reason why people won't use it."

Highest on the companies' enemies list is the Foundation on Economic Trends, a Washington-based consumer advocacy and anti-BGH group led by Jeremy Rifkin.
FAMILY FARMER — John Kinsman of Lime Ridge is a family farmer that knows his importance. He said the family farm is essential in maintaining the environment. He is also one of 23 farmers from eight states who have jointly filed a lawsuit against the National Dairy Promotion Board and four chemical companies for illegally promoting the use of bovine growth hormone.

Sauk farmers join BGH suit

By Mike Marquardt
Reedsburg Sunday Writer

LIME RIDGE — Dairy farming is much more than tending to cows that produce the milk of livelihood. It is a political issue, one that a Lime Ridge farmer has made one of his main tasks.

John Kinsman is one of 23 farmers from eight states that has filed a lawsuit against the National Dairy Promotion Board (NDPB), the USDA and four companies (Monsanto, American Cyanamid, Upjohn and Eli Lilly) for illegally promoting bovine growth hormone (BGH).

"They've (the NDPB) abused our trust," Kinsman said.

In the lawsuit filed about two weeks ago, the NDPB is charged with using about $4.4 million (that comes from farmers' milk checks) to promote BGH, although the genetic engineering product has not been legalized, according to Kinsman. He said although polls have shown 70 to 80 percent of dairy farmers oppose use of BGH, the board chose to work with the aforementioned companies in promoting it.

"(That money) is intended for the promotion of good milk," he said.

The lawsuit's allegations of collusion came as a result of information the farmers' received through the Freedom of Information Act.
Kinsman said the NDPB had to turn over numerous letters to them because of the funding it receives from farmers' milk checks.

Chemical companies want BGH approved for use for a simple reason, according to Kinsman. He said these companies continually work on genetically engineered hormones like this to put on the market.

The approval of BGH would open the door for other hormones, he said.

"They're using every means possible to get them on the market," Kinsman said. "If they get one out, they have a whole host of others to put out."

On Nov. 9-10, Kinsman attended a meeting in Washington D.C. of consumers, environmentalists, farmers and other factions against the use of BGH. Of 120 people attending, only three were farmers, he noted. Kinsman was there as a representative of the Wisconsin Family Farm Defense Fund and the Coalition for Responsible Technology.

At this meeting, strategies were discussed for attacking three major issues: BGH, the promotion of sustainable farming and the changing of present national farm policy.

Sustainable farming is the preservation of the environment as a whole while allowing man to use it to produce what they need, according to Kinsman. He said people at this meeting feel the preservation of the family farm is pivotal to achieve this, because family farmers implement conservation measures more diligently, rely less on pesticides and treat their animals better.

He said large commercial farming techniques basically use the land until it is worthless. Massive use of pesticides also help in decimating the environment, he said.

Present farm policy needs to be changed, according to Kinsman. He said right now, farmers are paid to produce less, with the government buying surpluses produced. This method is costing the nation billions of dollars and is producing little benefit, he explained.

On model farms in Europe, a method is being used where farmers are being paid with a quota system, Kinsman noted. He said farmers are guaranteed a livable wage for producing up to a certain quota. Above the quota, the farmer only receives half the price per unit of what he supplies, he said.

Staying within the quota controls farming and puts less stress on farm animals and land, according to Kinsman.

"It's a way to take better care of the environment," he said.

This type of farming would be a good way of preserving not only the national, but international environment. As an example, Kinsman noted South America.

He said South American farmers are tearing up valuable rain forest to clear land for farming. What is produced on the land is then exported to compete on the international market, while people within the own countries are starving, he said.

Kinsman said he has made trips to Europe to work with this type of quota system. There are different European countries experimenting with it, he said.

"Balanced quotas maintain the best land use," he said. "We have to get away from farm policies that force third world countries to slash and burn ..."

There have also been proposals to eliminate subsidies and help third world countries on the same competitive market level with U.S. farmers. This would encourage further environmental devastation according to Kinsman.
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Still hope for small family farms

Farmers need help in making the transition from big to small — Page 8
COVER STORY

John Kinsman, Lime Ridge, thinks many "conventional" farmers would like to get off the technology treadmill but don't know how to make the transition.
Celebrating the small farm

Revisiting a tried-and-true model for agriculture. By Kurt Gutknecht

Dairy farming whittles down the most durable of men. Many are stooped and crippled after decades of tending cows. It is the legacy of worrying, and of bending and stooping and lifting and hauling.

After about 20,000 milkings — a total of 700,000 individual cows — you'd expect 74-year-old John Kinsman to be a gnarled version of his younger self. But on a raw January day in Lime Ridge, there's no sign that farming has worn him down; nothing about him has the aura of retirement. Kinsman — wiry and enthusiastic — is racing to go. With weathered buildings and rolling hills as a backdrop, he epitomizes the independent yeoman farmer.

With 35 cows and 150 acres, many cible farmer-radical and social critic. He sees good things happening, in spite of the bleak economic prognosis for agriculture. Farmers, he says, are sick and tired of the agribusiness model of high inputs, continued expansion and depleted soils. They want off the technology treadmill.

These are shopworn criticisms, long espoused by a supposed minority of farmers and critics of contemporary agriculture. These critics are portrayed as a "fringe" element, unaware of the realities of modern-day agriculture. Not so, says Kinsman. The majority of working farmers share his views, he says. It's the adherents of conventional agriculture who are woefully out of sync.

"So many farmers are caught in conventional farming. Farmers with view Kinsman and his farm as a droll anachronism.

Don't tell Kinsman he's outdated. Many farmers are discouraged by the agribusiness model and would gladly shift to smaller, sustainable farms if only they knew how to make the transition, he says. He has been espousing his views in letters to the editor and at various forums for so long that he's become a quasi-institution — the irascibly intensive operations know something's wrong, but they don't want to talk about it. So many farmers trapped by conventional farming fear if they changed anything, they would lose everything," Kinsman says. Most "industrial" farms survive on assistance from some source, whether inherited equity or breaks from government, ranging from tax breaks to low-interest loans. "They are using up resources for future generations," he says.

UNFAIR SUBSIDIES
As proof, Kinsman cites a report by Midwest Environmental Advocates and Wisconsin's Environmental Decade that claims Wisconsin's cost-share program subsidizes "livestock factories" at the expense of smaller family farms. The groups examined data on 177 operations that had received cost-share funds from 1985 to 2000 that also reported the number of animal units. Operations with 300 to 1,000 animal units made up 13% of the farms in this group, but received 33.8% of the funding, or an average of $56,060.

"Intentionally or not, this program subsidizes the larger facilities so that they can expand into mega-livestock factories," according to the report.

DEFENDING FAMILY FARMS
Kinsman is president of the Family Farm Defenders, a loosely structured organization encompassing about 2,000 people of all walks of life whose targets have included the National Dairy Board and genetic engineering. The organization traces its genesis to a basement meeting in Washington, D.C., by representatives from members of 15 farm groups who felt disenfranchised by government programs and the major farm organizations.

Family Farm Defenders is also a member of the National Family Farm Coalition, which consists of 40 orga-

Continued on page 10
Continued from page 9

ezations with a total membership of about 100,000. The Farm Bureau, the National Farmers Union and the National Farmers Organization declined to join. “The invitation still stands,” says Kinsman. He attributes their refusal to a desire to “keep their own little kingdoms.”

Kinsman is now working with a coalition of environmental, citizen and religious groups, along with the Wisconsin Farmers Union, to pass legislation that protects family farms. There’s been no perceptible groundswell of support for the Family Farm Protection Act in rural areas. Kinsman attributes this in large part to the distorted view of the legislation by mainstream media who are beholden to agribusiness interests.

Agricultural interests often portray environmentalists as meddlesome and antagonistic — people with a poor understanding of production agriculture who promote an agenda that’s inimical to agriculture (especially animal agriculture). They have a hidden social agenda. They are “outsiders.”

PRAISE FOR ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Poppycock, says Kinsman, who says farmers should “sit down with them and talk to them. I found it to be almost the opposite. They are great people,” he says.

While some animal rights groups, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, oppose animal agriculture, Kinsman says that’s not true of environmental groups. Even many animal-rights groups have softened their opposition to livestock farming once they understand that small family farms are environmentally friendly. “Ten years ago in California, a woman told me that she wouldn’t have become a vegetarian if she had known this.” She had based her opinions about agriculture on the industrial farms in the region.

“These people are some of our best friends,” Kinsman says. “They are well educated and influential. We need to let them know what our agenda is.”

Kinsman has developed some close ties with Greenpeace, one of the most strident environmental groups. They listen to him, he says, and they respect what he says. “I love it,” he says.

“Most of the real family farmers are ready to reach out. They’re beginning to doubt what they’re being told — and they are beginning to wonder whether environmentalists are really to blame for their situation.

“I want to get people to stop and think. I’m not asking them to agree with me. Thirty years ago, I thought environmentalists were part of the problem. I went with the latest technology. I wouldn’t be farming today if I had continued on this path,” Kinsman says.

Kinsman travels the globe at the behest of other groups representing small farmers. The interests of small farmers transcend national boundaries, he says. He attributes the feverish competition between farmers in different countries to manipulation by corporate interests who want to keep farmers divided and unorganized.

“There are some beautiful things going on in the world,” he says, citing the resurgence of small dairy farms in Spain and the efforts of farmers in India to protect their cultural heritage. “It’s very inspiring to be around some of these people.”

Kinsman attributes his activism to his children, who forced him to re-examine the values inculcated by his Republican parents. In the 1970s, his family began participating in an exchange program with black farmers in the South.

Then there was hospitalization for a pesticide-related ailment that temporarily paralyzed his legs, and convinced him to abandon chemical-led agriculture. He has practiced rotational grazing for more than 40 years and raised 10 children on a 35-cow herd.

Neither he nor his wife, Jean, worked off the farm.

“I’m used to starving,” he says sardonically, although he notes that even his parents could afford to go to the World’s Fair during the Depression. Many farmers today couldn’t afford the luxury of such a trip, he says.

STAYING SMALL

Farmers are often ill served by large organizations, no matter how noble their stated objectives, he says. Once a cooperative exceeds 100 members, a staff usually handles matters and the real farmers take a peripheral role, he says, and preservation of the organization takes precedence over the needs of farmers. He says one of the most egregious manifestations of this principle is that employees of cooperatives are covered by health insurance while their farmowners aren’t.

Four years ago, Kinsman helped form the American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association, a grassroots attempt to consolidate milk shipments and gain higher prices for producers. Kinsman says the effort was successful (there are groups in several states), although progress was hampered because, he says, some people were more interested in procuring milk than in action to raise prices.

Farmers in southwestern Wisconsin have a reputation for being more cantankerous than their counterparts in other parts of the state, where the land is flatter and, supposedly, the prospects are brighter. The hills limit vision, fracture fields and limit opportunity. Kinsman would respectfully disagree. The hills can keep us focused on what’s important — and what’s really important is often within reach.

Farmers know this, he says. So do a lot of other people, not all of whom farm. Kinsman thinks it’s time to work with them.

For more information, contact Family Farm Defenders, P.O. Box 1772, Madison, WI 53701. Phone (608) 275-8354. Phone/fax (608) 260-0900. E-mail ffd@ureach.com.
Farm groups aim for dismantling of free trade pacts

by Donie Kiefer

"We're all fighting against the same enemy," saysEmilio Lopez Gamet, a farm activist from Mexico.

A step in Wisconsin was part of the interest during a visit to this country by Lopez Gamet, who, along with fellow farm activist Jose Luis Alonso de León, is trying to bring about change in farm policies that he believes are detrimental to his country, the U.S. and the world. Both men have impressive educational and career backgrounds in their homeland.

Lopez Gamet and Alonso de León, who visited several U.S. states in July, made stops at several farms in this area, including those of Family Farm Defenders members Francis Goodman and John Kiniasa, who agrees with them that farm policy changes need to be made.

Traveling with Lopez Gamet and Alonso de León were National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) president George Newman, NFCC translator and agricultural trade specialist Sherry Stanley, Kiniasa, NFCC vice president, and several members of the Family Farm Defenders group from Washington, D.C., where Stanley resides.

Alonso and Stanley accompanied Lopez Gamet and Alonso de León on their tour in Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois, during which time, Nuevo Pueblo Farm Act and an end to NAFTA. We U.S. farmers are learning from Mexican farmers instead of getting organized and together we're going to help secure a safe and healthy food supply and food security for all people. Otherwise we have a food system that benefits only corporations, not farmers or consumers.

We think the consuming public is a sleeping giant and that's beginning to wake up in a cooperative food system that destroys family farms and produces substandard produce. Food consumers are the only real alternative.

"We expect the consuming public to tell the U.S. government that there are to be major changes in farm and food policy," Lopez said.

One way Lopez Gamet and Alonso de León are trying to unite with U.S. farmers is by engaging in community dialogues such as one they conducted in LaSalle County during their recent visit.

Lopez Gamet and Alonso de León are soaring Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are killing our local and national food security. NFCC defines food security as follows: "The right of every nation to have enough food to eat. We need to have a food system that works for all people. Otherwise, we have a food system that benefits only corporations, not farmers or consumers.

In Mexico, this displacement is so severe and production is so low that farmers are reduced to growing corn and beans. In the United States, we see the same pattern of concentration of agriculture into the hands of a few large corporations. The result is not only a loss of livelihood for farmers, but also a loss of diversity in our food supply.

There are a few things that can be done to address this problem. First, we need to support local food systems that are designed to be sustainable and accessible to all people. Second, we need to support policies that protect farmers' rights and ensure that they are able to make a living from their work. Third, we need to support policies that help to reduce the power of corporations and ensure that they are not able to manipulate the food system to their own benefit.

Free blood pressure screens scheduled

Free Blood Pressure Screens will be done at the Elderly Services meal sites. A registered nurse will be available from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on the following dates: October 10, November 14, December 12, and January 9.

Parks and Grounds Working Supervisor
City of Richland Center (pop. 6160)

Responsible for supervision of all parks, grounds and cemetery personnel including the performance of Sexton duties. Starting salary DOG plus excellent benefits. Call 608-647-8666 or you may fax 608-647-8600 or e-mail mosean@rwdc.net for job application and position description. Please submit job application and resume by August 15, 2003 including salary history and references to the City of Richland Center, 500 S. Main St., Richland Center, WI 53581 c/o City Clerk's office.
CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT — The national Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), formed by the U.S. bishops in 1969, recently awarded nearly $9 million in anti-poverty grants for projects addressing the causes of poverty across the United States. Family Farm Defenders (FFD), which works to pay farmers in Wisconsin a more equitable price for milk, is among the recipients of CCHD grants for 2003. Here, John Kinaman, a leader of FFD, is shown at his dairy farm in LaVille in the Diocese of Madison. In this week's Catholic Herald, editor Mary C. Uhler and columnist Fr. William Byron offer commentaries on CCHD. The U.S. bishops at their recent fall meeting also addressed agricultural issues affecting rural life. For more information, see pages 10, 22, 23, and 24. (CCHD photo by Sam Lucero)
They’re worth a million bucks

Donated tractors bring cheer to farmers hit hard by Katrina

By Rachel Keeler

The American Society of Agricultural Engineers on Wednesday announced plans to donate a fleet of tractors to farmers in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The ASAE, based in St. Paul, Minn., has joined forces with the National Association of Counties to distribute the tractors to farmers impacted by the storm.

The tractors were donated by John Deere and Case IH, two of the largest manufacturers of farm equipment.

The tractors will be assembled and delivered to the affected areas in the coming weeks.

For more information, visit www.asae.org or call 800-368-5272.
Tractors

From page 10

Several hundred of local farmers and non-organic farming activists.

"(Farmers) want the sugar cane to last," he said, adding that he was a tractor and their undeveloped land acres of bell peppers and sugar beets to the Aug. 29 storm's winds and rain.

Special Farm Defenders was in the field for its annual conference, which is promoting small farmer solidarity against the pressures of agribusiness into the global marketplace.

"We're all been so excited we could do something that was a way of gaining solidarity with all the farmers in the hurricane area," said John Krashen, co-president of EDF and a tracti and the farmers from South Carolina.

The group sent two farm tractors to feed to the Gulf Coast in Katrina's aftermath, and several fruit and vegetable growers and other volunteers in New Orleans.

Farmer Patricia Buckett said the donation of the farm tractors would help the farmers who were in need of help. The farmers were able to donate the tractors to the food banks and other organizations in New Orleans.

Mississippi Association of Cooperatives members Frank Taylor of Louisville, left, and Denise Pow-Travis of Shepilo, right, discuss the tractors that were donated to the co-op from Family Farm Defenders.

Independent Mississippi farmers appreciate the community's strong support.

"It's tough, but we're happy to help our friends in this time of need," said Buckett, 25, who works on her father's farm in Shepilo and sustained significant storm damage to her fields and equipment.

"We appreciate that you're helping us, it's hard to find anyone who cares," said Buckett.
Experts praise local farms

Speakers at UW promote locally grown produce

BY MATT MARX
Campus Reporter

A food business and farming expert told a group of community members at the University of Wisconsin Thursday that encouraging and protecting small farms is key to building strong communities.

Jennifer Hall, kitchen program manager of Porchlight, a non-profit organization devoted to a farmer-controlled and consumer-oriented food and fiber system, said the current trend toward large, industrial farms has negative consequences for people's health, the economy and the self-sufficiency of small farms. "Diversified family farms is what made this country great," Kineman said.

Kinsman, president of Family Farm Defenders, a non-profit organization devoted to a farmer-controlled and consumer-oriented food and fiber system, said the current trend toward large, industrial farms has negative consequences for the land.

Both Hall and Kinsman argued for an increased focus on local food, as opposed to imported food.

Importing food and industrialized farming leads to small farmers not getting a fair price for their work, according to Kinsman, who said farmers are going bankrupt because the prices they get for their food do not correspond to the funds required for production.

Industrialized farms — known as Confined Animal Feeding Operations — were the targets of Kinsman's criticism.

Kinsman said family farms are the local alternative to these operations, as those local to these operations are not the only ones consuming milk produced by industrialized farms.

Hall also objected to growth hormones such as recombinant bovine growth hormone, or rBGH, which he believes to be harmful to human health, being included in milk. "I wouldn't drink that stuff if I was starving," Hall said. The Food and Drug Administration approved the use of rBGH in cows in 1993 and the hormone is still safe today, according to the FDA website. The FDA also regulates crops grown using genetic techniques and ensures the safety of products that are genetically modified.

Hall said the change to protect farmers will result from people in urban areas demanding local food, not from industrialized farms. He also said farmers suffer from unfair international trading practices. For example, a surplus of dairy products is shipped to India, which undermines the local dairy prices there.

In turn, India sends a surplus amount of dried dairy goods to the United States, which lowers prices in the U.S. "Because of the low prices, there is no dignity left in providing food," Hall said.

Jeffrey Beumer, Willy Street Co-op receiver and board member, attended the discussion and said responsible food practices reflect how people are all connected and can help each other out.

"I think one of the great benefits for events like this is that people can build connections between each other," Beumer said.
Organic Dairy, Environmentalism and Community Action:
Meet John Kinsman, a Wisconsin dairy farmer who has been stewarding his land for over 50 years.

By Jody Padgham, MOSES

On a rocky and hilly 150 acre farm in south central Wisconsin John Kinsman and his wife reared 10 children, supported only by a small organic milking herd raised primarily on grass and hay. Admitting that this economic feat may not be as feasible now in the time of high land prices and overhead, John does have several suggestions to young farmers today as to how to support a high quality life while preserving and improving a farm's natural systems. John is the Secretary of the MODPA Board of Directors.

A Look at the Farm

Over 50 years ago John and his wife scraped by enough money to buy a very overworked rental farm located about 1½ miles from the farm where John was raised near Lime Ridge, WI. The land is covered with steep hillsides and deep ravines, “It looks like a crumpled blanket,” John laughs. “The land was so misused before we bought it that even the weeds wouldn’t grow,” he recalls. “It looked like a brown highway.” He says they couldn’t even plow, there was virtually no soil left, with rocks “the size of icebergs.”

Fifty years later the pastures are lush and replanted and managed woodlands are thriving. One of John’s first efforts on the struggling landscape was to plant trees to restore the woods. With sustainable forestry as a primary passion, John claims that not a year has gone by that he hasn’t planted a tree. The rocky and steep hillsides are now covered with a beautiful forest. “Even the local conservationists come out to see what unique species we have here,” John claims. “They say we have plants and animals they haven’t seen anywhere else in the area.” There are even several springs that have emerged, where there were never springs before. John’s passion for the forest was fueled by an awareness of the need to put each type of land on the farm into its best use. He saw that the steep rocky hillsides should be wooded to stop erosion and build soil and habitat, and that the rolling hills would be best as pasture. The farm is now divided with about 80-90 acres as pasture and the remainder as woodland, with the cows fenced out of the woods.

Originally thinking he’d grow row crops, John soon realized that the soil couldn’t support cropping systems and so he moved all his flatter ground into pasture. He hasn’t planted corn on the farm in over 45 years, and says that he can grow enough pasture and hay to support his 36 cows and 38 calves and heifers on the 90 acres, with the addition of a little corn purchased from a neighbor. John has never been a high-input farmer, and buys no fertilizer except a few pounds of rock phosphate (to lock in the nitrogen) to mix with each load of manure that he spreads in a light layer over the fields each year. The soil is now rich and darker after 50 years of careful management. Pastures are a diverse mix, an alfalfa base mixed with lots of grasses and clovers. If they need some rejuvenation he will frost seed patches. Paddocks are permanent with a series of lanes and gates that allow John to graze everything or portions at a time in the intensively managed system. Laying out the farm with a local county agent many years ago, they set hay fields into long strips, one 80 acres long, rolling up and down the hills, which makes harvest very easy.

John’s 36 cows are fed only pasture, hay and mineral with a few handfuls of his partner’s organic corn at milking time. He used to feed more protein, but decided to experiment with feeding less and is happy with the result. “It was scary to try it,” he notes, “But I was spending thousands of dollars on buying in protein and losing money.” He says that he had to be willing to have less production in order to make money. With his organic operation and low stress cows, his vet bills are negligible and the cows are healthier. “You have to get to the point that you don’t feel bad about lower DHI records,” he laughs. “I like to work with contented cows, in a leisurely way.”

John isn’t a fan of a lot of fancy management tools. He doesn’t use a computer and isn’t that big on fancy ration formulas. He tells the story that his old partner spent a lot of time on the computer figuring out specific rations for each cow, but
they started to lose cows. "The rations got mixed up and no one was looking at the cows," he says. After that experience he returned to his original idea that you need to judge every cow as an individual, get away from over analyzing with fancy tests and ratios and just go out there to see and feel how things are going. "You have to use common sense and instincts to see problems," he says. "If I have good cow condition, they are eating well, and the manure looks good, I know I am feeding right."

For the past several years John has co-farmed with a partner. His previous partner was a young man who eventually left to develop a larger conventional farm on his own. John points out that many folks in his area have taken the approach of taking large bank loans, or grants from the government, to expand, are now struggling, or even being forced to go out of business. John's current partner does most of the milking and contributes about half of the farm's labor. He and John share income and expenses, as the partner also raises beef and the organic corn for all the cattle on his own farm. Since John's partner's wife has an off-farm job, it is safe to say that the two farms currently support 1+½ families, a total of 4 adults and two teenagers.

A six week stay in the hospital 45 years ago led John into organic production. He had been farming conventionally, but suddenly lost control of his legs and had to be hospitalized. "I was in a ward with several other farmers," John says. "Many were horribly disfigured." John continues that the doctors and interns kept coming in and asking him about his use of pesticides. They never came right out and diagnosed his problem as pesticide related, but it was obvious that what they were thinking because of the questions they asked him and the other farmers. He decided right then to go organic and hasn't looked back since. He has since worked with his neighbors to try to get them to use organic practices.

Suggestions for Success

John has several recommendations to share regarding how to be successful as an organic dairy farmer and farm advocate:

- To succeed you must WANT to farm. You must realize that it will be hard work, but that you can succeed if

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you don't worry about keeping up with the neighbors. John points out that you can't listen to the "get bigger" recommendations, as they can make your operation precarious. He adds, "The work is what is satisfying about farming. You have to use or lose your body!" He sees tractors as playthings, and recommends anyone stick with older machinery that can still be fixed in the yard. Computers and other complicated mechanisms on new tractors can lead to a lot of expense and down time when you have to get someone else to fix it.

- **Focus on net income.** Most folks like to look at a high gross income, but John emphasizes that the net is what counts. Keep costs low so that you can run an operation that is low stress for both you and your animals (and the land).

- **Work with nature.** Being organic is the only lasting way to farm, especially if you have challenging soil conditions such as John started with. You have to partner with nature, don't try to change nature to what you want. It will take nature awhile to stabilize after it has been misused, and organic is the only way to bring it back. We must focus on making things better for the next, and all, generations.

- **Learn from others, especially internationally.** For the past several years John has travelled the world, as a dairy farmer volunteer educator and as a representative of several organizations. Counting farming friends on several continents, John notes that he has learned an incredible amount by talking to and visiting dairy farmers from all over the world. John is the one of the founding members of the Family Farm Defenders, which he and 15 others started in the early 1990s as an alternative to other national farm organizations. "Family Farm Defenders is one of the best regarded farm organizations internationally," he notes. "We have been committed to working with, not against our international partners." He has an incredible view of the rise (and hopeful fall) of industrial chemical agriculture in many countries. He sees hope in the large number of farmers that are reclaiming the best of their native traditions and going back to farming the way that people have farmed sustainably for thousands of years. John comments that the negatives of GMOs and chemicals are becoming readily apparent in many countries. The new high expenses they generate are creating huge farming debts and even the destruction of families as debt-ridden farmers sell their own organs or commit suicide.

John stresses that we need to not only visit other countries, but also encourage people from other places to visit our farms. You will not only learn a lot, but the local media can also become interested and run a story about what you are doing on your farm. Neighbors that hadn't expressed interest previously may even be enticed to come hear about your farm as part of an international group tour.

- **Become involved!** John is a stellar example of the impact one can have by gathering with others to educate and create change. He recommends that anyone can start to generate support for what they do and believe locally by just attending meetings or participating on local committees. He emphasizes the importance of getting consumers involved. "Urban people are the farmers' best allies," he notes. They have tremendous power, both in the market place and as strong voices. Developing local partnerships with consumers is well worth your time. "Local and national consumer groups are desperate to hear the farmer voice," John states. He recommends any farmer shouldn't be shy to get up and talk. "Just tell your story in your own words, don't try to be someone else. They want to hear your voice." He also advocates that pretty much any farmer can tell their story through the print media. Write a letter, an editorial or an article, he says. "If you aren't comfortable doing it yourself, ask someone to help you. Your voice is very important."

As you can tell by now, John is a man of many interests and passions. It is hard to know where to stop when relaying all of the important things he has learned and is willing to share. He is excited to have done what he has done and be doing what he is doing, and is an inspiring example of how one farm, one family and one farmer can have a huge, positive impact on the world.

Jody Padgham is the editor of the Organic Broadcaster newspaper and also the financial manager at MOSES. She owns a 60-acre grass based farm in central Wisconsin where she raises sheep and organic poultry.
Got Economic Justice?
by John Kinsman

The U.S. can not achieve lasting economic recovery until it shifts to an economy based on justice. Government officials in Washington, DC and the fifty states are scrambling to cut funding for essential services while ignoring the elephants in the living room.

Why won’t government officials acknowledge the elephants and solve this crisis?

1.) The #1 industry in the U.S. is the military. Over half of our federal budget now goes to military related expenditures. The U.S. is trapped in a military industrial complex based on war and fear of violence. Our #1 export is arms and military hardware to most any nation, often eventually used against one another and against us.

Billions of dollars go to maintain troops and the 700+ U.S. military bases all over the world. The budget for highly paid secretive mercenaries is higher than the budget for regular military personnel. Billions of dollars are unaccounted for in rampanty corrupt military outlays that seem to be above prosecution. “America is pre-programmed for war, and unless the anti-war movement dramatically changes the manner in which it conducts its struggle, America will become a nation of war, for war, and defined by war, and as such a nation that will ultimately be consumed by war,” noted former Marine Corps major, Scott Ritter, in his 2007 book, Waging Peace: The Art of War for the Anti-War Movement.

2.) Blatant criminal activity by huge banks and inside traders are impoverishing millions of people. Price fixing and land grabbing by commodity traders and financial speculators are destroying countless family farmers. Obviously, serious enforcement of anti-trust legislation would embarrass and implicate too many political “friends” in Congress and other high government positions. Hundreds of farmers, consumers, and their allies spoke out against corporate control of our food/farm system at joint USDA/DoJ anti-trust workshops held across the U.S. last year, yet nothing has been done.

3.) The U.S. prison system is another one of our largest industries. The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration per capita of any country in the world. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, 1 out of every 100 Americans is now behind bars. Much of this trend is based on destructive drug policies that are selectively enforced. Millions of poor people of color are imprisoned for engaging in the same types of minor drug crimes that go ignored in largely white middle class communities and on college campuses. If we returned to the incarceration rates our nation had in the 1970s (which many citizens then thought were much too high), we would need to release four out of five people currently behind bars. More than a million people employed by the criminal justice system/industry would lose their jobs. Presently, the U.S. is two years behind in drug rehabilitation and providing help to those suffering from mental health problems. Both groups deteriorate in prison until treatment is available.

Warehousing of poor people and people of color to support the military and prison economies destroys countless lives and only adds to the moral and economic decay of our country. The role of generals and defense contractors is to SPEND, particularly in districts of powerful congress people and senators. The fighting is left to farm kids, the poor, and minority youth who are grasping for a way out of their poverty situation. Young people are sent to the world’s killing fields as a matter of course... As U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, has noted, over 40% of U.S. military recruits are now drawn from rural America. A 2007 Carsey Institute study found that over a quarter of those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan also came from rural areas.

Obviously our government officials will not change the highly profitable military and prison industries. Nor will they take action against the massive anti-trust violations that allow the few to profit at the expense of the many. That leaves the rest of us working together, to bring about an economic recovery based on human values; a recovery that redirects these billions of dollars wasted on violence towards rebuilding programs that bring dignity to all people. This also means shifting dollars to building “bridges” of friendship with our global neighbors instead of “walls” of violence and distrust.

This bridge building is possible only if we have the will to regard all people of all cultures as our brothers and sisters. Only then will we be able to work in harmony to change the system. The international organization La Via Campesina (LVC)...
activist farmer

representing almost 400 million family farmers, peasants, and workers is a good example. For fifteen years, LVC delegates from many countries (including those that certain powerful politicians have decided are “enemies” of the U.S.) have shown it can be done. After years of deliberation, LVC delegates from 82 countries unanimously approved and pledged to implement the seven principles of food sovereignty:

1.) Food is a human right
2.) Agrarian reform
3.) Protecting natural resources
4.) Reorganizing food trade
5.) Ending the globalization of hunger
6.) Social peace and
7.) Democratic control.

Food sovereignty is basically the right of all peoples and communities to determine their own food policies and to take care of their local needs first. The inspiring experience of working in harmony with the wisdom of indigenous peoples, people of all cultures, and all religions from all over the world is a privilege that should give much hope to those of us still striving to bring about economic justice in the U.S.

Constructive Cooperation or Destructive Competition?
by John Kinsman

Published in FFD newsletter - Summer 2009

Cattle and grain farmer, Glenn Tait, representing the Farmers Union of Canada & the Canadian Wheat Board, came to our FFD annual meeting in March in the spirit of cooperation and sharing of policies including “supply management” that brought fair prices in Canada. Also at our FFD meeting, keynote speaker Prof. John Ikerd, economist from the Univ. of Missouri, strongly endorsed sustainable family farm agriculture while detailing the destruction that CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations) impose on food, the environment, and the overall farm economy. Rafael Enrique Colmanerez, a coffee farmer and co-op organizer from Venezuela came later in March to share with us the successful rebuilding of agriculture in his country. And earlier, last November, Rodrigo Lopes of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) came in solidarity to enlighten us with their experience in creating prosperous farming communities in Brazil. Prior to that farmer friends from Central America, Europe, Africa, and Asia met with us - not to compete for lower prices but to cooperate for fair prices and wages. These models of justice for farmers and workers are in direct contradiction to the competitive “race to the bottom” resulting from the free trade regimes and other regressive agricultural policies forced upon us.

Years ago I had a discussion with a wise older farmer regarding the wisdom of hedging (playing) the farm commodities futures markets. University economists were labeling those of us as backward and stupid for not investing in the futures markets. My wise farmer friend, Frank Goodman, summed up our discussion with this statement: "Of course these professional futures traders need us; where there are big winners there must be losers - they need us!"

We can all be winners if we work together in constructive cooperation, using some of the models of our foreign neighbor friends. For too long a few giant corporations have profited greatly at our expense as we are forced into policies of destructive competition with our neighbors whether they be next door or in another country.
The USDA mandated Commodity Check-Off Boards squeeze millions of dollars from beef, dairy, hog, corn, soybean and other commodity farmers to compete against one another for markets when they should be cooperating for the common good. To add “insult to injury” the dairy check-off boards allowed industry to dictate their promotion messages. Our family farmer check-off dollars were used to promote Monsanto’s rBGH product and other industrial agriculture technologies that were designed to put us out of business. When FFD organized a nationwide campaign to force a referendum on whether to continue the dairy check-off, we found massive fraud in the bloc voting by the huge dairy cooperatives to keep it in place. Several family farm organizations attempted to vote out other counterproductive check-off boards but were overwhelmed by massive opposition by industry and the USDA. Meanwhile there appears to be competition between the winners: the Cargills, the Tysons, the ADMs, the Monsantos and others to see who can extract the most dollars from farmers and workers. To aid you in a clearer understanding of how these winners consolidate their power, I urge you to read “The War on Bugs” by Will Allen of Vermont, published by Chelsea Green Press (See book reviews in this issue.)

As I read material from Land Grant Agricultural Colleges and the industry dominated farm press, the words “compete” and “competition” dominate their advice. The “competition” they promote is designed to take away something from the competitor to harm them or to destroy them. This economic competition model breeds distrust as it pits neighbor against neighbor and community against community impoverishing them while agribusiness giants haul away massive profits.

The headline in the March 2009 issue of The Onion reads “FDA APPROVES SALMONELLA” The Onion is a satirical magazine which makes fun of politicians and policies that deserve ridicule. This headline just happens to be somewhat relevant at this time as a 3/19/09 article in AgriView reports on a corporate developed vaccine for cattle which prevents the development of most of the deadly E.Coli 0157 in a cow’s intestine. The USDA has granted a conditional license to sell this vaccine- Epitopix LLC and it now on the market. The article further stated, “Some major packers and producers will be the first to use it, but declined to be named, saying they don’t want their names associated with E. coli even for research. A spokesman for Tyson Foods Inc., one of the nation’s largest meat processors declined to comment. A call to Cargill Meat Solutions wasn’t immediately returned. CAFO factory farms and filthy corporate packing plants can continue to produce and process filthy diseased drug drenched beef with a “reduced” risk of E. coli bacteria. If consumers had a choice would they choose this beef or that from cattle raised on a grass-fed environmentally sustainable family farm?

The good news is that our family farmer and peasant friends from around the world are building models of constructive cooperation. The principles of Food Sovereignty are becoming a reality with many grassroots people. I was part of a unanimous consensus decision by delegates representing millions of farmers on plans to implement these principles at a international conference in Mozambique in October of 2008. Our good friend, Henry Sarigih, presented the Food Sovereignty message to the United Nations in New York on April 7th, 2009 (to read his full address, visit www.familyfarmdefenders. org). Henry is a farmer from Indonesia and the International Coordinator of La Via Campesina, representing several million peasants and family farmers around the world. Our president of NFFC and good friend, Ben Burkett, was a responder to the United Nations panel. Henry and Ben later enjoyed a productive two hour private meeting with Mr. De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food at the U.N.. Mr. De Schutter’s speech to the U.N. emphasized several of the principles of Food Sovereignty, stressing that governments must legislate and enforce “right to food” laws in their countries. He noted that 20 countries, including Brazil, India, South Africa, Ecuador, Bolivia and others have recognized the right to food in their constitutions.

Peasants, family farmers (especially women) are reclaiming desertified areas through water retention techniques, reforestation including agro-forestry farming, soil rebuilding, managed grazing, crop rotation and other sustainable methods that are highly productive and using the principles of Food Sovereignty to insure a life of dignity for the present and future. It is extremely hopeful to witness grassroots people making these ecologically sound cooperative changes that will make the world a better place.
Whose Really Behind the Push for More Industrial Agriculture? – The Answer is AFACt, a Front Group for Monsanto
by John Kinsman

On Sept. 7th, 2011 the Country Today ran an op ed by Heidi Clausen titled “Gore, Prince Charles Need Reality Check on Farming.” Unfortunately, Clausen neglected to do her homework before writing this article since it basically parrots the half truths spread by various front groups for corporate agribusiness. One of these front groups that is quite active in Wisconsin and is heavily bankrolled by Monsanto is AFACt – American Farmers for the Advancement and Conservation of Technology.

In her article Clausen states “England’s choices have routinely scared off proposals for modern dairy and hog operations, making that country largely dependent on other nations to feed its roughly 60 million residents.” The implication is that the only way to feed the world is through industrial agriculture and its technologies: recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH), biotech crops, pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, antibiotics, and so on.

A major international study in 2008 sponsored by the World Bank and five U.N. agencies proves otherwise. The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD) was conducted by 400 respected scientists and development experts from more than 80 countries and its results have since been endorsed by 58 countries. They note that “conventional industrial agriculture is degrading the world’s soils and other natural resources, and now threatens water, energy, and climate security.” The IAASTD report also concludes that locally based small scale family farm agriculture is the only system that can feed the world and cool the planet.

Another recent study by the Univ. of Michigan, comparing data from almost 100 other studies of conventional and sustainable agriculture, also found that a worldwide switch to sustainable organic agriculture could actually increase global food production as much as 50%. That is enough to feed a population of 9 billion people without any extra land.

In reality, it has been British policy to encourage factory farm expansion at the expense of family farms, even when these smaller sustainable operations fed more people. On separate occasions as I’ve traveled across England, I’ve seen these industrial confinement facilities and the dangerous consequences they bring. Prince Charles does not have the power to set farm policy in the U.K., and if he did he would certainly choose small scale sustainable family farming. Powerful transnational corporations like Monsanto are the ones dictating destructive food and farm policies in the U.K. just as they do in the U.S. and many other countries. In order see their influence, just follow the money and watch how their “investment” pays off when it comes to public policy.

Here in Wisconsin several dairy farmers who often appear in the media speaking in favor of industrial agriculture are actually AFACt figure-heads. These individuals include Liz Doornink, Laura Daniels, and Daphne Holterman. A July 8, 2011 article in the River Falls Journal reported that Jon-De Farms near Baldwin, WI, owned by Liz Doornink, spilled liquid manure from a broken pipeline into the Rush River. According to the DNR, such manure spills from Jo-De Farm have happened several times before. Nonethe-less, Doornink was awarded the Dairy Woman of the Year award at the 2010 World Dairy Expo. According to AgriView (9/23/10), she received the award because she sets “the standard for intelligence and commitment to the dairy industry.” Daphne Holterman, who owns Rosy Lane Dairy near Watertown, WI, won the same prize the year before, and has been hard at work for AFACt in Wisconsin countering the criticism of industrial agriculture by authors like Michael Pollen, who was met by protesters when he spoke to 8000 people at UW-Madison’s Kohl Center in Sept. 2009. Laura Daniels, one of the organizers of this protest, owns Heartwood Farm near Cobb, WI, works part-time as a nutritionist for Vita-Plus, is also on AFACt’s national leadership team.

In her op ed Clausen claims that AFACt is made up of farm families nationwide – in reality, it is a fake “grassroots” group created and controlled by Monsanto. In his March 9, 2008 New York Times article exposing Monsanto’s ties to AFACt, investigative journalist Andrew Martin concludes with the following "AFACt also listed integrity, honesty, and transparent as words we wish to embody. They could start by being more straightforward about who is behind AFACt."

As more food safety and environmental contamination disasters occur, farmers and consumers are perfectly justified in rejecting dangerous technologies like rBGH and Round-Up that members of AFACt are paid to promote. That is why sustainable small scale agriculture – not large scale industrial agriculture – is the fastest growing segment of farming today. If anyone needs a reality check, it is AFACt.
Taxpayer Subsidized Manure Digesters
Stimulate Factory Farm Pollution
by John Kinsman

What is the latest taxpayer subsidized economic stimulus scheme?
Why, manure digesters on factory farms, of course!

At the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen late last Dec. USDA Sec. Tom Vilsack unveiled plans to promote manure digesters as a way to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 25% - the trick is that you have to be a factory farm to qualify. In his State of the State address in early Jan., WI Governor, Jim Doyle, also announced his latest round of fresh tax credits for factory farm expansion, including a whopping $6.6 million for two manure digesters in Dane County catering to just a handful of mega dairies. Dane County Executive, Kathleen Falk, has also been pushing for $1 million in her own budget for these digesters. The total pricetag for the one proposed near Waunakee is over $17 million – just imagine how much good that money could do if devoted to promoting sustainable agriculture instead!
The real tragedy is that manure digesters actually make global warming worse while “solving” a manure problem that would not even exist if cows were allowed to graze on pasture rather than being confined indoors. As Paris Reidhead explains that the digesters operate like a cow’s stomach and need the proper bacterial balance to function efficiently. And for this balance, the farmers have to add corn silage or other biomass material to the liquid manure. The owners explained that these digesters were simply not profitable without the five to ten year contracts that guaranteed huge government subsidies. As problems developed they were forced to install a newer more expensive system, and with that “fix” came newer problems. It seemed this treadmill was mostly designed to benefit sales people, technicians, and manufacturers of manure digesters, not family farmers or the environment.

Without a fair milk price that actually covers their cost of production, many of the German farmers said they would not survive through 2010. The same crisis is facing dairy farmers in the U.S. who have endured a 50% decline in farmgate prices due to corporate control even as consumer prices for milk in the store have not budged and the dairy giants report record profits. In contrast, sustainable organic grass-based dairy farmers were a bit better off in Germany as they are in the U.S., though their future is not secure either. Numerous studies by Tom Kriegl of the UW Center for Dairy Profitability have shown that the most efficient dairy operations have less than 100 cows mostly outside and eating grass – yet, such a family farm is not large enough to qualify for taxpayer support and does not create enough manure to require a methane digester.

On the final day of International Green Week in Berlin, the BDM (Germany’s largest dairy farmer organization) held their annual congress with over 1500 people., mostly farmers present. Germany’s Agricultural Minister, Ilse Aigner, gave a pro-industry free trade pep talk not unlike what U.S. farmers must endure from our own USDA Secretary, Tom Vilsack. In my scheduled talk and discussions afterwards, German farmers were shocked to hear that U.S. farmers were also suffering from low prices and
repressive trade/farm policies just as they were. The USDA, industry, and the Farm Bureau had convinced them all that U.S. dairy farmers were prosperous. They had also been told that all U.S. dairy farmers were jumping on the factory farm manure digester bandwagon in order to take advantage of carbon credits – just a few of the many false solutions to climate change, including biotech crops, biochar, and agro fuels, that are now being pushed at public expense.

As long as my tax dollars and those of other organic sustainable farmers are being used to bankroll schemes that just increase pollution for more corporate profit, there will be no economic recovery. Indigenous communities developed “earth-friendly” farming methods that kept our planet healthy for thousands of years. Many of these practices are being incorporated into family farming today around the world. In fact, a recent 2008 study by 400 scientists for the United Nations International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) concluded that small-scale organic agriculture is not only the best means to feed the world, but also the best response to climate change.

Let’s stop wasting money on expensive digesters for a manure problem that does not need to exist, and put cows back outside on pasture where they belong. When manure is treated as a valuable resource, as it is on small farms, then we can eliminate or drastically reduce the need for petroleum based chemical fertilizers. Ending factory farm subsidies and promoting sustainable agriculture instead will not only lead to fairer milk prices for family farmers and healthier food choices for consumers, but it will actually help spare the planet from climate change, too.

### No More Nukes

**opinion article 4/18/11**

by John Kinsman

Nuclear power is not only unnecessary, it is among the costliest and potentially the most dangerous ways to produce electricity – which is why investors demand loan guarantees and taxpayer subsidized liability insurance, rather than risk their own dollars building new nuclear plants. Nonetheless, just five days after the Fukushima disaster in Japan, U.S. Energy Secretary, Steven Chu, was testifying before Congress wanting to build more nukes. In fact, Pres. Obama is proposing $36 billion to entice private industry to build the plants while cutting billions from renewable energy alternatives. This $36 billion in fresh loans is over and above the $18.5 billion already approved under the Bush administration. Apparently, the nuclear lobby enjoys bipartisan support.

The World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace International have done authoritative studies that show the U.S. and the world could shed dependency upon fossil fuels and nuclear power and shift to real green energy by 2050 if governments chose to do so. But can we, and the governments who supposedly represent us, rise above corporate profit and bureaucratic inertia to stop global climate change and serve the better interest of society as a whole?

Putting corporate interests first meant a fourteen hour delay before the managers of the Fukushima plant began pumping seawater into the overheated reactors, and this delay allowed a disaster of horrific consequences to unfold. According to the Wall Street Journal, it took a direct command from the Japanese Prime Minister to start the pumping. After all, introducing seawater would permanently ruin the reactors and render the company’s assets worthless.

Besides the brave Japanese workers who are sacrificing themselves in the battle to stop this meltdown, who is next to suffer from these inevitable nuclear accidents? Why, of course, farmers, fishers, gardeners, and consumers who have to dump milk, destroy animals, and bury produce that has been contaminated by fallout. The same thing happened after Chernobyl when the Lapplanders were forced to kill thousands of their prized reindeer and tons of tainted produce had to be pulled from European farmers markets and grocery shelves. We will all be living with Fukushima for generations to come.

Corporate proponents of more nuclear plants in the U.S. claim their safety is assured because
they are designed to withstand earthquakes of the highest magnitude. The Fukushima reactors were also built based upon this principle, but they did not plan for other unpredictable events that could trigger a meltdown. With global climate change, we are experiencing natural disasters of greater intensity and frequency - floods, hurricanes, droughts, tornadoes - that were previously thought impossible. And, as shown by the BP Gulf Oil spill fiasco, corporate dominated decision making does not add human error, sabotage, safety violations, and greed into the equation. No doubt General Electric’s cost cutting Mark 1 reactor design had a role to play in the Fukushima disaster, which is why the GE engineers were right to resign in protest 35 years ago when their safety concerns were overruled by GE executives. Incidentally, GE managed to pay no taxes to the U.S. government this year.

Here in Wisconsin there is also a renewed push to expand nuclear power plants, while failing to seriously pursue other greener alternatives. Worse yet, as spent fuel rods pileup at existing reactors on the shores of Lake Michigan and on islands in the Mississippi River, eyes are shifting to Wisconsin as a potential host for a national high level radioactive waste dumpsite. One can only imagine the inherent dangers with transporting such waste by truck, ship, and train across the continent to our North Woods for burial forever.

In 2008 the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD), sponsored by the World Bank and five U.N. agencies, issued its long awaited study. The study’s conclusion calls for a transformation of the world’s food and farm system towards smallscale sustainable agriculture. According to the 400 scientists and development experts from more than 80 countries involved in the study, this is the only way to cool the planet and feed the world, and the IAASTD’s finding has already been endorsed by 58 countries. These small family farms work with nature and require far less fossil fuel and electricity demand - in contrast to industrial agriculture which is responsible for 25% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

Concerned citizens need to contact their elected officials at both the state and federal level to oppose these misguided taxpayer subsidized proposals to build more nukes. The U.S. should be following the example of Germany - where 2% of all electricity now comes from solar - and impose an immediate moratorium on new reactors pending a comprehensive safety review of existing ones. Better yet, there are the examples of other nations - like Australia, Denmark, and Malaysia - that have refused to go down the nuclear road at all. Renewable green energy could easily fulfill all our electricity needs and make dangerous unsustainable options like nuclear obsolete.
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