

NESAWG 2015 *It Takes A Region* Conference

Session: Labor & Trade Discussion & Work Group

Session 1

Elizabeth Henderson – organic farmer – one of the oldest CSA's. Wrote *Sharing the Harvest: Citizen's Guide to CSAs*. Been involved with Domestic Fair Trade. And Diana Robinson of Food Chain Workers Alliance.

There's a lot to talk about around labor and trade in this region.

Introductions in the group. Some people here to learn, some people working on labor and trade and food justice issues, some have worked on TPP (against it), others researching TPP and how it impacts labor and trade. Many folks from Real Food Challenge, some from Domestic Fair Trade Association, Hudson Valley Farm Hub. Victor from Guatemala, Workers Justice Center in NY, currently unemployed, but has worked in several farms, been here 10 years, wants to help workers know their rights. Some farm and urban farm managers.

Diana, Food Chain Workers Alliance – helping to organize workers all across the food system; purpose to bring together people who are interested in food and ask more about worker justice at all levels. Lately focused on institutional local food procurement and how to infuse those relationships with the comprehensive values around labor justice, food safety and all other values, not just the local goal. Heath Environment Ag Labor (HEAL) Coalition of orgs to nourish the earth and people, rather than an extractive and exploitative food system. Working to create policies and the narrative around food work, the value and dignity in it. Uplift worker issues and help bring workers together from different parts of the food system to share strategies for winning campaigns and share stories (ex; different races, parts of the country, restaurants and farmers, etc.). Helps build power and solidarity in struggle. Org's purpose is to make space for those conversations and for people to organize and make change. Allow people to create their own solutions rather than be paternalistic.

Elizabeth – as a farmer, we're also food workers. Ag is often labeled as the bad guy – the farmers imposing bad conditions. But actually farms are caught in the middle. There's a decrease in the number of farms. Very hard for farms to stay in business. For farmers should not think about ourselves as members of the chamber of commerce. We are working in the fields with our workers. To adapt to climate change and ensure food safety and security, everybody has to be contributing to the solution. We have to be nimble, flexible, and creative to get through it. The conventional food system would be happy to import food from a system that doesn't pay well. That's what's been happening in organic. Now a hefty percentage of the ingredients for organic processed food is imported. The reason organic was more expensive was so that farmers could stay in business. That's what CSAs helped to do – members share the risks with the farmers. These are big issues and it takes us to work together. I've been happy

with this NESAWG conference – all workshops had to think about how race equity and the economics of the issues being discussed relate. Each session had a checklist to think through. This will help NESAWG become more effective.

Maybe we need to think of some topics.

Procurement policies – RFC folks, if you have a set of guidelines, are you going to provide incentives for businesses to meet those guidelines? 2 examples – Caring Dairy Program with Ben and Jerry’s wanted me to give advice on the quality of their program. One thing they have been doing right is to pay farmers an incentive to participate in the program. Ben and Jerry’s pays them to make changes to labor and environmental practices. Whole Foods doesn’t pay farmers extra to meet their standards, of certified organic, fair pay for workers, those are big challenges for small businesses. So how are those systems going to work?

Mary Jo Dudley – IN the last session there was some concern by farmers to jump into domestic fair trade out of fear about their workers’ immigration status. That hesitation is a red herring. It prevents people from moving forward. It seems to me that if you talk to the workers, they already know their vulnerability, and include them in the process, it doesn’t further endanger.

Elizabeth – There have been some farmers who did not want to go through with Food Justice Certification out of that fear that their workers would be arrested and deported

Sue Futrell – There are farms with good practices and they become a target.

Jo Dudley – But ICE knows where the farms are and they could go get workers if they wanted to.

Sure – but the farms and the workers are both vulnerable. All of these things are important, AJP is doing great work, but none of them are fixing the system, no silver bullet.

Allison – and example from VT migrant Justice – Milk with Dignity Program. It’s getting at some of these issues – it’s a worker-defined social responsibility standard. For the beginning the workers have not been participating in the decision making process. But this program has been championed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers campaign in Florida (penny per lb). It takes into account the farmers’ vulnerability as well. Ben and Jerry’s provides the price premium to the farmers for complying with worker defined standards. If workers are scared, maybe we should listen to them to hear what route does feel safe.

Caitlin – How are farms opting into this program, how is the dialogue started and what does the conversation look like/play out?

Allison – there were some egregious labor and human rights violations going on at first on the dairy farms that supply the St. Albans Coop and now the workers have identified that the corporate decision maker was the lynch pin. So they approached Ben and Jerry’s and tasked

them to get on board and then they got the farmers on board. It was based on asking each individual farm to choose. It's a lot about the corporate purchaser and the farm than the consumer and the farm.

Elizabeth – I've been involved with that process; my role has been to make it clear to B+J that they had to talk both to the farmers and the farm workers. The milk is supplied by a co-op, so the farms provide the milk through in a pool. The person that negotiates the price, is Unilever the megacorporation that controls Ben and Jerry's, so I'm fascinated to see how this transpires, as the Price of milk continues to drop. The price of milk has gone down \$8 per hundred weight in the last year.

Valentine – Earlier work at Migrant Justice was focused on the bad actors. This program focuses on the good actors. Migrant justice trains farm workers to present their case to the farmers who are already doing some good and programs should support the good actors in their work

Woman from Penn – and to make that the new normal.

Louis from Domestic Fair Trade Association – the new norm is to help the players recognize each other's practice and hold each other accountable. The Immokalee worker campaign should be a model and is for VT Migrant Justice

Sue – when we realized that the public certification wasn't something our farms were interested in, we went back to more internal discussions among the workers and us and so we, Red Tomato, can better understand the situation. Mostly we're talking to supermarket representatives. In the Imokalee case, they've gone to the buyers to say you need to pay for this if you want this change. We're always involved in a competitive price negotiation. What's the dignity price? It's a combined process of consumers raising the bar, then the suppliers at least working to source from farmers who at least abide by the law.

Victor – I'd like to go back to the housing part. The bosses provide us with housing so that they can have us at their beck and call at any hour they want. Sometimes when we have problems with housing and talk to the boss. If the heat, the stove, washer's not working. A lot of time goes by and they don't fix it. I heard about a housing situation where there was no windows, just some cloth attached to the window. The water was the same as for the cows, it was smelly and dirty. The guys asked for just some water and maybe fix the window. The boss said you can't tell me what to do on my farm. I'm the boss you're the worker. And if you don't like it I'm going to call immigration on you. And I'm paying you a good wage, I'm paying \$8.50. And since they didn't change anything about the housing, we said that's it, we're not going to work here. So the boss, the boss can't do anything with his farm without Latinos. So because they all quit at once, the boss called immigration. And then they got a driver to come pick them up and bring them to a hotel. The person showed up and all of a sudden there was immigration holding them in detention. And they told her there's nothing you can do here, they're already with us. So I think it's really important that we fix the housing, we're exposed to so much accidents and danger.

Carly Fox (Translator) – He’s living in my house. He’s injured and can’t work. There’s no governmental solution being offered, only band aids right now. I’m trying to coordinate a consumer side campaign on the dairy industry nation-wide. The system is really complicated. We need a lot of help and I don’t even know how to coordinate all the people who want to help. We have incredible worker leadership.

Lewis – how many workers are we talking

Mary Jo – about 10, 000 just in NY state. But don’t quote me on it. The reality is that there is no investigative authority to look at housing on farms unless someone calls the health agency. There’s no effective mechanism for changing the violations. As Victor said, there’s always a cloud hanging over workers - the boss can and many will call immigration.

Lazaro, another migrant worker – the boss is looking for a hug profit on the backs of the workers, there should be an equilibrium, he should have a profit and we should benefit too. They don’t have to fight against us. They should fight against the government for a subsidy, not us. They don’t have enough profit, it’s not our fault. They should look toward the horizon. We’re contributing to their pockets. They want us to be quiet. They aren’t putting themselves in our place. IF they would spend five minutes.

Carly Fox - We have a petition against a farm manager who beat up a worker.

Elizabeth – We’re coming at this from both the gut wrenching story aspect and the policy framework, so let’s try to figure out a solution. They inform one another.

Carly - 98% of farms aren’t under OSHA – when OSHA got passed dairy farms with fewer than 11 workers were exempted from inspections. Chobani ramped up production in NY state exponentially. We are setting up the worker centers so workers can speak for themselves and be able to educate each other. The right to a day off and to organize. We need a service, leadership training, drivers license, English classes so workers can negotiate with their own bosses. Housing at the state level is a way to advocate. They just choose not to. Wage - create mechanisms for workers to make wage demands without a lawyer. Ramp up an organizing campaign in NY to get the workers together.

Mary Jo – there’s a push to increase production in NY state by 5% but there’s no plan to increase the number of workers. There’s a lower price for milk too. I don’t think it’s all Chobani. Carly referenced the Farmer Workers Fair Labor Practices act which has been proposed but not passed for many years. The primary issue is that these details get negotiated along the way and farm workers are never involved in deciding what gets negotiated away. How do we turn around the idea so that the good farms want to be out-front about that. We want people to see the certification process as a plus not a burden. We need the exemplary farms to take the step

Elizabeth - and small scale farmers are not part of those decisions either.

Sue – part of the way forward – I’m not sure sitting down and having a conversation with a dairy farmer would be useful – maybe organizing and consumer pressure is more effective. There should be an alliance among the farmers and the farm workers to contribute to common ground. Maybe doing it in the public eye right away isn’t right. Maybe behind the scenes can work better.

Lewis – Is there a body that exists that is progressive

Mary Jo – there are some that are supposedly that role (the Dairy Growers Association) but none of them are here now, and when the rubber hits the road, they don’t speak up.

Elizabeth – I’m with NOFA and in NY state every farm can have a health and safety inspection and training for free. IT makes me crazy that farmers aren’t using these services.

Anim – Thank you for sharing your experiences and ideas. I want to pick up on the idea that we should validate the idea of creating a market for the good food. The more we coordinate with the workers and go product by product industry by industry that seems to be working. To the stick side, rather than reward. When the big buyers are afraid that their product or brand may be boycotted. We have not thought enough about boycotts. Is there a way to think more about boycotts over the long term over multiple regions and products. There’s work trying to source 30% to source local – what if we had a similar plan to set a long term plan for products to target.

Allison– consumers did put pressure on Ben and Jerry’s – there was a very public march in Burlington, and that was the day that B+J said they thought it was a good idea. The threat of tarnishing the brand. But there were workers who didn’t want people to boycott the product because that brand is part of their livelihood. Consumers putting pressure on B+J rather

Any threat to that brand in particular was that fairness was supposedly part of their brand

That’s why they were targeted first.

Mary Jo – on long term boycotts – There needs to be a deep analysis of the power structures that exist. We need to understand the different pieces.

This is intentional long term work. We can’t expect results right away. We have to be committed long term.

Next session will talk more about TPP.

Session 2

Introductions and reactions to the conference:

Mangoes (The sweet stuff) – Race and Equity have been central to many conversations; Space and time to talk to colleagues; connecting with everyone and feeling hopeful about where we're going; Identifying opportunities to work together; seeing youth involved; seeing people I've heard things about but haven't met in person; energizing by seeing other people; Shirley Sherrod was the reason I'm here – her story is powerful, the story of black land loss is so important to understanding structural racism but the story can be hard to access and her personal story was powerful for that purpose; new to the area so this has been orienting for me; mind-expanding; the workers here yesterday really provided a powerful piece and wish that each session had these real connections; the ability run into people that I talk with but don't get to catch up with – having the personal interaction is fantastic and gives the opportunity to identify new ways to collaborate, the chance to ask people on the ground about whether my research is relevant and useful; space to meet with people; time to “take the temperature” of what's going on since I'm in academia; glad to see more of a theme focused on race and equity. It's worth recognizing that over five years there's been more representation at other conferences too not just here. More food chain workers have been represented and that's very important.

Onions (the not so sweet stuff, or things that we touched on on some layers, but not enough)– Voices are missing; Didn't have enough time to interact with new people or really get to know them – people have come in with the people they knew and I'd like to see more structures to allow people to form new relationships. Five minutes with people is rare, so not enough time. I'd like to see day one being focused on the problems and day 2 being focused on solutions; frustrating that more info wasn't up on the website sooner, so that I could try to sell the conference to others in my region when there's lots of competition for events; Theme of race was presented, but we need to dig deeper – we need more of the how not just the what and why. Want to see more black farmers. The comment about giving mother earth rights and comparing it to African American struggles or even comparing it to other struggles, so more work needs to be done around that. It's offensive to compare those struggles. Who's land are we standing on – Native Americans in this area were not discussed. That's something we need to be talking about and I didn't see named or represented.

Question – is NESAWG really the place to bring new people into the conversation. But maybe it is the main regional gathering point.

What is this work group? Today we'll focus on TPP and how it impacts food and workers. Maybe at the end we can do an individual check in for personal next steps.

Anim and Hannah will talk more about their work.

How much do people know about TPP

The USDA public relations about it have been interesting. There are emails from Vilsack about how it will benefit ag in different states with flashy infographics.

Be interesting to see what the chamber of commerce is doing on it.

I saw a good resource on Medium that broke down each section.

Brief overview from Hannah – TPP is a free trade agreement, that supposedly reduces barriers to trade between 12 countries around the Pacific rim, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc. Not China, Korea was in but not anymore. It's been being negotiated since 2005, in secret with the head of each state. Corporate advisors have had access to these documents and lots of big ag companies have their hands in the trade deal. What's in it? None of the text has been public until very recently. Info from Wikileaks was the only thing we knew for a while. This spring = fast track, which means president can send it to congress and they only have 60 days to pass. There was major organizing by environmental orgs, and labor unions, citizen actions. Congress could only see in the basement, with no phone, one chapter at a time, they were voting on the process not the document. It was supposed to pass with no question, but it ended up passing by only a few votes. That set the stage for Obama to complete negotiations. Sept 5th the negotiations were completed and now it must be ratified and agreed upon by the countries. The White house started introducing the text. And now the actual info in the agreement is coming out.

Anim – There are 29-30 chapters, 6,000 page document. 5 deal with trade, the exchange of material goods. The rest deal with copyright laws, who can invest in what things, etc. Since WWII, the rules have expanded to go beyond products. This expands far beyond that. Financial services are included more than before. For example, countries that have restrictions on foreign ownership of land – they were minimized before and now the restrictions would have to be dropped.

Claire - It leads to more financialization of land. It's harmonizing to corporate interests.

Anim – Once the rules are agreed on in each country – the ISDS, Investors state Dispute Settlement, it's a court that exists outside any country or institution. 3 judges that have rotated through the corporate world. When one country calls out another country about following the rules, it goes to that court.

Hannah - Corps or governments can sue each other over barriers to trade. So Cargill can sue Mexico for less buying of their sugar. Mexico had to pay the company. This will expand that on a local, state, and national level. There's a concern that public interest laws could be considered barriers to trade, things like environmental protections, food safety etc. TTIP – may mean even more challenges to local procurement policies under that. A few other concerns: GMO labeling, countries under the agreement wouldn't be able to label. Seafood industry concern about whether it would lower food safety regulations and then we'd have cheap imported fish that would bring in food that is unsafe and ruin the fishing industry here and encourage even worse human rights practices in the industry.

Anim – there's an article in the Guardian about the fishing industry in Thailand and human rights issues.

Hannah- on the farming side of labor – this is modeled after the Korea free trade agreement which resulted in the import of cheap foreign food and make it more difficult for our farmers to have markets here. It will make it cheaper to produce things in other countries, and they don't have to pay workers as much. Off-shoring of jobs.

Anim – states have to have a statement about labor, but the protections are weak or vague.

Florence – What's the next step and the perception in other countries.

Hannah – there's been global opposition and organizing in every country involved in the agreement. The text to the public – they have to analyze economic impact and share it with congress. The earliest it could be voted on is Feb or March. But once 60 days pass, congress votes up or down.

Florence – What is Obama saying about this?

Hannah – It's been a topic in the democratic election cycle. Hillary finally came out against it, eventually.

It's been Obama's baby. And the Clintons are all about free trade agreements.

What about in congress.

It's bipartisan divided. Most of the democrats are opposed. Some republicans opposed.

Almost everyone knows because of the organizing and that needs to continue. The labor unions and the Fair World, Food and Water Watch. A lot of people feel defeated because there is action and organizing but it feels out of control.

Hannah – there's been a media blackout. There've been massive protests, cancer patients arrested, major organizing of rallies with hundreds of thousands of people. But it's not on the radar, it's not being covered. One of the most important things it to know that there is a strong base of opposition.

Claire – what does the media stand to gain or lose. It sounds like collusion.

Amin – One is who owns the media structure. One difficult question is why is Obama pushing this? I trust the president.. he really seems to believe that this will help the middle class.. if he's for it, so we're left to wonder if we're missing something? He's saying we want to write the rules, not China. Besides Cargill getting meat in Japan, etc., the copyright laws and the intellectual property laws are the big push, it seems.

Amanda – TPP being framed as an American led initiative for us to gain control of trade. I want to bring that up because there's an amendment that's been proposed that was developed by APEC (American Israel Pac) would prevent the U.S. from being involved with those who are a part of the boycotts. It's a peoples movement to hold to Israeli government accountable. The TPP would circumvent peoples' ability to democratically oppose and hold the Israeli government accountable.

Tessa – It would be beneficial to understand the advocacy points so we can know how to respond.

Is that something we can organize around to participate in actions even beyond today.

Claire – How does this drill down and matter for this region, especially within the NESAWG sphere. The variant of that may be useful.

Alison – it's being framed as good for state ag economies but how might it harm it and are the gains going to be on the backs of people in other countries. That's what happened with NAFTA which is part of why Mexican workers are now coming here, because of NAFTA>

Amin – So maybe now we can try to engage individually and try to come up with actions for our own networks.

Clare – we need to be able to articulate the counter narratives.

Amin – the proposal is "I/WE want to work on TPP because 5,4,3,2,1 scale of how much we each want engage.

There's a time limit for our work.

Diana - But there's a lot already going on and we can just plug our work into those efforts.

Hannah - Let's go around and find out what we most want to learn more about because there are groups that do webinars and are organizing efforts for action – calling reps, etc. Especially for organizations who are in districts of reps that will listen, they can write letters, etc.

Maybe we can do a follow up via email and go from there.

Ideas –

Caitlin J - Webinar is our class at Tufts would be great.

Caitlin H - Would love to see something in the NESAWG newsletter to share this conversation with the larger group.

Knowing who are the think-tanks and orgs working on this. Can we have a bunch of links.

Alison - Talking points about the narratives around free trade and how we can be questioning those narratives. Obama's for it, the narrative is hard to combat, there are complexities and buy-in from the democrats and we can't assume that it's going to be ok.

Florence – with 6,000 pages, who can know what's really in it?

Hannah – there are orgs that are working to understand it – Public Citizen, Citizens Trade Campaign, Food and Water Watch, Institute for Ag and Trade Policy.

Developing Talking points for NESAWG, in case there's an opportunity to blast out to the network when it is timely. Maybe a consolidated place for us to add talking points as we educate ourselves.

Clare – there's going to need to be thought about why this matters, not just how it affects the specific things we see that we don't like.

Alison – one of the critiques of protective trade is that we become navel gazers. We need trade but how can it not be ranked for corporations rather than communities. We need trade, but we're having trouble bringing the right values into the policies.

Diana - Other ideas for how to move forward with this group after today? Do we meet? What structure? Which issues do we want to focus on, just TPP or labor and trade in the region more broadly? Is that how we want to function?

Alison – Without clear membership, it can be difficult to take on projects, but it's fruitful conversation. I'd advocate a 2-3 times per year google hangout to check in so that we can let things grow organically but not try to take on a project that will flounder. There used to be a social network for NESAWG to sign up for, but it didn't really work.

Caitlin H – I've organized several volunteer groups and agree that taking on a project is not realistic, but information gathering would be good and also weigh-in on what we want to see at the conference next year. Or try to organize something outside of NESAWG?

Clare – hearing some of the dairy farmers and other voices. But we may see some of the complicated ways that it interacts with labor. This is what we're going to continue to see more of.

Diana – an email follow-up to find out more about opportunities.

Amin – Conference call up to twice per year, one in January, so that if there's action around TPP we have time to do that, and at that time and gauge who would want to stay involved. And then find out about which other interests do we have.

Hannah – We've at least established that we're all interested, so maybe we can get each other's email and feel ok to send things around to each other when things come up, and we can then feel some accountability to this group.

Diana – Is there already a google group? That would be a good space for this.

Caitlin H – If there is a group, there should be ground rules about tone, clarity, the types of information that can be shared, how we are expected to participate. We will disagree, and I would want it to be a space that we can talk with respect and collaborate creativity.

Diana – So a call in January?

Diana and Hannah are 5's (leaders to help organize the call), most people are 4's who will participate. Diana and Hannah will send out a doodle poll for when to participate. And we'll share resources via email.