

# Why International Solidarity Among Farmers Matters

## A reflection on the 2025 Short Course in People's Agroecology

By Jackie Clark

If you have been an EFAO member and magazine reader for a while, you may know me as an occasional contributor to this publication, or as EFAO's Small Grains Program Manager. What you may not know is that I'm also a part-time farm worker at [Root Radical](#), the organic vegetable farm run by Emily Dowling on Howe Island, near Kingston. Through working on Emily's farm, I got connected to the National Farmers Union as a farm worker. I'd known about the [National Farmers Union](#) (NFU) in my professional capacity before, but never understood that as a farm worker I could actually be a member (one way in which the NFU actively acknowledges the value of farm workers—not just farmer-landowners, but workers who do not own land—and their importance in the agriculture sector).

As a professional development opportunity, I took a course at the University of Vermont on Agroecology, Food Sovereignty and Social Movements. The class was made up of students, farmers and advocates from all over the world—I made friends with comrades in the United States, South Africa, and Bangladesh, for example. The coursework connected me to international peasant rights movements like [La Via Campesina](#) and encouraged me to get involved with the NFU's International Programs Committee.



*La Via Campesina, founded in 1993, is an international movement bringing together millions of peasants, landless workers, indigenous people, pastoralists, fishers, migrant farmworkers, small and medium-size farmers, rural women, and peasant youth from around the world. Built on a solid sense of unity and solidarity, it defends peasant agriculture for food sovereignty. The National Farmers Union of Canada is a member of La Via Campesina.*

The (online) classroom opened my eyes, however it was an in-person experience that transformed my understanding. I was one of five NFU delegates who traveled to Vermont in August for the [2025 Short Course in People's Agroecology](#)—hosted by [Rural Vermont](#) (another member of [La Via Campesina](#)) and the [People's Agroecology School of Vermont](#). The People's Agroecology School is not a physical place, it's "a collection of farmer-educators and -organizers dedicated to advocacy and action on behalf of farmers, inspired by rural people's movements in Latin America and the Latin American Institutes of Agroecology in Central and South America. The short course gathered international agroecological allies from places like Ontario, Vermont, California, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua and Pakistan to participate in work brigades, political education, and farmer knowledge exchange.

It was an experience unlike any other. As a group, we all helped to prepare meals, wash dishes, spread compost, harvest fruit, share political strategy, engage in ceremony, care for children and more. I knew through my work at EFAO that farmers learn best from each other—and during this week I saw that we also learn best when working together. Shared labour connects people, contributes real results to farms in need, and allows for relationship building alongside practical learning.

**Join Mollie Wills, Grassroots Organizing Director at Rural Vermont for Power to the Farmers: The History and Current Movements of Grassroots Political Organizing, a keynote presentation at the 2025 EFAO Conference. Visit [efao.ca/conference](http://efao.ca/conference) for more details and to register!**

Rolando, farmer and member of La Organización Boricúa (another member of La Via Campesina) from Puerto Rico taught us about how he developed the



methodology of work brigades locally. He and 11 other farmers get together monthly to complete a large task on one of their farms, rotating which farm they visit each month. Similar to a rotating work bee or call for mutual aid—and they also weave in intentional conversation. How are you doing? What are your struggles this year? How can we work together? Another important element, he told us, is fun. They have music, dancing and cold drinks after hard work. Shared joy is just as important as shared work. He led us in music and dancing a few nights in Vermont—and the shared joy was inspiring.

This course emphasized not only the ecological principals on the land, but the necessary incorporation of political

and social principals encompassed in true agroecology and applying those in relationship with each other and the land.

In this time of hostility towards the USA and enhanced feelings of Canadian nationalism, I felt conflicted about travelling across the border. It wasn't until I was pulling garlic alongside a farmer from Vermont that they explained "we're here, trying to do the same work you are, living under an oppressive regime," that I began to understand.

Arbitrary borders are not the real obstacle when it comes to farmer rights and agrarian and ecological prosperity. Greater forces, like colonialism, imperialism and capitalistic greed are the actual obstacles, and are ubiquitous. As we continued to work beside each other and discuss our respective struggles, I saw more and more how those struggles were regionally contextual, but connected. It may be ice storms in Ontario, flooding in Vermont, hurricanes in Puerto Rico, or genocide in Palestine, but the need for mutual aid is the same. The need for climate resilience and for valuing the knowledge of Indigenous and land-based people is the same. The desire of farmers from all these places to have a say in right-sized policies is the same. Farmers in all these places are working towards the ability to access land, save seed, slaughter livestock, protect their food safety and access markets—these are the pathways to food sovereignty. We're walking them in different places, but it's the same pathway.

The greatest compliment I can give to this kind of work, and education, is that I walked away feeling genuinely hopeful. This hope was not a wistful wish for a better future, but grounded in the tangible, embodied experience of solidarity. At this particular moment in history, that feeling is more important than ever.



Interested in getting involved with the international movement for peasants rights? Email [ipccordinator@nfu.ca](mailto:ipccordinator@nfu.ca) to get connected. ■

**Jackie Clark** is EFAO's Small Grains Program Manager, helping encourage farmers to realize the benefits of incorporating small grains in field crop rotations. She is passionate about innovation and collaborative research across the agri-food industry, and connecting farmers with the resources they need to improve the sustainability of their operations. She is also an accomplished writer and former journalist.

**To learn more about the intersection between peasant rights, farm worker solidarity, and food sovereignty and learn how you can get involved in food movements globally, join us at the 2025 EFAO Conference for a session hosted by Celeste Smith, Maddie Marmour, and Sarah Siska. Visit [efao.ca/conference](http://efao.ca/conference) for the full program and session details.**

