

# Coalition hosts 'Come to the table' fundraiser

■ The Walk for Farmworker Justice coalition wants to convince farming cooperatives to negotiate on worker rights

By Lindsay Buchele  
Oregon Daily Emerald

In the latest attempt to address poor conditions facing farm workers, a coalition of worker rights groups has been formed to launch events that will push Oregon's farming cooperatives into negotiations over workers' rights and wages.

The newly formed Walk for Farmworker Justice coalition is hosting a spaghetti dinner Sunday from 5 to 8 p.m. at Central Presbyterian Church, 555 E. 15th St., in an attempt to raise money for the first-ever Walk for Farmworker Justice.

The WFJ coalition is made up of nearly a dozen labor, religious and community groups, including the Eugene-based Committee in Solidarity with the Central American People. The walk, which will take place in June, will cover most of the Salem, Woodburn and Stayton areas. The coalition's targeted farming cooperative, NORPAC Foods Inc., is located in Stayton.

"We're just trying to get NORPAC to come to the table and negotiate," CISCAP coordinator Scott Miksch said. "That's why the theme of the fundraising dinner is 'Come to the

table.'"

NORPAC, made up of 240 farm families, is one of the largest grower-owned processing cooperatives of frozen fruits and vegetables west of the Mississippi.

The Oregon Farmworker Union, which has a Spanish acronym PCUN, has been attempting to negotiate since 1989 with NORPAC over worker wages and the right of workers to organize into a union. PCUN officials said every attempt at negotiation has failed.

Rebecca Saldaña, the religious liaison for PCUN working with the coalition, said NORPAC has been ignoring the rights of workers and even firing workers for challenging working conditions.

"When it comes to labor practices and rights, workers need to be protected against retaliation by the farm owners," Saldaña said.

NORPAC spokesman Brian Bell argues that NORPAC doesn't have any reason to sit down with PCUN or the coalition because worker rights are handled legally by the farm families themselves. Bell said NORPAC has jurisdiction over labor issues only in its processing plants,

and that affiliated farmers have full jurisdiction over labor issues on their farms.

"Our processing plants have had good labor relations for over three decades," Bell said. "Growers, as owners, cannot tell the managing cooperative how to manage the processing facilities. Likewise, the managers cannot tell farmers how to hire, pay and handle their employment of farm workers."

Bell stressed that although NORPAC does not have the right to regulate how a farm is operated, growers handle their farms in accordance with the law. Bell also said that PCUN, which has been boycotting NORPAC-processed foods since 1992, has been doing all the wrong things to instigate negotiations.

Bell said that in 1991 PCUN approached one of the largest of NORPAC's farming families, the Kraemers, in an attempt to negotiate a contract. This contract, Bell said, would state that PCUN would provide the farm workers for the Kraemers and determine worker wages.

The Kraemer family refused, Bell said, because PCUN's contract provided lower wages for the workers than what the farming family already paid. Bell said PCUN retaliated against the refusal by starting the

The Walk for Farmworker Justice coalition will host a spaghetti dinner Sunday from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Central Presbyterian Church, located at 555 E. 15th St. The dinner will be accompanied by live music, a dessert sale and a silent auction.

A sliding-scale charge of \$5 to \$20 is requested for each dinner.

The event is the first fundraising event to support the Walk for Farmworker Justice. The walk will take place June 18-24. The walk will begin in the agricultural areas of Marion and Yamhill counties and will encompass the area around the NORPAC fields.

boycott of NORPAC.

It's this boycott that's preventing negotiations, Bell said.

PCUN has a different story.

Saldaña said the boycott is a result of two different strikes put on by farm workers employed by the Kraemer family. She said that in both strikes, workers were attempting to secure higher wages. The first strike was successful without help from PCUN. The second strike began with the workers forming a committee, along with PCUN, to address the issue of a pay raise for the cucumber harvesters. Saldaña said the Kraemers refused to hear the committee, and a strike ensued.

PCUN then proceeded to engage the authority of NORPAC over the farm in the hopes of getting the Kraemers to negotiate. NORPAC refused, and the boycott began.

The walk, which is planned by

the coalition, will do nothing to convince NORPAC to negotiate with farmer workers' rights groups, Bell said, reasserting that NORPAC has no control over farm labor issues.

"If any of the 240 growers, including the Kraemers, wanted to negotiate with PCUN, they are totally free to do so," Bell said. "If PCUN were to lift the boycott and stop with all the publicity stunts, and go to the Legislature and address labor issues, the Legislature will carefully consider what they have to say."

Saldaña said PCUN has appealed to the Legislature, with opposition from NORPAC, and will continue to do so. She also said the walk, the boycott and other efforts will continue until NORPAC agrees to negotiate worker rights.

## Green

continued from page 1

Issues on the agenda include ballot measure ideas, campaign reform, developing the social service aspect of the party and addressing electoral and non-electoral issues, Patterson said.

"Some of the convention will be very interesting," he said. "Some of what we do, however, will be dry party business."

In addition, there will be a variety of workshops on putting additional action into ongoing

activism, although Egan did not provide specifics and reiterated that the convention's focus will be on the party's direction.

Campus Green Party member Erik Amos said that the convention will deal with general party business rather than trying to directly reach potential members.

"If they want to come out and check it out, sure," Amos said. "It's going to be open to the public."

While open to the public, there will be requirements on who can vote for determining the direction of the party. Anyone who is a sup-

porting member of the party can participate.

The party's definition of a supporting member is any "dues paying" member, Patterson said. Members will participate in finalizing a party focus initiative and will vote to put that plan into action.

Lane County Pacific Green Party is hosting the event and has made arrangements for free child care on-site and low-cost accommodations in the Eugene area for those attending the event.

Everyone is welcome to attend the convention, and admission is free.

The Pacific Green Party will host its state convention this weekend at the University. The main focus is to lay out a two-year plan for the party.

Where: Agate Hall, 19th Avenue and Agate Street.

When: Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Sunday 9 a.m.-noon

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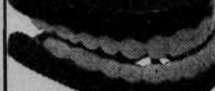
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