

An Open Letter from Maine Farmers to the U.S. Congress to Support the Right of Workers to Organize

As a Maine farmer, I am deeply concerned about the pervasive violation of the rights of working people when they attempt to exercise their basic freedom to form unions and bargain collectively for a better life.

Over the past 30 years, workers' living standards have declined in well-documented ways – stagnant or low pay, longer hours spent at work, unaffordable or no health care benefits, and increasing insecurity. Increasing income inequality is an unfortunate hallmark of our time.

U.S. labor law protects the legal right of workers to form unions, yet employers regularly and effectively block that right. Employer violations of workers' rights are routine and illegal firings of union supporters in labor organizing drives are at epidemic levels. In 2005 National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) annual report 31,358 people -- or one worker every 17 minutes -- received back pay because of illegal employer discrimination for activities legally protected by the National Labor Relations Act. But the perpetrating corporations pay no effective price, and far too often these tactics successfully block workers from winning the collective bargaining rights they seek.

This routine and flagrant violation of workers' rights has created a climate of fear and intimidation in the workplace. The results are that too many workers do not try to exercise their freedom for fear of losing their jobs. They quietly suffer hazardous working conditions, falling wages, and declining benefits.

The Employee Free Choice Act is the first step to fixing this badly broken system by strengthening penalties for companies that break the law by coercing or intimidating employees. It will also establish a third-party mediation process when employers and employees cannot agree on a first contract, and enable employees to form unions when a majority expresses their decision to join the union by signing authorization cards. It makes real the principle that the free choice of whether to form unions should belong to workers.

As farmers and members of our communities, we will continue to work to disseminate the message that the right of workers to freely organize their workplaces is required in a democracy, and families and communities are strengthened when workers can bargain for fair wages, adequate benefits, and safe working conditions.

We call upon the U.S. Senate to bring the Employee Free Choice Act to the floor of the Senate as soon as possible. We urge that the Senate vote to pass this historic legislation as a public representation that this bill offers the best remedy to the egregious violations of workers' rights and the best hope to restore to workers a voice in the workplace free from fear and harassment.

AUTHORIZATION FORM

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I endorse "An Open Letter from Maine Farmers to the U.S. Congress to Support the Right of Workers to Organize". I permit my name to be used on the letter that may be reproduced and distributed to the press and the general public.

PLEASE TYPE or PRINT CLEARLY:

Name: _____

Title: _____

Farm: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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Signature: _____

Please check here if you want your farm listed for identification purposes only.

Your name will be added to a list of others who, through the Jobs with Justice network, are calling publically for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.



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