

Food Democracy Now!: Sustainability NGO morphs into anti-GMO lobbyist

[Food Democracy Now!](#) (FDN), founded in 2008 with the support of [Michael Pollan](#), [Marion Nestle](#) and other organic and natural food advocates[1], claims to be a grassroots organization of more than 650,000 “farmers and citizens” dedicated to building a “sustainable food system...that gives our communities equal access to healthy food, and respects the dignity of the farmers who produce it.” It says the food system is “fundamentally broken.” It’s major focus is campaigning against GMOs and criticizing agri-businesses unless they are linked to the organic industry.

FDN appears to be an individual NGO but may in fact be a coalition of other advocacy group or a for-profit advocacy organization. FDN files 501c3 non-profit/ tax exempt charitable tax returns and also claim to have a 501c4 non-exempt lobbying arm called [Food Democracy Action](#) which cites “partner” organization [Center for Food Safety](#) and [Right to Know GMO](#) (RTKGMO)[2] “dedicated to winning legislation that mandates the labeling of genetically engineered foods in the United States.” FDN regularly promotes the work of US Right to Know ([USRTK](#)), which has FOIA’d more than 40 scientists and science communicators in an attempt to intimidate them into not speaking out about agricultural biotechnology.

HISTORY

Organization Details

FND notes that donations are “not tax deductible” however, we have found that at least part of the organization claims formal 501c3 non-profit tax status with IRS filings from 2009-2012. It solicits direct contributions via its website and is a formal party to a Center for Food Safety led lawsuit against Monsanto. [3] Its website domain was registered in December 2008 by Dave Murphy with a Brooklyn, NY phone number (917) 968-7369 who later transferred the registration to Domains by Proxy – privacy protection service blocking details on the registrant.[4] Food Democracy Now! notes an “allied grassroots lobbying arm” Food Democracy Action, which is likely the main arm through which it is raising non-tax exempt contributions and which in a 2012 press release notes that financial support for this campaign will be run through the lobbying arm of the [Organic Consumers Association](#) 501c4 political action and trade industry lobbying arm.[5]

* Food Democracy Now!

P.O. Box 5, Clear Lake, Iowa 50428
EIN: 26-3901715
Phone: (641) 583-5305

* Food Democracy Action

web domain registered in 2012, no details or tax filings available.[2]

FDNs website and public relations is handled by Richir Outreach[\[7\]](#)

FUNDING SOURCES

Reported income/expenditures from contributions and grants to Food Democracy Now 501c3 exempt organization:

- 2009 income from contributions and grants: \$57,800 and expenditures \$55,704[\[8\]](#)
- 2010 income \$60,530/ expenses \$49,410[\[9\]](#)
- 2011 income \$266,935/ expenses \$277,289[\[10\]](#)

Food Democracy Action is the 501c4 non-tax exempt arm of Food Democracy Now! for which tax filing information is not yet public, which claims formal “partners” Center for Food Safety and Right to Know GMO (RTKGMO) [\[2\]](#) Nutiva, a major funder of GMO labeling initiatives and member of the Non-GMO Project noted funding support for Food Democracy Action.[\[12\]](#) Food Democracy Action reported raising over \$250,000 for the Washington State Yes on I-522 initiative campaign.[\[13\]](#) It was also noted as contributing at least \$75,000 to the California Prop 37 GMO labeling initiative.[\[14\]](#)

CAMPAIGNS / ACTIVITIES

FDN has focused lobbying, litigation, labeling ballot initiatives and public relations efforts around opposition to organic and GMO coexistence and campaigns against corporate control of agriculture and food.

Food Democracy Now/Action was the conduit through which funds were solicited and raised in the Washington State 522 GMO labeling ballot initiative in coordination with [Organic Consumers Association, a virulently anti-GMO and anti-vaccine advocacy group](#), and other groups failing to register as political committees, and report donations that resulted in a campaign finance violation complaint filed by the No on 522 campaign.[\[15\]](#)

Food Democracy Now! is a co-plaintiff in a separate lawsuit in the U.S. District Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, Organic Seed Associations et Al. v Monsanto. FDN claims “coexistence is contamination” and provides an [advocacy toolkit](#) to block GMO approvals and lobby U.S. government agencies to prevent any level or allowance for GMOs in organic.

Drop the Money Bomb to label GMOs and defeat Monsanto! campaign – Among the groups promoting the ‘Drop the Money Bomb on Monsanto’ campaign via unpaid ads, blogs, and e-newsletters are Food Democracy Now!, Mercola, Inc., Natural News, Real Food Media, Lundberg Farms, Eden Foods, Nature’s Path and many others.

Opposition to Monsanto sweet corn registration. FND is part of a 2011 coalition with [Food and Water Watch](#), [Center for Environmental Health](#), [Center for Food Safety](#), and [CREDO Action](#) (formerly Working

Assets] to lobby food companies to reject GMO corn.[16]

FDN is part of the 2010 [Food Sovereignty Alliance](#) campaign in with Food First (Institute for Food & Development Policy), Farm Aid, Pesticide Action Network and Why Hunger demanding that the White House and Department of Justice “curb food monopolies” and big agribusiness.[17] [18]

Right to Know GMO

“Coalition of States for GMO Labeling”

Food Democracy Now is the coalition lead and website domain registrant for “Right to Know GMO” which includes a state-by-state network of local affiliates like [Right to Know MN](#) and is based out of a PO Box in IOWA. The group members include: Food Democracy Now (to whom donations are directed), Nutiva, Joe Mercola, Organic Consumers Association, Vermont PIRG (VPIRG); Rural Vermont; [John Fagan’s Earth Open Source](#), [Jeffrey Smith’s](#) Institute for Responsible Technology, Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps, the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), Cedar Circle Farm, the Center for Food Safety, Main Organic Farmers and Gardeners (MOGFA), Label GMOs California, Nature’s Path Organic, Ben & Jerry’s, Lundberg Organic Farms, and GMO-Free Connecticut.[19]

The domain is registered at the address of Lisa Marr in Clear Lake, IA. Other domains registered to this address include “NonGMOSnack.com” and “Non-GMOLunch.com”

* Domain Name:RIGHTTOKNOW-GMO.ORG

Domain ID: D167822164-LROR
Creation Date: 2013-02-07T15:01:14Z
Updated Date: 2013-04-09T03:45:54Z
Registry Expiry Date: 2018-02-07T15:01:14Z
Registrant ID:CR136279312
Registrant Name:Lisa Stokke
Registrant Organization:Food Democracy Now!
Registrant email: lisa@fooddemocracy.org

State “Right to Know” coalition members, like MN, are not all transparently associated with this group, often register their domains using privacy protection services and make not disclosures as to whom solicited donations and sales of merchandise are directed.

KEY PEOPLE

- [William David Murphy](#) is the Founder and Executive Director of Food Democracy Now!, a grassroots movement of more than 650,000 American farmers and citizens dedicated to reforming policies relating to food, agriculture and the environment.

According to their website, Dave Murphy has been called “the most crucial and politically savvy actor

in the on-going efforts to help move American agriculture into the 21st century” as a result of his “Sustainable Dozen” campaign, which resulted in four candidates being placed in high level positions at the USDA and his efforts to reform food and agriculture under the Obama administration.”

In 2006, Murphy moved back to Iowa to help stop a factory farm from being built near his sister’s farm. After seeing the loss of basic democratic rights of rural Iowans, Murphy decided to stay in Iowa to fight for Iowa’s farmers and rural residents and expose the flaws of industrial agriculture to help create a more sustainable future for all Americans.

In 2007, Murphy organized the Food and Family Farm Presidential Summit, where five of the six Democratic candidates pledged their support to help save family-farm agriculture. He filmed then Senator Barack Obama’s now famous promise to Iowa farmers to label genetically engineered foods.

Previously, he has worked as an environmental and food policy lobbyist and political strategist. His writings have appeared in the *Nation*, *The Hill*, *The Huffington Post* and *The New York Times*.

Dave is known as the “big dude from Iowa” by friends and foes alike and is a board member of the Iowa Organic Association (IOA).

Dave Murphy participated in the 2014 Biosafety Alliance, Justice Begins with Seeds Conference.[\[20\]](#)”

- **Lisa Stokke** is co-founder and associate director of Food Democracy Now!. For nearly a decade, Lisa has focused on creating a local food system in Northern Iowa, working to connect consumers with farmers who raise and grow food sustainably. During the past several years Lisa has organized dozens of events, including the Clear Lake Annual Earth Day Organic Lunch and also events surrounding the Iowa Farmer’s Union 2007 Presidential Summit in Des Moines, Iowa working to showcase local and organic food, farmers and opportunities for her native home in Iowa. In 2010, Lisa was honored to be named a “Woman Making a Difference”, by Shape Magazine. As the mother of four children, Lisa knows the importance of a nutritious meal and ensures that her children eat a healthy, organic diet. She is particularly concerned about achieving school lunch reform through Food Democracy Now! and also within the local community school system and believes that the key to creating health and sustainability lies within teaching our children to be stewards of the water, land and soil. Lisa is hopeful that this administration will ensure the implementation of policy changes so that her children have a sustainable future to look forward to.
- **Paul Willis** is a hog farmer and Manager of Niman Ranch Pork Company. He is the owner and operator of the Willis Free Range Pig Farm in Thornton, Iowa, where he lives with his wife, Phyllis. In 1994, Paul was introduced to Bill Niman, and the two forged a ground-breaking partnership to sell natural pork from family farms using traditional, humane, animal husbandry. Paul has been the subject of numerous feature-length articles and book chapters in books, such as *Righteous Porkchop* by Nicolette Hahn-Niman, *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer, and the upcoming book, *Gristle*, edited by Miyun Park and Moby. Paul is currently the member of a committee convened by the National Academy of Sciences to undertake the project, 21st Century Systems

Agriculture, which is studying the science and policies that influence the adoption of farming practices and management systems designed to reduce the costs and environmental effects of agricultural production. In 2003, along with Bill Niman, he was honored with the Good Neighbor Harvest Award by the Glynwood Center, an organization that works nationally and internationally to support sustainable agriculture. Niman Ranch pork, which is 500+ family farmer strong, is marketed and sold in the finest retail outlets and restaurants throughout the country.

- **Aaron Woolf** is the director and producer of the critically acclaimed film, **King Corn**, his sixth feature documentary. Aaron's last three films have aired nationally on PBS and look into the human consequences of government policy. In 2000, Woolf directed Greener Grass: Cuba, Baseball, and the United States, a WNET-ITVS co-production that received a Rockie Award. In 2003, he directed Dying to Leave: The Global Face of Human Trafficking and Smuggling, which won an Australian Logie Award for best documentary series, aired as a two-hour special on the PBS series Wide Angle, and was screened at the State Department and the United Nations. Aaron's films have been broadcast worldwide and he has presented work and spoken on agriculture and immigration policy at numerous institutions including Stanford University, Yale, UCLA and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. He is the founder of Mosaic Films Incorporated and holds a Masters degree in film and communications studies from the University of Iowa. In 2007, Woolf opened Urban Rustic, a Brooklyn NY grocery specializing in locally-sourced and organic foods.

Board Members:

- Fred Kirschenmann, president (affiliated with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State)[\[21\]](#)
- William D. Murphy (see above), executive director 2011 compensation \$48,350
- Paul Willis, (see above) treasurer
- Carol Patnode, director (organic farmer, Herbalist, Physical Therapist and instructor at North Iowa Area Community College)[\[22\]](#)
- Francis Thicke, director (owner of "Radiance Dairy" in Fairfield, IA, political candidate affiliated with the Maharishi Institute, organic/biodynamic farmer)[\[23\]](#) [\[24\]](#)
- Harn Soper, director (owner Soper organic farms and founder Sustainable Farm Partners, LLC an organic farming private equity investment group in California)[\[25\]](#)

AFFILIATIONS

- Center for Food Safety
- Organic Consumers Association
- Right to Know GMO
- Food First!
- GMO-Inside campaign with Green America

CRITICISMS

- [Washington State political action committee violation complaint](#)

See Also

[Mother Nature News profile of Dave Murphy](#)

[Washington Post profile of Dave Murphy](#)

[TreeHugger article on “Sustainable Dozen” campaign for USDA appointments](#)

Resources

- [Food Democracy Now Facebook page](#)
- [Food Democracy Now on Twitter](#)
- [Food Democracy Now! on Vimeo](#)
- [Huffington Post Food Democracy Now stories](#)

References

- [1 http://www.fooddemocracynow.org/signers/](#)
- [2 http://fooddemocracyaction.org/](#)
- [3 Monsanto, farmers group react to U.S. SC ruling, Legal Newsline, May 14, 2013.](#)
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