

Companeros, companeras, Ladies and Gentlemen,

President Abraham Lincoln, in one of his speeches once quoted the Gospel of Matthew 12:22-24 that a house divided cannot stand. In these times we live and work in a dysfunctional global economy. Markets that are driven by global manufacturers and retailers searching where they can grow and purchase cheaper agriculture commodities that continue to put at risk our jobs and farms in the US. Today we call on uniting farm workers and small family farmers in a common effort to press for sustainable markets for the crops we cultivate and harvest. While this is controversial with some critics who would want to pit us against each other, the math does not lie. We must unite the house. Farmers who are suppliers to global buyers must survive the punishing inflation and cheaper imports that are produced with exploited labor. The most challenging is getting the participation of global manufacturers and retailers to adopt practices that allow all to sustain our livelihoods here in the US and our counterpart small farmers and farm workers in other parts of the world. This is not “us” against “them”, but rather correcting a global supply chain that is equitable and sustainable for all as part of one reconciled household.

While this must seem to be an insurmountable task, I want you to know that it has been done before without the help of Congress or governmental policies. FLOC has pioneered supply-chain agreements going back to the 1980's with global buyers like Campbell Soup, Vlasic Pickles, Heinz USA, Dean's Foods and their subsidiaries Green Bay Foods and Aunt Jane Pickles. In 2004 the Mt. Olive Pickle Company duplicated these agreements by raising the price of their purchase of cucumbers by 11% in a 3 -year period to make Workers Compensation possible among their suppliers and brokered the agreement with the North Carolina Growers Association. Today, as we stand with farmers from across North Carolina, as we build upon a strategy that has been successful for decades, a strategy that has broken boundaries many advocates thought impossible. The formation of the only union of farm workers outside the west coast with no legal frameworks is in itself miraculous. This occurred not because we were so powerful but because we understood the math. We understood the economics and still do today. We understand that you cannot squeeze blood out of a turnip, a farmer on the brink of collapse cannot improve farm worker's standard of living. The resources have to come by making our markets sustainable with farmers receiving fair prices for their commodities. We urge our government agencies to lend support for this effort through any means possible to champion the American ethic of farm workers and farmers receiving a fair day of pay for a fair day of work.

As we take a moment to discuss the state of agriculture in North Carolina I hope advocates, policymakers take a second to consider the significance of our union of immigrants and migrants in this region and why it must be protected. We at FLOC have always fought for sustainable supply chains. One where workers are guaranteed the right of return with seniority, where they are not blacklisted for citing violations of law, where they are not charged fees for recruitment where they enjoy a mechanism to complain without fear of retaliation. All this gives us a degree of dignity and respect. This has been achieved to some degree but we cannot have any of these

things if there are no farms. It has been alarming that our jobs have dwindled under our CBA and those waiting to cross are tempted to weigh more risky options that are rife with abuse.

Therefore, we are not each other's enemies but rather an unequal and unfair global supply chains that must be corrected. We have visited our counter parts in other countries and what we have seen is horrendous. Nowhere should we tolerate the exploitation of children who are forced to work in the fields with their parents, that are housed in squalor, working as tenant farmers or sharecroppers some making less than a dollar a day. Those agricultural products are then imported to the US where they can sell it less than the food that is picked by union workers and by my brothers in the audience.

So I stand here today, side by side with the NCGA, with Latinos Farmers and Ranchers, with FarmAid and with my union brothers from the AFL CIO and the United Farm Workers, because our jobs, where we have a good wage, a grievance mechanism, and the chance to give our family a better life, are becoming fewer and fewer, and this is a direct result of the exploitation of our brothers and sisters across the globe. We cannot and will not stand for it. We need a change; we need our jobs and farms in the United States.

We are calling on those in power to assist in helping us create a voice in determining fair pricing for our commodities here and abroad before more and more family farms are pushed to their breaking point and ruin our livelihoods. We must reconcile with the buyers of our commodities and help them see the wisdom of sustaining those that do the actual hard work on which their business depends. In this consideration they too become part of the house that needs to be united. We must insist on sustainable change before there are no more family farms and more and more of our food is imported through the exploitation of others and before my brothers in the audience lose their livelihood.

Hasta La Victoria!