

# Boycotts

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But Veda Federighi, information officer for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, said the department has yet to find any clear evidence that the cancers are due to pesticides.

"After an extensive investigation of the cancer cluster in McFarland, we have not been able to find a cause for it," Federighi said in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

Federighi maintained that her department — which regulates the use of pesticides in the state — is not a pawn of the growers, as farm worker organizers contend.

"We don't like it when workers get sick," Federighi said. "We take action. We do everything we can to minimize risks."

In 1987, for example, a number of workers became ill after coming in contact with a form of phosalone, an insecticide. Even though the pesticide had caused no previous problems, the state put additional restrictions on its usage. The pesticide is no longer in use in California, Federighi said.

The department needs concrete, scientific evidence before it can act, Federighi noted. "We're not saying that we can't do better," she observed. "Unfortunately, people die every year in the work place." Meanwhile, Federighi maintained that the farm workers are using concern over pesticides to support their failing efforts at unionization.

But Irv Hershenson, regional manager

for the grape boycott in New York state, said the farm workers have had a long-term commitment to eliminating the use of pesticides.

"We've been advocating the end of the use of dangerous pesticides even before the union began," Hershenson told the *Catholic Courier*, noting that all contracts negotiated by the union have contained clauses banning the use of pesticides. "We called for the end of the use of DDT five years before the (Environmental Protection Agency) did," he asserted.

Local efforts on behalf of the farm workers' boycott have been going on for years. In addition to the diocesan endorsement, the boycott has picked up support from local labor groups, and from such parishes as Corpus Christi, Blessed Sacrament, St. Thomas the Apostle, Ss. Peter and Paul and Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Ss. Peter and Paul, whose parish council endorsed the boycott at their January meeting, has scheduled a weekend of information for Feb. 3-4. Guest homilists will speak about the boycott, and the "Wrath of Grapes" will be shown several times.

The local boycott efforts will receive a boost when Chavez, who founded the UFW, comes to Rochester on April 4. Among events planned for the day is an address at Corpus Christi Church at 5:30 p.m.

Chavez is also expected to make a major announcement about local boycott efforts during the visit. That announcement may involve a call for a boycott of one food store chain, farm worker officials say.

Although the Nestlé and grape boycotts have received widespread support locally,

the newest boycott, which targets Salvadoran coffee, is just getting off the ground.

The boycott calls for consumers not to buy Folgers, Maxwell House or Hills Brothers coffees because they contain Salvadoran coffee beans. According to boycott organizers, the profits from the sale of this coffee support the 14 wealthiest families in El Salvador, and not the workers.

Nancy Baran-Mickle, who is coordinating the local effort, said originally the boycott was to begin only if efforts to talk to the Salvadoran government about its policies failed.

But the sudden increase in violence in El Salvador in recent months — including the killing of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and the housekeeper's daughter — allegedly by government forces — led to the start of the boycott earlier this month.

Baran-Mickle said she is just beginning to receive endorsements of the campaign, but noted that several local groups have already expressed support for it. Among these groups are Corpus Christi Parish's Peace and Justice Committee, the Rochester Committee on Latin America, Politics of Food, and the Rochester Sanctuary Committee, she said.

Among the individuals urging support for the boycott is Corpus Christi parishioner Joe Piersante, who visited El Salvador last summer.

Piersante contended that because the coffee income goes only to the wealthy families in El Salvador, the "money goes to buy guns to supply the army to kill the poor."

In addition, the boycott "is a way for the American people to become educated about the whole issue of El Salvador," he said.

Piersante asserted that the Salvadoran people support the boycott, as well. "I was just in Washington (D.C.) for an interfaith service with religious leaders from El Salvador, and they support it," he said.

Also supporting the boycott are several of the leading Salvadoran labor organizations, including the National Union of Salvadoran Workers, the Federation of Associations of Cooperatives of El Salvador and the coffee workers' union.

Baran-Mickle cautioned, however, that simply abstaining from the purchase of certain products will not be enough. As with all boycotts, she said, individuals who support the effort should educate themselves and others about the reasons for the boycott, and should lobby government or company officials to get policies changed.

Father O'Shea noted that involvement with such efforts as boycotts is simply an extension of church teachings and traditions.

"Solidarity with those who experience the world not at its best, but sometimes at its worst, is part of our tradition," Father O'Shea said. "Basically, we're following the best components of our Catholic tradition."

"As a church," he concluded, "we have to ask ourselves whether we are identifying with the rich and powerful, or the poor, the marginalized, the dispossessed."

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