



FLAG Matters

Fall 2015



Hello, Friends!

It's been a while since you've heard from us, so we thought we would let you know what we've been up to. As advocates and lawyers, we at [Farmers' Legal Action Group](#) do our work for farmers behind the scenes, preferring to let the farmers take the spotlight when good things happen. However, this means we often get so busy with our work that we forget to share our accomplishments with friends and supporters! We invite you to spend a few minutes catching up with us.



The Good Acre: Members of the Minnesota Hmong Agricultural Cooperative and FLAG staff were on hand for the ground breaking of The Good Acre's new food hub. Left to right: MHAC member Seoblong Thao, The Good Acre General Manager Rhys Williams, FLAG Executive Director Susan Stokes, MHAC member Phenhli Thao, FLAG Senior Staff Attorney Hli Xyooj,

FLAG Communications Associate Mai Yang, and MHAC member See Vang Thao.

Accomplishing Great Things!

This year and last have been busy, with many new and exciting developments. Highlights from FLAG's work in 2014 and 2015 include:

Hotline requests

Our staff responded to more than 1,050 hotline requests from around the country, on topics ranging from bankruptcy to discrimination to landlord/tenant issues and many more.

Increasing immigrant farmers' income

We assisted many low-income immigrant farmers in accessing new markets to increase their families' income. One example: we worked with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to provide linguistically and culturally tailored training to farmers' market vendors, enabling an additional 66 immigrant farmers to become certified to accept Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers in 2014. Another: we connected and negotiated contracts for more than 12 immigrant farmers with the newly formed food hub The Good Acre (TGA) and were part of TGA's ground-breaking event (pictured above). Check back with us to hear about future work with The Good Acre in the year ahead.

Farmer training

We conducted 57 training sessions with more than 1,500 farmers and other participants. Topics included: licensing, insurance, risk management, credit, cooperatives, lending law, direct marketing, recordkeeping, leasing, farm and food safety, and the 2014 Farm Bill. All of our trainings are custom-tailored for each audience, and many are delivered in Hmong.

Leases for immigrant farmers

Written leases are an important way to protect renting farmers' interests and ensure stability for the growing season. In 2014, FLAG attorneys secured written leases for 94 immigrant farmers on more than 150 acres of rented farmland in Dakota, Washington, and Ramsey counties; before then, just seven of these farmers had written leases. This year, we've negotiated written leases for 138 immigrant farmers on more than 160 acres of land; these leases allowed the farmers to earn more than \$400,000 per season on those acres.

Looking Forward to 2016: New Partnerships and Initiatives

A cornerstone of FLAG's work has always been collaborative partnerships with other nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and farmers to improve conditions for small-scale family farmers and help ensure their success. In recent years, partnerships have allowed us to offer our legal expertise and unique technical knowledge to augment the training and support provided by other organizations to the farmers they work with. We are excited to be continuing some of these key partnerships, and starting new ones, through upcoming collaborative projects funded by the USDA.

Conservation Innovation Grants Program

FLAG will be a key partner on a new three-

Office of Advocacy and Outreach's 2501 Program

FLAG will also be a key partner on a project

year project funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to teach organic farming methods to historically underserved producers in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Our long-time partner [Minnesota Food Association](#) will be the lead organization on this grant, with [Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service](#) (MOSES) and [The Farley Center for Peace, Justice and Sustainability](#) (Farley Center) serving as the Wisconsin partners.

FLAG's role will be to educate landowners and farmers about new incentives available to land transferred to immigrant farmers (see [CRP-TIP program](#) for more info), and to help farmers negotiate leases that support their use of organic and conservation methods.

led by the Farley Center in Wisconsin to conduct training and outreach to historically underserved farmers in Minnesota and Wisconsin, also with partner Minnesota Food Association. Our role will be to provide technical and legal assistance to immigrant farmers in both states with accessing USDA insurance and loan programs. We will also offer a workshop in Minnesota on collaborative farming and land tenure options for farmers as part of this project – stay tuned for more details!



Farm Aid's 30th anniversary concert was kicked off with a national press event featuring, from left to right, FLAG Founder and Program Director Lynn Hayes, farmer Rosario Maldonado, Event Moderator Monica Eng, Farm Aid Executive Director Carolyn Mugar, Farm Aid Board members Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, Dave Matthews, and Neil Young.

Behind the Scenes: FLAG Staff and Board Updates

FLAG has an accomplished staff and board who have achieved many notable accomplishments in their careers, received numerous prestigious awards, and have participated in countless nationwide conferences and events. Here are a few recent updates from our board and staff:



Lynn Hayes

FLAG Founder and Program Director Lynn Hayes was a featured speaker at the press conference just prior to the [30th annual Farm Aid concert](#) last month in Chicago (pictured above at left side of stage). Farm Aid helped launch FLAG in 1986.

Lynn also presented and co-facilitated a session on “Fortifying the Work of Individual Farm Advocacy” at Farm Aid’s 30th anniversary Strength from Our Roots conference.



Hli Xyooj

Senior Staff Attorney Hli Xyooj was named by the local Asian Pacific American Bar Association as a member of the prestigious “Best Under 40” list compiled by the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA). Hli is one of only 14 attorneys in the country receiving this honor. This award recognizes talented individuals within the Asian Pacific American community under the age of 40 who have achieved prominence and distinction in their fields of endeavor and who have demonstrated a strong commitment to Asian Pacific American civic or community affairs. She will be presented with the award in New Orleans on November 5 at NAPABA’s annual conference.



Stephen Carpenter

Senior Staff Attorney Stephen Carpenter received the 2014 Excellence in Agricultural Law Award from the [American Agricultural Law Association](#).

Stephen also presented on Right to Farm laws at the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance’s 9th Annual Farm and Food Leadership Conference on September 25-26, 2015, in Bryan, Texas.



Susan Stokes

Executive Director Susan Stokes will be a panelist at the [Yale Food System Symposium](#) on October 31 discussing: “Is There a Food Movement?” Other panelists include Gerald Torres, Jane M.G. Foster Professor of Law at Cornell Law School and a scholar on social movement theory; and Emily Broad Leib, Director of the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic. Susan was also the keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Twin Cities

Agricultural Land Trust and was a featured storyteller at the September meeting of Minnesota Young Food Professionals.

We are delighted to announce the addition of two new FLAG Board members, **Ross Racine** and **Terry VanDerPol**, both of whom bring impressive qualifications to FLAG's board:



Ross Racine

Ross Racine has dedicated his career to working with Indian farmers and ranchers in the development and management of their resources, and he has extensive cross-cultural experience. He has served as the Executive Director of Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) since 2001. Ross is a Blackfeet Indian, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, and spent many years working on farms and ranches near Browning, Montana. He received a Northwest Regional Award of the Intertribal Timber Council for his work on models for Tribal planning on land use. Among his many involvements, Ross serves on the NRCS Chiefs Reinvention Forum Executive Committee regarding negotiation of the NRCS-Conservation District agreements, is an Indian Land Tenure Foundation Board member, serves as Chairman of the Agriculture Committee for the National Congress of American Indians, and also serves on his local school board in Billings, Montana.



Terry VanDerPol

Terry VanDerPol farms in the western part Minnesota outside of Granite Falls, raising grassfed cattle. She is a member and staff person of Land Stewardship Project (LSP) and is LSP's Community Based Food Systems Program Director.

Upcoming Events

[11th Immigrant and Minority Farmer Conference](#) **January 30 & 31, 2016** **St. Paul, Minnesota**

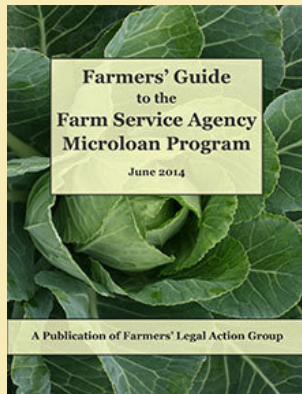
This is the largest gathering of its kind in the country. FLAG's Hli Xyooj and Mai Yang play crucial roles in planning the [conference](#) each year, and FLAG attorneys will present up-to-date workshops.

[Minnesota Organic Conference](#) **January 8 & 9, 2016** **St. Cloud, Minnesota**

FLAG's Stephen Carpenter will be presenting at a workshop on the latest organic checkoff developments at the [Minnesota Organic Conference](#) on January 8, 2016, in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

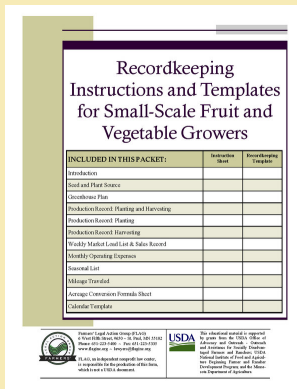
Helpful (and Free!) Resources for Farmers

One of FLAG’s priorities is making sure all farmers and farm advocates have access, free of cost, to the legal and technical information they need to be successful. We have created numerous publications and tools to help explain agricultural law, insurance programs, loan programs, leases, and more – all of which are available for **FREE** on our website! [Check out the many resources we have available](#), organized by topic. Some of our most popular publications include:



Farmers’ Guide to the Farm Service Agency Microloan Program (pictured): A comprehensive guide to accessing this program that has been a terrific resource for small-scale producers.

FLAG’s Recordkeeping Template (pictured): Practical tools to help farmers keep important production and sales records for their farms. It is designed to be accessible for farmers with limited English proficiency, and prepares farmers to apply for insurance and loan programs.



We are now in the process of updating our **Farmers’ Guide to Minnesota Lending Law** to reflect the most recent changes in the law and will be posting updates on our website.



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