

President Barack Obama  
% Julie Chavez Rodriguez  
Associate Director of Latino Affairs & Immigration  
Office of Public Engagement  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC

Dear President Obama:

I nominate Fred Ross, Sr. posthumously for the Presidential Medal of Honor. I am one of the lucky people to have known Fred Ross and to have been trained by him. In my very first job after graduation from Union Theological Seminary, as field staff for the California Migrant Ministry, I was assigned to Corcoran, California, home of the J.G. Boswell Company and the cotton fields of the San Joaquin Valley. Corcoran could be compared to a cotton mill town of the south. Almost everyone worked for or was connected to the Boswell Company. We began working with local churches about the plight of farm workers. Two young assistants, Mennonite conscientious objectors, ran boys' clubs with the sons of farm workers. We organized a teen club in the local Presbyterian church, classes for women in home economics, Vacation Bible School and Sunday School.

Good Christians would give baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas and then forget about the desperate lives of farm workers for the remainder of the year. Our boss, the late Rev. Doug Still, realized we weren't making much of an impact and sought training for his staff with Fred Ross, Sr.

After six weeks of training we began to hold house meetings and to discover what the people themselves really wanted. You, as a former community organizer, know the rest. Farm workers wanted what all of us want: education for our children, affordable homes, adequate health care, job security. We launched a voter registration drive and after that, a campaign for public low cost housing, which we won, incidentally. These kinds of activities sprouted up all over the agricultural San Joaquin Valley under the leadership of the Rev. Chris Hartmire, (Doug Still had resigned), and resulted in the creation of the United Farm Workers with Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta, the heroes of farm workers and all of us.

I was privileged to be present last year when you, Mr. President, inaugurated La Paz as a National Monument. It was an exciting moment. Fred Ross was responsible for so many transformations and for believing in the abilities of ordinary people to empower themselves and to achieve their dreams. Fred Ross deserves the recognition he did not receive during his lifetime. I hope you will grant this to him and his family and to inspire the rest of us to do likewise.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Carhart Darweesh  
Co-Chair, Orange County Interfaith Committee to Aid Farm Workers