



UNITED FARM WORKERS

29700 Woodford-Tehachapi Rd • P.O. Box 62 • Keene, CA 93531
Telephone: (661) 823-6105 • Fax: (661) 578-6972
email: execoffice@ufw.org • website: www.ufw.org

Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

February 18, 2013

Dear Mr. President:

All of us in the United Farm Workers of America respectfully request that you award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Fred Ross Sr. I first met Fred in 1974, while organizing the second grape boycott in Detroit. We traveled to Ohio for an entire week of training with Fred for boycott organizers from the Midwest. My only knowledge of Fred at the time was his reputation as the guru of community organizing and that he had inspired and trained Cesar Chavez.

What I learned from Fred, especially his methodology of house meetings, has stayed with me ever since and continues forming the foundation of UFW organizing today. You have to organize one person at a time, time after time, often through house meetings, small gatherings of friends and co-workers invited into people's homes. Fred and Cesar didn't like one-on-one visits because of the value of having people feeding off each other's responses. Organizing among big crowds didn't allow people to effectively communicate with each other.

Later, during a hard-fought 1976 statewide initiative campaign in California, Fred taught us the ironing board techniques to gather petition signatures. We'd set up ironing boards holding multiple petitions at busy public places and use bird dogs (people approaching passers-by) and barking (drawing attention to our cause). Hundreds of us across the state qualified the union initiative in record time without using paid petition gatherers.

Fred's exploits with the UFW ranged from advising and reassuring Cesar during the very beginning of the union in the early 1960s to training organizers for field strikes and boycotts, to helping organize the grape boycott across the U.S. during the '60s and '70s. I worked with Fred on many other occasions throughout the years.

No American of the last century contributed more to perfecting the art of community organizing than Fred Ross. His impact still lives on through the many people he galvanized for social and political activism. Not many Americans who believe in a democratic society fueled by active participation know about Fred Ross Sr.'s contributions. Please help change that by awarding him the Medal of Freedom.

Si Se Puede!

Arturo S. Rodriguez
President

cc: Julie C. Rodriguez

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Founded by Cesar E. Chavez (1927-1993)