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The Fight Against Fracking is a Fight For Social Justice



Members of the Californians Against Fracking coalition huddle before the March 15, 2014, “Don’t Frack California” rally in Sacramento, attended by thousands.

By [Anna Ghosh](#)

Today, March 31, we celebrate the birthday of Cesar Chavez, the co-founder of what we know today as the United Farm Workers; now in its 52nd year. His heroic leadership of a 5-year grape strike in Delano, California, in the 60s is chronicled in the newly released film [Cesar Chavez](#). Through aggressive but nonviolent organizing, Chavez organized thousands of poor Latino workers throughout Central California to win higher wages, better working conditions and collective bargaining rights for generations of farmworkers.

I had the honor last week of having a conversation with an amazing woman who worked alongside Chavez in the 60s and has been fighting for social justice her entire life. Lupe Anguiano is a civil rights activist known for her work on women's rights, the rights of the poor, and the protection of the environment. In 2006, she founded the environmental nonprofit [Stewards of the Earth](#) to provide educational, social and economic services to low-income and Indigenous people in the United States, Mexico and Latin America. In 2007 she was designated a Women's History Month Honoree by the National Women's History Project and has an [archive](#) named after her at UCLA. Now, Anguiano's fight for social justice has led her to fight fracking and dumping of toxic waste associated with fracking and drilling where she lives in Oxnard, California.

Here's an excerpt from our talk:

How did you get involved working with Chavez? When the strike began I was a Catholic nun working with migrants and Latino people in Los Angeles. The grape growers didn't adequately take care of their workers – they had no restrooms or clean water to drink – and it felt that it was part of my mission as a nun to stand up for these workers' rights. We would picket in Los Angeles where they would unload the grapes from Delano.

What led to you leaving the clergy to become a community organizer? The more I learned about the injustices being waged against Latinos, the more I got involved. I fought redlining (housing and financial discrimination), as did many religious people, but Cardinal McIntyre (who Harvard historian Lisa McGirr calls “the most extreme right-wing member of the American Catholic hierarchy”), objected to Los Angeles clergy speaking out. He said we were getting too political, but we knew this was about social justice. This is what Christ did (stand up for the poor). Pope John XXIII even encouraged it, which gave me wings. But I continued to be reprimanded by the Cardinal, which led me to leave the order. I felt that I could do more as a layperson. This is when I was invited by Cesar to come to Delano. But then I was called to Washington by President Johnson to work on bilingual education.

What did you think of Washington? I was very disappointed, so I went back to Delano. Volunteers were paid \$5 a week plus housing and food, but it was the most rewarding job of my life. I would get up at 3a.m. so I could ride in the truck with Cesar. He used a great method of organizing to get the attention of workers and policy makers alike. He taught us the importance of nonviolence. I learned so much.

What is your personal connection to the land and agriculture? I am a Latina and Latinos build the agricultural industry in California. When I was a child, every summer we would pick fruit on the farm that my Uncle tended. Latino workers always protected and respected the soil, the land and the environment. Agriculture is what enriches our state. It's what makes California so special and important. Why would we want to tarnish or risk the agricultural wealth of our state?

Why do you think Governor Brown can't see how fracking and extreme extraction threatens California's agricultural heritage? I'm completely disappointed by Brown. I have lived in California since I was in the third grade (Lupe is now 85), and every governor and

president since I have lived here has protected our agriculture and environment. For example, Nixon initiated the Clean Air and Endangered Species Acts and when the big oil spill in Santa Barbara happened, Governor Reagan initiated CEQA (the California Environmental Quality Act). What is Governor Brown doing destroying California's agricultural economy? Petroleum by its very nature destroys living organisms. Has he gone out of touch? I hear his wife is invested in petroleum and she's probably influencing him. But how can a governor not understand that agriculture is so integral to our economy? Destruction of our agriculture is criminal. More than 50 percent of the nation's fresh food comes from California and to destroy that would be it outrageously sinful.

Then there's his rhetoric on climate change, but he continues to stand behind dirty fossil fuels. The whole thing is crazy. Can he not see the huge opportunities in renewable energy? We are leaving behind industrial era and moving into renewable technology. California is in the lead and our universities are set. The whole nation and world are moving towards more renewable sources. But Governor Brown's lack of action to stop fracking and drilling could destroy California's position as a leader in renewable energy.

What are you working on now? I live in Oxnard, which is the dumping ground of Ventura County. A few years ago, we fought tooth and nail to keep a liquefied natural gas terminal out of Oxnard. We won, but it's a continuous battle. Now they're dumping fracking waste in our strawberry fields and trying to build wells near an elementary school. They're trying to turn Oxnard into a Bakersfield. Why aren't they going to Thousand Oaks or Simi Valley? Because they would never allow it. We cannot allow our communities to become toxic dumping grounds. We're not Texas, we're not South Dakota.

What organizations do you think are doing the best work in this area? Groups that engage Latinos, like [LULAC](#) and the [Latino Congreso](#), and groups that focus on agriculture, like Food & Water Watch, are critical. We must align ourselves. Food and water are the foundation for life. [The Center for Biological Diversity](#) and [Earthjustice](#) have good attorneys, great research and information.

How can we make the most impact?

We must cultivate more responsible leaders. We need more independent, "decline to state" voters. We need more young people to get politically active. After all, this is the world that they are inheriting.