

Farm Aid received this email on September 19, 2018, from dairy farmer Jarous Volenec who lives in Wisconsin. His words describing his family's daily struggles and fighting spirit represent the experiences and feelings of so many family farmers around the country. He reminds us why Farm Aid fights to keep family farmers like Jarous farming. We're honored to share his inspiring words below at this year's festival.

To: Farm Aid
From: Jarous C. Volenec, Hardscrabble Farms
Subject: The Fight of Hardscrabble

Dear Farm Aid,

I wanted to attend this year's festival in Hartford Connecticut. I wanted to participate in the "On the Road to Resilience" activities. I wanted to meet, share and learn from individuals that have the same passion for America's farm families as I do. I wanted to stand beside fellow farmers and advocates on this national stage, tell our stories, explain our importance and hopefully make a difference. But...

I am fighting the fight of Hardscrabble (this is the name of my farm). My family has been on this piece of dirt for five generations now. My daughters are the sixth to call Hardscrabble home. We are dairy farmers. So were most of my Uncles and now just two of my cousins. I have been at this life for 43 years now, running the dairy herd since the mid 90's. Every year of farming I've had to figure out how to get more out of this land, these cows and myself. I am a survivor, never backing down from a challenge, sustained by a confidence that I will succeed if I work harder, work faster, work smarter, but it is starting to grind me down. I have always been willing to sacrifice myself for my family and this farm, but what I have come to realize since I was blessed with a family of my own is that when I sacrifice myself, I sacrifice them as well, which is why I won't be attending the Farm Aid festival.

2018 marks a change in strategy for me. Harder, faster, smarter aren't cutting it anymore. I've started fighting back. I joined Wisconsin Farmers Union. I am writing, speaking out, advocating for what I believe in. The problem is I am still engaged in an occupation that demands most of my time. This past week I and the one full time employee I've been able to keep on have been pulling 20 hour days. Neither of us has seen our families except in passing. He'd have to pull my weight at the farm for me to attend Farm Aid which would mean another four days of not seeing his family and mine being without me as well.

I can't do that to him. I can't do it to my family. I am still fighting, but I need to sit this campaign out. I was thinking about this today... my wife married a farmer and now he's become a soldier. I don't think she bargained on me becoming a soldier and never fully anticipated what the life of a farmer's wife would be. I never foresaw this level of strife. I thank God often that she loves me despite the "hardscrabble" life I provide.

So, I am farming this week. It is my hope, by writing this down and sharing it with you, that my absence might be just as significant as my presence. I thank you all for the work you do. I thank you for speaking on my behalf. I thank you for fighting there while I fight here.

Stand your ground. Don't let the bastards grind you down.

Thank you,
Jarous C. Volenec
Hardscrabble Farms, LLC
Montfort, Wisconsin