**UCSD – April 12, 2012**

My name is LeRoy Chatfield, founder and publisher, of the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project.

The Documentation Project is a multimedia website covering a 31-year period in American history that documents the social justice movement of Cesar Chavez. It is unique and nothing like it exists anywhere. Essentially, what I have done is compile, and organize in chronological order, primary source documents and materials to stitch back together the history of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement from 1962 – the year he founded his movement – until 1993, the year of his death.

The Documentation Project contains hundreds of personal account essays; unpublished manuscripts; books no-longer-in-print; the personal archives of dozens of movement volunteers; hundreds of hours of oral history; more than 13,000 photographs; dozens of documentary films and videos; a collection of music, art and graphics produced and used in the movement; thousands of union organizing leaflets and flyers; staff training manuals for boycott organizing and activities; the complete archive of the farmworker movement newspaper, **El Malcriado**; the FBI file on Cesar Chavez; an 8-month online discussion with farmworker movement volunteers, a Timeline from 1960-1993; and a Roster of movement participants; every article about the farmworker movement published in the **New York Times**, the newspaper of record in the United States and every article of Dick Meister, former labor editor of the **San Francisco Chronicle** and KQED TV San Francisco and an exhibit of a collection of hundreds of "buttons" used in the farmworker movement. The list goes on but this

gives you an overview of the scope of the documentation I have compiled and published.

The entire Documentation Project is available online to anyone, anytime, anywhere in the world – at no cost and everything in chronological order.

My faithful, albeit, long-suffering professional web tech, Jennifer Szabo, tells me the Documentation Project is the largest website she has ever encountered or worked with, and is so large, it takes 7 DVDs to back up the site.

You can imagine her reaction when I tell her of my plan to add hundreds more farmworker movement photographs shot by Carlos LeGerrette from San Diego and filmmaker Glen Pearcy from Maryland.

When you consider the length of the farmworker movement – 31 years – and the fact that I have been working for 8 years compiling, organizing and publishing it, the size of the site is not too surprising.

Some days, I think the Documentation Project is too large and its sheer size too intimidating and overwhelming for students and academics who wish to use it. On the other hand, I believe everything about the history of Cesar Chavez must be included . . . and that is what I have done.

2012 marks the 50th Anniversary of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement and to celebrate this anniversary today, I have selected from the Documentation Project website, a 29 minute documentary film - made in 1969 by Thames, a London-based filmmaker – that was broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

In my view, this documentary captures some of the essential and historical ingredients a person would have to know in order to begin to appreciate and understand Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement.

**First: the plight of California farm workers.**

Working in the dirt for hours at a stretch in sweltering heat exceeding 100 degrees and paid by the most cruel system ever conceived: piece rate. The faster you work, the more you earn. No water or toilet facilities provided, no protection from pesticide residues left on the vines or the wasps that make their nests there. If a worker takes a lunch or rest break, or has to walk deep into the field to find privacy to relieve him/herself, or if the worker stops for a drink of water, he/she is financially penalized because farmworkers are only paid for the amount of grapes they pick that day. Don't like it? Take it or leave it.

Housing conditions were the poorest you can imagine. Most migrant workers lived in shacks either on the outskirts of town or in labor camps. Everything, including health, had to be sacrificed for the sake of earning enough money during the harvest season to be able to survive during the winter months when there is little or no work.

**Second: the sheer size of the industry Cesar Chavez sought to organize.**

If I tell you that agriculture is California's largest industry – a 37.5 billion dollar industry - and represents 23% of the nation's cash receipts for crops and livestock, or if I tell you that nine agricultural counties in California rank in the top ten of all agricultural counties in the nation, that tells you something, but it does not conjure up an image. Or if I tell you that Cesar Chavez launched his farmworker organizing movement in the California grape industry, which is a $3 billion dollar industry and ranks No.2 in California agriculture, again that tells you something, but "billons" are hard to visualize, they do not conjure up an image.

But if I tell you that the table grape boxes you see in this documentary film – each one weighing 26 lbs - are stacked 12 high, it will build a wall 7' high and extend from Delano CA to Boston MA, a distance of 3000 miles. This image gives you a visual idea about the size of the table grape industry in California.

Or if I tell you the number of truck-trailers needed to haul the cases of wine produced from California grapes would stretch end-to-end from San Diego to New Orleans, a distance of 1800 miles, this too gives you an image about the size of the grape industry in California.

In the documentary film you will see seemingly endless fields of grape vines, each vine topping out at about 7 feet tall. The size of these vines so close together for hundreds of yards at stretch give you the feel of working in a dense jungle closed off from the outside world. Each of these vines requires 10 field-hand operations throughout the growing season to produce the crop ready for market – weeding, fertilizing pruning, tying, leafing, thinning, tipping, picking, packing and swamping the 26 lb boxes from the field to the cold storage plants. To service the California table grape industry requires nearly 50,000 farm workers, which is 8,000 more than the 42,000 total number of students, faculty and staff employees here at UCSD.

The size of this California industry is huge, its financial resources staggering, its political influence without equal, and it had a 50-year unblemished record of crushing any efforts to organize its workers . . . the fact that Cesar Chavez decided to organize these workers into a union where none had ever existed is mind-boggling, even death defying.

**Third: the personal sacrifice, the dedication and determination of the strikers in the face of an endless supply of strikebreakers - or black legs - as the film refers to them is incredible.**

Unless you were present and served as a witness, it is difficult to imagine how courageous, dedicated and selfless, these striking farm workers were in 1969. On its face, there was no way the picket lines at the fields would convince the majority of strikebreakers – whether Filipino crews of long standing or green card workers bussed in from the Mexican border or indigent migrant workers too poor to have a choice – to leave their jobs and honor the strike. Contracts with the growers could never be won through a field strike at harvest time . . . and yet the farmworker strikers never lost hope. They refused to give up! They believed the boycott of California grapes would rescue them.

**Fourth: The power of the farmworker movement's consumer boycott against California grapes.**

The Delano Grape strike began in the September harvest of 1965 and the BBC documentary was shot in Coachella Valley harvest of 1969 sometime during May and/or June.

Since the start of the Grape Boycott in late 1966, Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement had signed 9 contracts with growers and all but one of them – the DiGiorgio Corporation – were associated with wineries and all of them were the result of the consumer boycott or the threat of such a boycott. The union contracts were: Schenley Liquors (Delano); DiGiorgio Corporation (Arvin); Christian Brothers Winery (Napa Valley & Reedley); Almaden Vineyards (Hollister); Paul Masson Vineyards (Soledad); Pirelli-Minetti Winery (Delano); Gallo Winery (Livingston); Novitate Winery (Los Gatos) and Franzia Winery (Ripon).

This BBC film captured one of the most remarkable scenes in the history of the farmworker movement: a telephone conversation between Coachella grower, Mike Bosick, and the grape brokers in Milwaukee who attempted to sell his grapes to Kohl's Supermarkets in Wisconsin.

Aside from my own personal interaction with growers and their representatives while on Governor Jerry Brown's staff in 1975, I know of no other public and candid admission by California growers about the effectiveness of the grape boycott and their helplessness in dealing with it.

The film shows a sampling of grape boycott activity by shooting a colorful demonstration at a San Francisco Safeway store in support of the grape boycott but the reality and the geographical spread of the grape boycott was far, far greater than that.

In the film, as you view Cesar Chavez being interviewed in his pajamas, seemingly bedridden, about the boycott and its relationship to nonviolence, you need to be aware he was in daily contact with his boycott staff in 37 major cities in the U.S. and Canada. (Please keep in mind that in 1969 there was no social media, no computers, no cell phones, no fax machines, not even pagers) If you consider each boycott center had a full time staff of perhaps 10 volunteers and a part-time staff of perhaps 20, this equates to more than a 1000 people whose only purpose in life was to prevent the sale of grapes by supermarkets and their purchase by consumers. The grape boycott was a social justice war zone far, far removed from any control by the California grape industry.

In order to appreciate the magnitude and the geographical scope of the international boycott apparatus developed by Cesar Chavez, listen to the litany of names of the boycott centers:

Montreal; Toronto; Buffalo; Boston; New York; Miami; Dayton; Pittsburgh; Philadelphia; Washington DC; Baltimore; Cincinnati; Atlanta; Columbus; Cleveland; Detroit; New Orleans; Chicago; Milwaukee; Memphis; El Paso; Houston; St. Louis; Kansas City; Minneapolis; Denver; Portland; Seattle; Vancouver; San Diego; San Fernando Valley; San Pedro; Los Angeles; Sacramento; San Jose; Oakland; and San Francisco.

But remember: this boycott superstructure did not simply appear because some one called a press conference or because your name was Cesar Chavez. There has to be a reason and a strategy why each city was selected. The boycott was built step-by-step, volunteer by volunteer. Boycott techniques needed to be developed and taught to the volunteers, the boycott centers needed to be well managed and disciplined, and, critically important, the boycott center had to be financially underwritten by the local community of farmworker movement supporters.

**Fifth: The use of religious and other symbols and songs to inspire strikers and supporters.**

Images of the La Virgen de Guadalupe (the religious image carried at the front of the marches during the Mexican revolution) and the red and black Huelga flags are an integral part of the farmworker movement and show up in photographs, documentaries, TV news coverage about Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement. You will note their prominence in the film. Camera crews and photographers assigned to cover the Delano Grape Strike thanked their lucky stars to be able to shoot their assignments using such visual props. And the singing! You cannot have a movement without song and the farmworker movement had dozens of them.

**Sixth**: **Finally, the most important reason I chose this BBC documentary for today's presentation is to introduce you to the Cesar Chavez I knew so well during my years working with him in the farmworker movement – patient, soft-spoken, unassuming, confident, unhurried, a genuine listener, razor sharp and stubborn. He was 42-years old when this film was made.**

As you listen to him calmly answer questions about non-violence, the boycott and Gandhi; explain why and how Governor Reagan clutters up the facts; why a strong union assures industrial peace; why the table grape industry is in such trouble; the immorality of the Nixon administration

using the Department of Defense and the Department of Agriculture to undermine the grape boycott and the Delano Grape Strike by purchasing massive amounts of grapes; his vision for the poor to participate in society, etc. You have to ask yourself: can this be the person who attended 28 elementary schools before dropping out to go to work in the fields? Can this be a person speaking without the benefit of any high school or college education? Listen to his vocabulary, his diction, his sentence structure. Note his references to Gandhi, to the encyclicals of the Roman Catholic Church, and the history of farm labor. If there is such a thing as a self-educated person, Cesar Chavez is a prime example. How did this happen?

After the Delano Grape Strike began in September of 1965, Chavez began to meet and speak with outsiders who came to Delano in droves – lawyers, labor leaders, university students, intellectuals, protestant church officials, teachers, priests, ministers, senators & members of congress, rabbis and nuns, writers, photographers, filmmakers, artists, national news reporters, political activists . . . OR he was on the phone talking with them.

Cesar Chavez had a mind like an oversized damp sponge - he soaked up their vocabulary, their references to history and books, their phraseology, their conceptual images. These outsiders - supporters of the farmworker movement - opened up a new world filled with words, ideas and verbal expression. He began to read Gandhi and other books about history – he was not a speed reader, but a careful and thoughtful reader. He absorbed it all. Jacques Levy, author of **Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa** said the intellectual curiosity of Cesar Chavez was insatiable. I can personally attest to the truth of this observation.

Cesar Chavez lived a life of voluntary poverty and during his 31-year struggle for social justice, he never enriched himself. He preached nonviolence and he fasted publicly to promote it. At the age of 66, he died

in his sleep while staying overnight in Yuma Arizona, the area where he was born. Forty thousand people attended his funeral. The material possessions Cesar Chavez left behind amounted to a few clothes, some shoes, his reading glasses and the books he had read. But his legacy of struggling for social justice will live on for hundreds of years.

One last point: in this BBC film you will meet Cesar Chavez, already an internationally acclaimed leader, dressed in his pajamas. Seriously, I ask you: when is the last time you met a world figure dressed in his/her pajamas?

I thought so.