

Small Family Farmer Fights Back Against Over-reaching Government Forcing her off her Land

(NaturalNews – Julie Wilson) Martha Boneta, operator of a small family farm in Paris, Virginia, achieved success not only for her business but also for small farmers and property owners across the state when the “Boneta Bill” finally became law on July 2.

Despite efforts from local and state government officials, including Fauquier Zoning Administrator Kimberley Johnson, who accused Boneta of violating zoning ordinances, [HB-268](#) passed, which protects traditional farming and agricultural practices against over-regulation on the county level.

Liberty Farm is a [small, working 64-acre farm](#) located about an hour outside of Washington D.C. that offers fresh seasonal organic vegetables, fresh and dried herbs, honey and honeybee products, eggs, chicken, duck, turkey, emu, hand-made soaps and sheep wool crafts.

The controversy began in 2012 after a neighbor reported Boneta’s farm and its on-farm store as a “nuisance” following a birthday party that she held for eight 10-year old girls, which led to Fauquier County putting her out of business.

Johnson, the county zoning board administrator, accused Boneta of selling fresh fruit, vegetables, beverages and homemade handicrafts out of her on-site farm store, an action he says violated “modified zoning rules.”

The *Star Exponent* reports that, under the state's Right to Farm law, agricultural operations are supposed to be protected against "nuisance law suits, and prevent local governments from using zoning laws to restrict standard farming practices, even if these practices bother adjacent property owners."

According to Boneta, her zoning administrator went on her Facebook page and saw a birthday party picture of little girls on her farm, and an advertisement that she posted for pumpkin carving in her pumpkin patch. Boneta says she was found in violation of engaging in traditional activities that farmers have engaged in "since forever."

The consequences for Liberty Farm's alleged violation carried a penalty of \$15,000 per day in fines "based on amendments made to the county's zoning ordinance," reported *The American Spectator*.

Despite maintaining that her retail farm business license was "grandfathered" into any changes made by the county, Boneta was also forced to stop selling vegetables that she had harvested. To prevent the food from being wasted, she donated it to local charities.

Boneta's story gained national media attention, prompting farmers to stage peaceful "pitchfork protests" outside of the Board of Zoning Appeals building in support of her farm and state property rights.

The [Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund](#) (FTCLDF), of which Boneta is a member, offered her legal aid during her struggle.

In the 2013 session of the General Assembly, Rep. Scott Lingamfelter helped bring justice to Boneta and protect other farmers from similar abuse by spearheading legislation that would strengthen Virginia's [Right to Farm Act](#).

The “Boneta Bill” passed the House by an “overwhelming margin,” but was killed in a Senate committee. However, grassroots organizations and Boneta’s supporters didn’t give up, but instead returned to the General Assembly in 2014 and “won wide bipartisan approval for legislation protecting the rights of family farmers.”

Backed by the [Virginia](#) Farm Bureau and signed into law by Gov. Terry McAuliffe, customary activities at agricultural operations are now protected from local governments unless substantial impacts on public welfare can be proven.

The bill also prohibits localities from requiring special-use permits for farmers wanting to host farm-related activities.

“I am grateful to all the Virginians and legislators from across the Commonwealth who rallied for non-partisan legislation that provides economic opportunity for small [family](#) farmers, access to consumers and allows the great traditions of farming in Virginia to flourish,” said Boneta.

“It is gratifying to see the hard work of Virginians, working together across party lines, rewarded by a law that enables family farms to prosper as our Founding Fathers intended.”

Additional sources:

<http://theroanokestar.com>

<http://www.farmtoconsumer.org>

<http://spectator.org>

<http://www.dailyprogress.com>

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