

the history of Middlebury College's involvement with Goodrich Farm and the students seeking justice in our 'climate solutions'

This document attempts to create a timeline of student activism and organizing to support the immigrant-led organization [Migrant Justice/Justicia Migrante](#). It is based on the well-documented history and personal experiences of dozens of students involved in the Middlebury College Student Solidarity Network ([@middmwd](#)).

Although they are beyond the scope of our timeline, we would be remiss to not acknowledge the long history of powerful student and alumni activism, volunteering, and solidarity with immigrant farm workers through Juntos, ENVS 401, Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN), Addison Allies, and Viva El Sabor. They do incredible work. However, we have witnessed numerous times how Middlebury College hyper-focuses on these more palatable relationships (which are mainly student-led initiatives anyway) to avoid accountability for their partnership with Goodrich Farm, their greenwashing, and their connections to human rights issues. They attempt to use these other endeavors to preserve their image, while actively engaging with a farm with a documented history of labor abuse and corporations worsening the climate crisis. We are excited to use the timeline to shed light on the ways students engage with Migrant Justice that the College won't tell you about.

An prettier version of this timeline can be found [here](#), housed in [go/disorient/](#).

If you have any questions about this document, please feel free to direct them to Claire Contreras '23 [ckcontreras77@gmail.com](#) and Andrés Oyaga '23 [andres.e.oyaga@gmail.com](#). There are also many other students who have been involved in this work and timeline, but these are the folks that finalized this document.

~2009: Middlebury College forms a relationship with Goodrich Farm, exploring biomethane gas plant to fuel Middlebury College.

<https://www.middlebury.edu/announcements/2010/05/middlebury-and-farm-energy-company-explore-use-bio-methane-gas-college>

2009: formation of Migrant Justice sparked by the tragic death of farmworker José Obeth Santiz Cruz.

<https://vtdigger.org/2010/06/28/tragedy-spurs-a-movement-grassroots-group-forges-connection-between-mexico-vermont/>

2014: Farmworker Needs Survey leads to the creation of the Milk with Dignity Code of Conduct and Milk with Dignity Program.

<https://migrantjustice.net/sites/default/files/FinalSurveyMay2015.pdf>

2015: Goodrich Family Farm files request to build a renewable natural gas plant on its farm in Salisbury, VT, which will supply Middlebury College with energy.

<https://www.middlebury.edu/announcements/2015/05/local-company-files-request-build-renewable-natural-gas-plant-will-bring-middlebury-college>

October 2017: Ben and Jerry's signs on to Milk with Dignity.

<https://vtdigger.org/2017/10/03/ben-jerrys-signs-milk-dignity-pact-migrant-workers/>

November 2017: Partnership between Middlebury College, Goodrich Farm, Vanguard Renewables, and Vermont Gas Systems announced to build an anaerobic digester at Goodrich supplying "Renewable Natural Gas (RNG)" to Middlebury College and Vermont Gas customers.

<https://www.middlebury.edu/announcements/news/2017/11/middlebury-college-looks-food-waste-and-manure-new-energy-source>

January 2019: Middlebury announces Energy2028 plan to transition to 100% renewables, reduce energy consumption, divest from fossil fuels, and commit to educational opportunities. This announcement is the culmination of work by Divest Middlebury, a seven-year campaign on campus for the College to divest from fossil fuels.

<https://www.middlebury.edu/energy2028/divesting-fossil-fuels>
<https://grist.org/beacon/middlebury-college-divests/>

August 2019: Groundbreaking ceremony for anaerobic digester. Representatives of Middlebury College, Vermont Gas, Vanguard Renewables, and Goodrich Family Farm are in attendance. It is the largest anaerobic gas digester in the Northeast. The RNG plant at Goodrich is celebrated as a technology that will get middlebury one step closer to their Energy2028 goals.

<https://www.middlebury.edu/announcements/news/2019/08/middlebury-college-and-project-partners-celebrate-groundbreaking-facility-turns-manure>

October 2019: Campaign launched calling on Hannafords to join Milk with Dignity.

<https://migrantjustice.net/Hannaford-Launch>

November 2019: Middlebury students (Olivia Pintair and Hannah Ennis) organize a protest at Middlebury's Hannafords attended by over 80 farmworkers, organizers, students, and community members as part of the Milk with Dignity Day of Action.

<https://www.middleburycampus.com/article/2019/11/milk-with-dignity-pushes-for-leche-justa>

February 2020: José Ramos is physically and verbally attacked and denied wages at Goodrich Farm, returns a few days later with a Migrant Justice organizer, and receives the same reaction.

<https://migrantjustice.net/Goodrich-Farm>

February 29, 2020: over 50 protestors, 20 of whom were Middlebury students, stand in solidarity with José to demand justice. The protestors are met with aggression and violence from

the Goodriches, who charged into the crowd, pushed people, and shouted obscenities. The Goodriches then send Migrant Justice a No Trespassing Order, and José does not receive his wages for over a year after a Department of Labor complaint.

<https://www.myhamplainvalley.com/news/local-news/farm-workers-protest-violence-and-stolen-wages-migrant-justice-pickets-dairy-farm-over-abuse/>

March 2020: Students meet with Middlebury Dean of Sustainability and Environmental Affairs Jack Byrne who emphasizes that the partnership was non-negotiable and the College would not be involved in the farm's 'internal labor disputes' A second meeting occurs with Jack Byrne, the student organizers, and Madeline Sharrow and Marita Canedo of Migrant Justice, in which Migrant Justice offered to help the College renegotiate their contracts to incorporate farmworkers' rights, which the College declines. Communication is broken by Jack Byrne.

Students begin planning next steps including consciousness-raising on campus and confronting Vanguard Renewables about the labor abuses, as they had allegedly done their "due diligence" in investigating the farm before constructing the digester.

Students (Jaden H., Liv P., Alex. C., Connor W., Hannah E.) outraged by lack of response from Middlebury write an op-ed in the Middlebury Campus, reach out to Migrant Justice and administrators. Op Ed [published](#) March 12.

Mid-March 2020: onset of Covid-19 pandemic in the US sends students home and stifles organizing efforts and op-ed gets buried in the chaos.

Fall 2020 - Spring 2021: an Environmental Justice subcommittee of the Middlebury Environmental Council (EC), in partnership with Middlebury's Climate Action Capacity Project is tasked with developing recommendations towards a justice and equity framework for Energy2028.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jgsaUqskN0pu_lbABILXEFS6HzsdClo1/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=108123198714795608381&rtpof=true&sd=true

- The subcommittee proposes, among other things, "Ensuring that all partnerships already established going forward (including and especially Goodrich Farm) are equitable, using a process that engages and empowers local community members and already- established social justice organizations (such as Migrant Justice, the Milk with Dignity Program, ACORN, and others) and by developing a code of ethics in collaboration with such external organizations which would involve the review of partnerships (retroactively as well as proactively) and renegotiating them as needed... Critically interrogating Middlebury's relationship with Vermont Gas... reevaluating Middlebury's dependence on carbon credits, biomass, energy from Hydro-Québec and renewable natural gas as a way of reaching its energy goals... more candidly introducing incoming and existing students to continuing problems facing efforts to switch to renewable energy sources (including Middlebury's ongoing struggles, as noted above) so as to avoid greenwashing and acknowledge the need for continued activism and organizing in these areas."
- The Energy2028 website is amended to have a tab for "cross-cutting theme: justice" which is noticeably bare and vague which does little more than link to the college's land acknowledgement

- The report is presented to Jack Byrne, Middlebury President Laurie Patton, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration David Provost, and the rest of the EC. No follow up is ever given, and no actions are taken to explicitly address the majority of the concerns raised in the report.

Spring 2021: Middlebury's Sunday Night Environmental Group (SNEG) begins a working group to address Middlebury College's greenwashing. These students, meeting remotely due to Covid-19, begin by researching into Renewable Natural Gas, Vermont Gas Systems, VGS's greenwashing, the relationships between Middlebury, VGS, and Goodrich Farm, state regulation of fossil fuel infrastructure, Energy2028, and potential allies and barriers.

July 2021: Production of RNG begins (big press event)

Early Fall 2021:

Greenwashing conversations continue in SNEG, now with in person meetings and an influx of new members, and brainstorming occurs around raising awareness within the student body regarding RNG and Goodrich Farm so that a larger mobilization can occur and pressure the administration into action.

Sunrise Middlebury, a hub for the national Sunrise Movement and an unofficial student organization on campus, sets a goal of pushing Middlebury to join the Milk with Dignity program, or to hold suppliers to MD standards

The Student Government Association (SGA) Environmental Sustainability Committee sends out an email to various student organizations including SNEG, Sunrise, and Juntos hoping to connect these organizations and some individuals to work together towards the goal of pushing the College to hold its suppliers to Milk with Dignity standards

Sophie Chalfin-Jacobs and Molly Babbitt begin class projects for Theories of Change with Professor Dan Suarez focusing on Migrant Justice's Milk with Dignity campaign and student organizing efforts to support Migrant Justice and expand Milk with Dignity

October 2021: Migrant Justice Dignity Tour

- Middlebury Center for Community Engagement (CCE) cancels the Dignity Tour stop on campus set for October 21st for Covid safety reasons, rudely providing only one day's notice
- Students organize a screening of the virtual Dignity Tour event on October 22

October 28, 2021: SGA hosts meeting bringing organizers together, solidarity campaign/working group forms! Outreach begins for Portland march

November 4, 2021: Middlebury Campus article investigating Middlebury's relationship with Goodrich Farm and history of labor misconduct at Goodrich sparks conversation across campus and among administrators.

<https://www.middleburycampus.com/article/2021/11/allegations-of-wage-theft-and-labor-misconduct-persist-at-college-partnered-dairy-farm>

<https://www.middleburycampus.com/article/2021/11/authentic-climate-justice-is-overdue>

November 8, 2021: 16 Middlebury students join hundreds marching at the Hannafords headquarters in Portland, Maine, led by Migrant Justice farmworkers and organizers. This sparks the emergence of the Middlebury College Student Solidarity Network to support Migrant Justice actions and student organizing to support farmworkers.

<https://migrantjustice.net/announcing-maine-march>

November 9, 2021: Student collective begins weekly meetings (rotating facilitation), formation of slack channels, email list, and google drive.

December 3, 2021: Erin Goodrich (employee Student Affairs at Middlebury and wife of Chase Goodrich, the owner of Goodrich Farm) joined the the Milk with Dignity Student Solidarity Network slack channel without comment or invitation

- The November Campus article indicates she intended to meet with Campus staff who declined due to conflict of interest
- She joined the Slack channel via a (now removed) link on a poster without reaching out
- Elio quickly removed her and blocked any confidential information
- Andrés messaged her asking about the situation and she expressed no interest in further communication.

December 8, 2021: Meeting with Natalia Schwien, Sustainability Specialist at Middlebury with Sophie C-J, Andrés O. and other students in attendance.

- Provided advice for upcoming meeting with Jack, Mike, and Mez: set parameters, goals, intentions
- Shared that conversations in Franklin Environmental Center about Goodrich have occurred daily since the November Campus article, shared that internal structure surrounding the Environmental Center and Energy2028 Committee is unclear with lots of overlap
- Shared goal of setting up due diligence parameters but named anxiety in the Environmental Center about using the Milk with Dignity Program specifically as it is “politicized” proposed setting up a parallel structure, also shared personal support for MJ

December 9, 2021: Meeting with Jack Byrne, Mike Moser, Mez Baker-Medard and students Sophie C-J, Jaden H., Molly B., Andrés O., Elio F. (representing SGA,) and a student representing Energy 2028 Energy Subcommittee

- The meeting was initiated by Jaden as she had been present in previous conversations with Jack
- There was a limit imposed by Jack on the number of students present
- Mez is a member of the Environmental Studies faculty who Jack had turned to for advice following the Campus article (she was also one of Sophie’s professors)
- Mike Moser is Director of Facilities at Middlebury, leads the Energy Subcommittee of Energy2028, and was the last point of contact with the Goodrich family

- Meeting began by setting guidelines for accountability, acknowledging power imbalances, deep listening, clarity in communication, decentering ourselves to center farmworkers
- Jack expressed shared goal of supporting farmworkers, presented situations and feeling of being stuck/unsure of next steps
 - Communication with Goodrich was tense following the 2020 protest
 - After the protest, Jack asked the Goodriches if there were other incidents the college should know about, they said no but that there were allegations and said they would not communicate further on the subject. Jack also asked about joining Milk with Dignity, which they were opposed to.
 - Goodrich broke communication after expressing hurt from November Campus article
 - Vanguard has offered to potentially help with communication with Goodrich, but progress on this is unclear
- Sophie asked for more information about the relationship between the four entities in the contract which Mike felt uncomfortable answering but Jack seemed ready to share more.
 - Mike perceived this as a leading question with a goal of squeezing Vanguard to communicate with Goodrich re Milk with Dignity (it was not a leading question)
- Some tension arose when Jack expressed desire for verification on some allegations while Mike wanted to avoid rehashing past events
- Jack proposed a follow up meeting with an openness to inviting Migrant Justice representatives to join, others agreed.

December 9, 2021: Students support Migrant Justice phonebank fundraising event (check out @middmwd on instagram for pictures of phone banking events).

December 9, 2021: Students publish two op-eds in the Middlebury Campus: [reflecting on the march](#) at Hannaford Headquarters in Maine and [inviting students to join the collective](#).

January 20, 2022: Students meet with Migrant Justice and discuss how students can support the campaign for Hannafords to join Milk with Dignity. This marks the official forming of the Middlebury Milk with Dignity Student Solidarity Network.

April 7, 2022: Andrés Oyaga writes an op-ed linking Middlebury's sustainability initiatives to greenwashing and systemic violence against immigrant farmworkers in Vermont.

<https://vtdigger.org/2022/04/07/andres-oyaga-middlebury-college-sustainability-initiatives-put-blood-in-our-energy/>

<https://andresoyaga.substack.com/p/blood-in-our-energy>

April - May 2022: Following the Op-Ed, staff and administrators at the College threaten legal action against Andrés; what follows is email confrontations/exchanges and mediation between Andrés and staff / administrators.