For two years in a row [I was a vender](http://joannfarb.weebly.com/blog/the-conscientious-omnivores-i-met-at-the-2015-kaw-valley-seed-fair) at the [Kaw Valley Seed Fair](https://www.facebook.com/kawvalleyseeds/), an event originally started by the Kansas Area Watershed Council (but they are no longer involved) and attended by over 1000 people each year.  It is an annual free February event at the Douglas County Fairgrounds that allows people to freely give and take a variety of seeds.  Several dozen vendors pay money to get a booth at this event, and when I first attempted to get a table to provide educational materials connecting food, health, sustainability and social justice for people, I was put on a waiting list, as no spaces were available, but once a space opened up and I was in, they told me that current vendors have first crack at spots the following year.

Unlike many of the booths there, my booth wasn't selling anything -- just giving away free vegan food samples, recipes, information and little packets of [kale seeds (click here to see photos)](http://weebly-file/6/2/1/2/62122903/img_4127.jpg)from my garden that I had packaged on paper hearts inscribed with inspiring quotes.   I LOVED the seed fair.  Even though I spent a week preparing for the event, the positive response that I got from so many there, made it feel very worth my time.  The food I provided was the only really healthy gluten-free vegan food at the fair, and many told me how important that was In making them feel welcome at this event.   My information, pamphlets, and newsletters were for some, their first exposure to the science showing  just [how powerful plant based diets can be](http://plantbasedresearch.org/research-articles-category) in preventing or [reversing diabetes](http://www.pbnsg.org/diabetes-education/2015/5/24/hope-for-diabetes), or [heart disease](http://montgomeryheart.com/programs-memberships/) and even [some cancers](http://ornishspectrum.com/proven-program/the-research/), providing an important balance to the dietary information I saw being offered at other booths -- which just merely [reinforced the status quo](http://www.pcrm.org/media/good-medicine) of eating from the old four food groups -- even though [that diet has been shown to enable progression of most chronic disease.](http://www.dresselstyn.com/news_info.htm)

There were of course those who read [my ﻿large banner﻿](http://weebly-file/6/2/1/2/62122903/seed_fair_banner.pdf) from a distance and carefully avoided approaching my table at all. Others, including vendors who were selling products of exploitation,  came up to me and made it clear that they were absolutely committed to killing and eating animals, and let me know that they found my message offensive and wished I was not there.  But these were a very small number of people.

For myself and many of the vegans who came to the fair thinking a seed fair would be about plants, the presence of venders there promoting local meat dairy and eggs was disturbing, but unfortunately something we are forced to endure frequently at public events.  This aspect of the seed fair is certainly not very welcoming for us.

But it never occurred to me that by simply promoting non-violence, environmental sustainability, and health, and responding to the questions people posed, I would find myself deliberately excluded from participating in this event.  The Seed Fair organizer's justification is that they want this to be a family friendly event and welcoming to everyone.  They believe that my behavior there was inconsistent with that.

What makes this all the more troubling to me, is that the people who made this decision to exclude me, are not some intolerant fundamentalists trying to exclude a pro-gay message, or prevent questioning whether G-d exists (The usual folks who invoke, "not family friendly" in order to restrict expression of ideas that they disagree with.)  These are people who probably share many progressive values with me like inclusiveness, nonviolence, tolerance for differing points-of-view, that it is an act of responsible citizenship to non-violently challenge injustice,  that it is wrong to cause unnecessary harm to animals, and that it is unjust to prohibit the free, honest respectful speech of others simply because it challenges ideas or traditions that they are very attached to.

So here is what happened, and I am naming names of the individuals involved, so that anyone who'd like to see something good come out of this is free to seek out their own information and come to their own conclusions.  I know one person who contacted Laura Green seeking more information was only told that this was confidential and it was a closed matter.  It is my opinion that members of the Seed Fair board, acted inappropriately based upon hearsay and personal bias to prevent my participation in a public event, I believe that Laura Green in particular behaved very unprofessionally and I would like to see her step down and for someone at least capable of having civil dialog take over the job she has been doing.   So here goes...

After what I believed to be an extraordinarily successful event last year, I was looking forward to tabling again.  When I did not receive an email asking if I would like to have a booth at the 2016 fair, I telephoned Laura Ann Green, who's name, and KU email address was listed on [public information pertaining to previous year's fairs](http://eventful.com/lawrence/events/kaw-valley-seed-fair-/E0-001-079504864-2)***. {Note – when I initially posted this link it advertised the Seed Fair and gave Laura Green as the contact and provided her KU email address, her telephone number at KU and her cell phone number. Apparently that page is no longer there, but someone told me that they did screen shot it first.}*** – but I was told that   I told her that I was interested in a booth, but had not gotten an email about it.  "That's because you were uninvited for this year" she told me.  Those words that she used really stuck with me.  The rest of our conversation went something like this:
     "What?....Why?" I asked
      "Because of the incident that happened last year."
       "What incident?" I asked again
       "The incident where you told a child that if they ate meat, they were murdering animals."  Laura replied matter- of -factly

Her words caught me totally off guard.  First off because "murdering," doesn't sound like a word I would have used in such an environment.  But I did not say that to Laura, instead I asked her a lot of questions and found out that someone claiming to have overheard my conversation with a child who visited my booth had made a complaint to the fair, and that the board governing the fair discussed this complaint, and on the basis of this hearsay evidence, and without ever even contacting me to find out if I had anything to say about this alleged "incident," made the decision to not allow me to table at the fair this year.  Despite my requesting that this decision be reconsidered as it was very unfair, Laura was adamant that her word on this was final and we said goodbye.  I then called Jessi Asmussen, co-owner of Mellowfeild's Urban Farm, a local organic farm here in Douglas County.   Jessi was the only other person I could think of whom I knew to be an organizer of the Kaw Valley Seed Fair.  Jessi essentially concurred with Laura, except to add that it was unfortunate that I had been canned, without someone letting me know directly before this year's invites went out. When I challenged her about the justness of having made a decision to kick me out based upon hearsay, and without even asking to hear what I might have to say, she told me simply that they work hard, are very busy and didn't  have time to look into this further.  Repeatedly she told me that this was a group decision of the six then board members.  The way she said this implied that because it was a group decision, that negated the fact the decision was based entirely on hearsay, on top of the fact that the justification was extremely frivolous.  When I continued to press her, Jessi who also admitted hearing about this from some unnamed third party had this to say:

     "JoAnn, what you said, made a child cry, and her mother, who was right there too, was obviously upset.  If you are saying things that are making children cry, then there is something very wrong with what you are saying."

My first thought when she said this was the many times that I have had children fall in love with something interesting on my table at public events (I often have realistic plastic animal figures on display.)   Several times children have tried to walk off with them and I have had to tell them, that those are mine and need to be left on the table. Some children have cried upon hearing this.  While I feel very strongly that I should always interact kindly, compassionately and responsibly with children, I disagree with Jessie that the mere fact that a child cries is justification that one has behaved inappropriately.  But another friend of mine, upon hearing my account of these conversations had this to say:

     " It is astounding to me how people hide behind a disingenuous “concern” for children to avoid the truth. What they are really afraid of is their children asking them questions they just don’t want to deal with or face. Children see the truth and they can handle it quite well.  Additionally astounding to me is how adults can abuse children ad infinitum with lies, without even blinking, but if another person offers their child the slightest inkling of truth, they rail against the “damage” we are dealing them. It is their own fragile psyche they are protecting, not their child's very fit one. "

And another friend shared [this article](http://freefromharm.org/animal-products-and-culture/ruby-roth-telling-children-truth/) about similar types of pushback experienced by the author of several very popular children's books including, "That's Why We Don't Eat Animals."  Fortunately the [Lawrence Public Library](https://lawrence.bibliocommons.com/search?t=title&q=thats+why+we+don%27t+eat+animals&search_destination=catalog) doesn't try to prohibit this message from children there.

As a result of my conversations with a third friend, she emailed Laura Green to request that I be reinstated.  The next morning, my first phone call of the day was a huge surprise.  It was from Laura.  She started off by requesting that I call off my friends and tell them to stop threatening her.    When I asked who had threatened her and what kind of threats were made, she gave me one name, but no specifics about threats.  (Knowing this person, I am sure they were very professional and polite.)   I again pleaded to Laura that she reconsider and allow me at the Fair, and that I thought her actions in this had been unjust.  Laura responded that the fair is just a private event, and I shouldn't make such a big deal out of it, and that I appreciate that she was just doing the best she could.  I told her that I was also just trying to do the best I could too.  Laura insisted that I stop talking to people about this situation, to which I responded that I thought what happened was wrong and I would talk to others and if they were troubled by what had happened and chose to speak up, that was their choice.    This prompted Laura to say one last thing to me after that. Actually,  she screamed it into the telephone so loudly that my husband and daughter who were both in the room, could hear exactly what she said, "IF YOU THREATEN ME, YOU'LL BE F\*\*\*ING Sorry!" and she hung up.

I think the idea of a seed fair is fabulous.  It is also the perfect forum to inform people about the many benefits both to individuals, and society as a whole, of plant based diets.  The idea of a public event to encourage everyone to save and share seeds, goes right to the heart of widely shared values about peace, justice, sustainability and health.  It is unfortunate that an event started by the Kansas Area Watershed Council, is now being mismanaged by a group of individuals, who seem oblivious to how their actions are furthering injustice in our community, and that they are unwilling to try to undo the harm that they have enabled to happen.

It is my hope that the current members of the seed fair board, will read my post here and then revisit this issue, and realize that they acted hastily and without full consideration of how unjust their actions in this situation were and allow me to table at this year's event.  This morning I also took my story to the media.  We'll see what happens.