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## **An Open Letter Call to End Sex Offender Tributes in JAFSCD**

**From:** Gayle M. Woodsum  
**Subject:** [COMFOOD] An Open Letter Call to End Sex Offender Tributes in JAFSCD  
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**To:** comfood@elist.tufts.edu

An Open Letter to Duncan Hilchey,  
Editor in Chief of the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development (JAFSCD)

It's my hope as I write this letter that by the time you receive and read it, it will turn out to be unnecessary. I'm writing with a call for you put a stop to your plans for publishing Hank Herrera tribute pieces in JAFSCD.

By now, you have no-doubt read or at least heard of the multiple letters of courageous and powerful testimony publicly revealing the truth of a lifetime of sexually predatory, abusive, and assaultive behavior committed by Hank Herrera. This is not something deserving of tribute. Neither is it something to be ignored or thought of as a sidebar that can be separated from the rest of Hank's life or what might seem to be contributions of value.

The fact is that for decades, Hank Herrera used the social change mission of the sustainable foods systems movement as a cover for a destructive lifestyle that victimized women, many of whom suffered deeply as a result — both personally and professionally. Most egregiously, Hank's actions robbed people of voice across a sector that continues to struggle against the ongoing challenges of racism, sexism, classism, and other social oppressions that threaten our ability to successfully effect real change.

Sexual harassment, abuse, and violence plague every aspect of society, including social change efforts created with the intention of enabling compassion, equity, and justice to lead the way. These crimes against the very core of an individual's sense of self, create a culture of silence not only among the victims of those who perpetrate them, but among all who ignore, deny, downplay, or dismiss it.

We as a people give limitless permission and power to sexual offenses by virtue of our inability or refusal to act against them with definitive and permanent response. Hank Herrera's ability to obtain and hold positions of power and respect even after being called out as a sex offender, after being reprimanded on job sites, and being removed from projects, grants and jobs of distinction because of irrefutable evidence of the abuses he committed repeatedly, point most assuredly to his well-honed ability to protect himself. As well, his ability to live as both a long-term sex offender and as someone given repeated and positive recognition as a social justice activist is not only absurd, but criminal in its own right — with the blame for this specific example of deeply rooted social injustice to be placed at the feet of a system designed to protect and excuse perpetrators by ignoring and enabling the horror visited on their victims.

Hank Herrera has died. He has not earned absolution by passing through this final life experience that comes to all of us. To seek, offer, and make public tributes to his work as if every bit of it was not informed by a pattern of consciously chosen despicable and criminal behavior against women — which none of us found a way to prevent in his lifetime — is to once again inform women that crimes against the core of their being are of little or no consequence to the world.

In these times of great challenge and extraordinary efforts being made against social injustice, we who are part of a vitally important movement to demand justice and equality throughout food systems work, have an opportunity to publicly acknowledge the deep danger and vast destruction present wherever sexual harassment, abuse, assault, and violence exist. The courage and strength of the women victimized by Hank Herrera who've been able to speak truth to the systems that protected their abuser, can be honored by an across-the-board refusal to give time, space, power, and tribute to a man who not only violated his individual victims, but violated the social justice efforts of us all.

Movements against sexual harassment and violence did not begin with Me Too. Since the 1970s cry to Take Back the Night, and before, women and others have spoken out, marched, organized, legislated, protested, and battled against the sexual abuse and violence that exists in every type of family, organization, and institutional structure there is.

Let us all now have the courage and wisdom of victims who become social justice activists. Let us act with conviction and justice on the devastating truth finally widely and publicly revealed about one of the countless sex offenders never stopped, never held fully accountable. We can begin by ending efforts to turn the death of Hank Herrera into permission to misrepresent the full truth of his work within the food justice movement. We can also use this lesson to take a next, much more important step in the direction of actively seeking out sexual offenses wherever they exist, and put an unflinching, permanent end to them.

With deep gratitude to those who speak out,

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