

## Say No To Lousy Food

Raised in Berkeley, California, Jose Bove returned to his native France in 1968 to study at Bordeaux University. In 1975, he became an organic farmer breeding sheep in the hills behind Montpellier, the region that produces Roquefort cheese. Since then, Bove has become a figurehead for anti-globalisation activists in France, and is famous enough to have lunched with Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and been embraced by President Jacques Chirac. Bove first political campaign was against the French government in the 1970s, when he and a few hundred other sheep farmers attempted to stop the Larzac region of France from becoming a military base.

After ten years of almost daily battles with the police, the group succeeded, and Larzac became a National Park. In 1987, Bove helped to set up the Confederation Paysanne (Peasant Confederation), with the aim of fighting for the rights of small farmers against agricultural barons. In 1997, Bove began mounting protests against crops altered by biotechnology and, in June 1999, destroyed 3,000 genetically modified rice plants at an international research lab in Montpellier. He and two other activists were tried in early 2001, and Bove was sentenced to a ten-month suspended prison term. The sentence, which was below the three-month prison term requested by the prosecution, does not seem to have phased Bove, the fight continues, no prison sentence or fine is going to prevent us from saying that genetically modified crops are dangerous. Bove already had first-hand experience of prison sentences when the Confederation Paysanne dismantled a branch of McDonalds (under construction in Millau) in August 1999. For this Bove spent three weeks in prison.

He and his lawyers insist that the police were informed ahead of time about the planned demonstration, and that the action was a symbolic, non-violent protest against multinational corporations. It was this demonstration that brought Bove to international attention, and the term malbouffe (lousy food), coined by Bove at the demonstration, came to imply a confused unease, a mixture of guilt and accusation. The destruction of the restaurant was a reaction to the 100 percent tax placed on French delicacies such as Roquefort by the US, after the French government objected to hormone-treated US beef.

At his trial in February 2001, thousands of costumed supporters paraded through the streets of Montpellier, turning the court case into a giant anti-globalisation festival. In March 2001, an Appeals Court upheld the three-month prison sentence given to Bove at the trial. He appeal against this but in February Bove was sentenced to six months in prison and a 50,000 French franc fine in Frances highest court, the Cour de Cassation. His sentence may still be appealed and is now with a lesser court that will rule as to how the sentence should be applied. Bove said he would take his case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In conversation in February 2002 he told Reuters,

I always considered myself not guilty because we acted out of a position of necessity. Im not afraid of anything, not even prison... We shall continue the struggle. Last year was a busy one for Bove. In his book, *The World Is Not For Sale: Farmers Against Junk Food* (Verso), co-written by Francois Dufour, Bove defends his actions against McDonalds,

Often illegal action is required to make a case. If the cause is fair, the public will support it. The level of support Bove has received in France suggests that the French public feel the cause is just: the left-wing daily *Libertarian* has described him as a peasant Robin Hood. Bove continues his appeal against his conviction, but as he told *Associate Press* he is not letting it interfere with his life Either I'm guilty and I go back to prison, or Im innocent.

In April 2002 Bove was arrested again this time by the Israeli authorities for visiting Yasser Arafat in his then beseiged headquarters in Ramallah. In June 2002 Boves prison sentence finally caught up with him and in his typically flamboyant style he drove to prison on a convoy of tractors. He served six weeks, but in January 2003 a group of scientists, actors and politicians who supported him destroyed another field of GM crops. Jose Bove is was then facing another 14 month jail sentence.

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### About the Author

Davinus Greeno works for the [organic food](#) and [ethical clothes](#) directory that lists 100s of Organic and Ethical Companies and we also have [Health Articles](#) for you to read or publish.