

# The Campaign for Fair Food

*Farmworkers and consumers advancing human rights and social responsibility*

The Campaign for Fair Food calls upon retail food corporations to end the poverty, forced labor and other human rights abuses faced by Florida farmworkers by establishing socially responsible purchasing practices. Led by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a human rights award-winning farmworker organization in Immokalee, FL, the Campaign for Fair Food is supported by religious, human rights, student and sustainable food organizations across the nation.



The Campaign for Fair Food has been successful in achieving landmark agreements between the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and some of the largest food corporations in the world: Yum! Brands (Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC and others), McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods Market, Bon Appétit, and food service providers Compass Group, Aramark, and Sodexo. These agreements are changing the very structure of the food system so that it ensures the well-being of the men and women who harvest.

Through the Campaign for Fair Food, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has joined with the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and many other faith bodies to work side-by-side with the CIW farmworkers toward a more sustainable and just food system. The Presbyterian Hunger Program fosters Presbyterian participation in the Campaign across the nation.

**Conditions in the Fields** According to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida supplies over 90 percent of the tomatoes consumed by Americans from October to May. However, according to the US Department of Labor, most farmworkers today earn less than \$12,000 a year. Like textile workers at the turn of the last century, Florida tomato harvesters are still paid by the piece. The average piece rate today is 50 cents for every 32-lbs of tomatoes they pick, a rate that has remained virtually unchanged since 1980. As a result of that stagnation, a worker today must pick more than 2.25 tons of tomatoes to earn minimum wage in a typical 10-hour workday -- nearly *twice* the amount a worker had to pick to earn minimum wage thirty years ago, when the rate was 40 cents per bucket.

Tomato pickers harvesting in Florida, toil long days in pesticide laden fields with no right to overtime pay, no health insurance, no sick leave, no paid vacation, and no right to organize to improve these conditions. In the most extreme cases, workers are held against their will and forced to work through violence or threat of violence, in modern-day slavery rings. The CIW has worked with the US Department of Justice and FBI to successfully investigate and prosecute 7 cases of slavery in recent years, freeing more than 1,000 slaves. These cases have been prosecuted using laws put on the books following reconstruction or under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act passed in 2000. The conditions in the fields are appalling and systemic. But through the CIW's Fair Food agreements we are seeing, as one US Senator stated, "the beginning of the end of this harvest of shame."

**Campaigns and Historic Agreements** The Campaign for Fair Food was initiated in April 2001 when the CIW called for a nationwide consumer boycott of Taco Bell restaurants and products. Presbyterians and other people of faith had long offered food and clothing to the farmworkers in Immokalee. Through this experience people of faith were led to ask "why is it that farmworkers work 10-12 hours a day, sometimes 7 days a week and still cannot support their own families?" It was this fundamental question of human dignity that prompted the Presbytery of Tampa Bay to overture the 214th General Assembly in support of the Taco Bell boycott. After prayer and study, the General Assembly voted affirmatively to support the boycott in June 2002. Over the next three years Presbyterians joined Methodists, Catholics, Episcopalians, Baptists and many other people of faith in observing the boycott, writing letters, engaging in public protest, and supporting the CIW on "truth tours" where workers traveled cross-country to educate consumers about the exploitative conditions that lay behind the food we consume. The PC(USA) played a unique role in convening talks between the CIW and Yum! Brands which helped lead to the

farmworkers' historic agreement with Yum! Brands/Taco Bell in 2005. In June of 2006, the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly passed a resolution affirming the church's ongoing work with the CIW and the Campaign for Fair Food in light of the confessional heritage of the PC(USA) <https://pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=1139>.

The Campaign for Fair Food then focused on reaching similar agreements with the largest fast-food corporations in the world. Together with other people and institutions of faith and conscience, the PC(USA) played an active role in engaging corporations through letter-writing, public witness, hosting educational programs, prayer, and conversation. This engagement has helped the **CIW achieve agreements with McDonald's, Burger King, and Subway in the fast-food industry, as well as Whole Foods Market in the grocery industry, Bon Appétit and three of the nation's largest food service providers: Compass Group, Aramark and Sodexo.** These historic agreements commit these major food corporations to work with the CIW to: (a) pay farmworkers an extra net penny per pound for tomatoes harvested for their company, (b) establish an enforceable code of conduct for their grower/suppliers with a zero-tolerance policy for modern-day slavery, and (c) ensure the full participation of farmworkers in the creation and monitoring of these agreements.

**In November 2010, the CIW reached a fair food agreement with the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, which represents over 90 percent of the growers in the Florida tomato industry.** Florida growers are now working with the CIW to uphold fair food principles within their fields. Righting wrongs won't be accomplished overnight. But change is now underway due to the growing partnership for fair food among farmworkers, consumers, growers and willing corporations.

***How the Fair Food Agreements Address Modern-Day Slavery in the Fields*** Modern-day slavery doesn't occur in a vacuum; it flourishes in degraded work environments with poverty wages and few rights. The high-volume, low-cost purchasing practices of giant corporate buyers drive growers to hold down costs wherever they can which has resulted in stagnant, poverty wages for 30 years and, in the worst instances, modern-day slavery. Oxfam America wrote in a 2004 study, *Like Machines in the Fields*, "Squeezed by the buyers of their produce, growers pass on the costs and risks imposed on them to those on the lowest rung of the supply chain: the farmworkers they employ" (page 36). The agreements between the CIW and food corporations include a zero-tolerance policy for slavery in their supply chains. How does this work? In 2008 when crew-leaders working for two Florida growers were sentenced in federal court for enslaving farmworkers, including locking tomato pickers in a cargo truck, chaining them to posts, and forcing them to work in the fields, companies that had fair food agreements with CIW were legally obligated to suspend purchases from involved growers. This is the first time in history that such market power has been used to address the enslavement of workers in the US agricultural industry. Further, the agreements address the poverty and abuses that allow slavery to flourish by enforcing the code of conduct for fair working conditions, the penny per pound wage increase, and by driving purchasing to growers who meet higher standards for workers. The 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly committed the church to coordinated work against modern-day slavery, including in the agricultural industry. The CIW is a partner with the PC(USA) in educating and working to eradicate this grave human rights violation.

**Next Steps** Aside from Whole Foods Market, the supermarket industry has been slow to adopt the higher standards widely accepted by the fast-food and food service industries and supported by Florida growers. **The Campaign is urging Kroger, Ahold, Publix and Trader Joe's corporations to work with the CIW** to improve farmworker wages by paying an additional net penny per pound to workers and to address human rights abuses by adopting and enforcing the fair food code of conduct.

## ***What you can do***

- ◆ **Pray** for the farmworkers, major tomato buyers in restaurant, grocery, and foodservice, the growers, and the work of the Campaign for Fair Food and **learn more** about the PC(USA)'s participation in the Campaign for Fair Food at [www.pcusa.org/fairfood](http://www.pcusa.org/fairfood) or contact The Rev. Noelle Damico at [noelle.damico@pcusa.org](mailto:noelle.damico@pcusa.org) or 631-371-9877.
- ◆ **Send postcards to the CEOs of Publix, Kroger** (Dillon's, Ralphs and many others), **and Ahold** (Stop & Shop, Giant, Martin's and Peapod) grocery chains, and **drop off manager's letters to local grocery stores** calling on them to work with the CIW. Visit <http://www.pcusa.org/fairfood/action.htm> to order postcards or download manger's letters.
- ◆ Join the **CIW's peaceful, public actions in Boston** (Ahold) on the afternoon of **2/27/11** and **Tampa** (Publix) on **3/5/11**. Details at [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org) .

