

## Coalition of Immokalee Workers & Yum Brands Reach Historic Agreement for Human Rights



Jonathan Blum, Sr. VP of Yum Brands  
and Lucas Benitez, CIW on 3/8/05

In Hebrews 11:1 we read “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and Taco Bell Corporation reached an historic agreement that concretely addresses the sub-poverty wages and working conditions of farmworkers and is the first step toward moving the fast food industry toward a new way of doing business that respects human rights. Upon reaching this agreement, the farmworkers called for an end to the Taco Bell boycott

that they had initiated almost four years earlier.

Back in 2001 many people doubted that the CIW, whose members were among most impoverished workers in America, who spoke little English, had no political clout and few legal rights would be able to change the way the fast-food industry does business. Some people scoffed when they learned the workers had called for a boycott of Taco Bell saying that there was no way that farmworkers with so little power could successfully confront Taco Bell and its parent company Yum Brands, and convince the largest fast-food company in the world to take a leadership role in ending farmworker exploitation in its supply chain. But the CIW was certain that change was not only necessary, it was possible, and they could, despite all the odds, bring it about. Early support for the workers and the boycott came from people of faith who, with the farmworkers, were ready to work with hope and conviction for that which was not yet seen.

Local Presbyterians in the Peace River and Tampa Bay presbyteries accompanied the workers on strikes, marches, and hunger-strikes that drew attention to the sweatshop conditions in the fields. In June of 2002 the 214<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted to support the boycott. In the ensuing years thousands of Presbyterians across the country upheld the boycott and wrote letters, prayed, protested and supported the CIW and its work. The PC(USA) played a critical role in convening talks between Yum Brands and the CIW in 2003 and 2004 that paved the way for their landmark agreement. Yum Brands and the CIW invited the PC(USA) to participate in the press conference announcing the agreement and also asked the PC(USA) to host the victory rally on March 12<sup>th</sup> at the Presbyterian Church’s National Headquarters in downtown Louisville.

In this historic agreement made by the CIW and Yum Brands, Taco Bell has agreed to all the workers’ demands. Taco Bell will pay a penny-a-pound more per

tomatoes and require its Florida suppliers to pass the increase along to the workers. This increase will be retroactive to January 1, 2005 and will almost double workers wages, increasing their earnings from 40-45 cents per 32 pound bucket to 72-77 cents per bucket. Yum Brands has modified its code of conduct to ensure labor rights, monitoring, a grievance procedure, and a preferred purchasing program that both requires and incents growers to respect the human rights of their workers. Yum Brands will dialogue with its suppliers and the CIW in an ongoing manner. In addition, Yum Brands agreed to fund a lobbyist to work with the CIW to change labor laws to include farmworkers as they do workers in other industries. And, significantly, Yum Brands has agreed to work with the CIW to spread this new model of socially responsible purchasing throughout the fast-food industry.

The agreement between CIW and Yum Brands has laid the cornerstone for socially responsible purchasing in the fast-food industry. But it is only the first step. As Stated Clerk, Clifton Kirkpatrick, called for Presbyterians to cease boycotting Taco Bell at the March 8<sup>th</sup> Press Conference he said, “The hard-working men and women of Immokalee have long deserved the concrete improvement in wages and working conditions this agreement assures. But the significance of this agreement is in the promise it holds for transforming the entire fast-food industry and the responsibility it confers on each one of us as consumers to walk with CIW and Yum Brands into this future. Together we must ensure that this momentous first step charts a sure and clear path for other major buyers to follow.”

### What You Can Do:

- Write to Yum Brands and commend the company for leading the fast-food industry by example with this agreement. Write to CIW and commend them for leading a principled boycott campaign that has paved the way for this historic change. Sample letters with contact information are available on [www.pcusa.org/fairfood](http://www.pcusa.org/fairfood).
- Write to the CEOs of McDonald’s, Subway, and Burger King asking them to meet with the CIW and commit incorporating principles of the Taco Bell agreement in their own supply chains. Background and sample letters are available on [www.pcusa.org/fairfood](http://www.pcusa.org/fairfood).
- Pray for human rights to be respected throughout the corporate food industry.
- Join the PC(USA)’s low-traffic Fair Food Listserv for the latest developments in the Campaign for Fair Food on [www.pcusa.org/fairfood](http://www.pcusa.org/fairfood).

### A Prayer of Thanksgiving and Recommitment

God who labors and rests, we give thanks for this historic agreement between CIW and Yum Brands. We have seen faith-made-visible through this struggle and we are tasting its first fruits in this victory for human rights. Help us to spread this new model throughout the fast-food industry. We remember those workers who still labor, exploited and enslaved. May our church be an effective witness for good work, fair pay, and human dignity. Help us to be faithful to your gospel that is “good news” to the poor and promises liberation for us all. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

*Photo by Evan Silverstein, Presbyterian New Service*