

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

Campaign for Fair Food



The Campaign for Fair Food is an ongoing effort of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in partnership with farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), to establish purchasing practices within the retail food industry that ensure and advance fair wages and other human rights of tomato pickers who labor at the base of these corporate supply chains.

The premises of the Campaign for Fair Food are that:

- ◆ Retail food corporations have a responsibility to improve the wages of farmworkers because their procurement practices have helped to suppress those wages at a sub-poverty level.
- ◆ Farmworkers must be full partners with retail food corporations -- and the growers that supply them -- in protecting and advancing their own rights, as a matter of human dignity and effectiveness in changing the conditions in the fields.
- ◆ Consumers have a responsibility to influence retail food corporations to ensure the human rights and dignity of the men and women harvesting produce through purchasing decisions, shareholder actions and shared public witness.

These premises grow out of the Presbyterian Church's teaching, policy and engaged work on these matters with the CIW, ecumenical and interfaith religious bodies, human rights, student and labor organizations. This partnership work has been formalized through the General Assembly Council's September 2005 vote that the PC(USA) become a founding member of the Alliance for Fair Food, the network of human rights, religious, labor, student, and grassroots organizations that work cooperatively with the CIW to advance farmworkers' human rights by advocating for socially responsible purchasing within the retail food industry. See www.allianceforfairfood.org for additional information. In June of 2006, the 217th 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) <http://pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=1139>. The 218th General Assembly committed the church to coordinated work against modern-day slavery, including that in the agricultural industry. The CIW is a partner with the PC(USA) in educating congregations and middle governing bodies on this grave human rights violation.

A Brief History

Tomato pickers harvesting in Florida toil long days for 45 cents per 32-lb bucket of tomatoes, 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 in modern-day slavery rings. The CIW has worked with the US Department of Justice and FBI to successfully investigate and successfully prosecute 7 cases of slavery in recent years, freeing more than 1,000 slaves.

The Campaign for Fair Food was initiated in April 2001 when the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), Florida farmworkers harvesting tomatoes for suppliers of retail food corporations, called for a nation-wide consumer boycott of Taco Bell restaurants and products. After prayer and study, the 214th General Assembly of the PC(USA) voted to support this boycott in June 2002. Over the next three years congregations, middle governing bodies and national staff observed the boycott, wrote letters, engaged in public protest, facilitated dialogue between Yum! Brands and the CIW, and supported the CIW on "truth tours" where workers traveled cross-country to educate consumers about the exploitative conditions that lay behind the fast-food we consume.

In 2005, the CIW forged an historic agreement with Yum! Brands/Taco Bell. In March of 2005 the CIW and Yum! Brands, parent company of Taco Bell, resolved the 4-year boycott with a ground-breaking agreement. The historic agreement commits Yum! Brands to work with the CIW to: (a) pay farmworkers an extra penny per pound for tomatoes Taco Bell purchases, (b) establish a human-rights based code of conduct for 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

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agreements. *The CIW has since forged agreements with McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods Market, and Bon Appétit.* The CIW's agreement with Yum! Brands became the model for the CIW's agreements with these other major corporate buyers. The PC(USA) played an active role in helping the farmworkers achieve these unprecedented agreements through letter-writing, public witness, hosting educational programs, prayer, and engagement by the Office of the Stated Clerk and the PC(USA) Campaign for Fair Food. The CIW's focus has now turned toward the grocery and food service industries.

Addressing 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 insist that the corporations use their power to enforce a zero-tolerance policy for slavery in their supply chains. How does this work? In December 2008, as crewleaders 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 two Florida growers, Six L's and Pacific Tomato. The companies that have agreements with CIW either immediately cut their contracts with these suppliers or are moving toward that end. This is the first time in history that such market power has been arrayed to put an end to 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 and the penny per pound wage increase. In this way the agreements address particular instances of slavery as well as re-direct the market forces toward the elimination of the soil in which modern-day slavery flourishes.

Implementation of the Agreements and Next Steps For two years, 2005-2007, the penny-per-pound increase flowed to farmworkers harvesting for Taco Bell. But as the McDonald's agreement was being implemented in fall of 2007, the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, the grower lobby, effectively prohibited their members from participating through fines and surcharges. Consequently, the penny-per-pound payments to workers have been suspended and the money paid by Yum, McDonald's, Burger King, Whole Foods Market, and Subway is currently being held in escrow until the growers are able to pass it on to the farmworkers again. Florida Governor, Charlie Crist, met with the CIW at the end of March 2009 and publicly committed himself to the Campaign for Fair Food, calling on the FTGE to also participate in the campaign so that the promised monies can reach farmworkers. In June 2009 Alderman Farms and Lady Moon Farms, two of Florida's largest organic growers that supply Whole Foods Market, agreed to pass on the penny-per-pound wage increase to farmworkers and meet strict labor standards. And in September 2009, one of the largest Florida Growers, East Coast Growers and Packers, has agreed to work with the CIW and food industry leaders to implement the CIW'S Fair Food agreements, including the penny-per-pound raise to harvesters, supply chain transparency, and a stringent code of conduct. This step forward effectively breaks the stalemate established two seasons ago by the FTGE. But your help is needed: to move *all* tomato growers we need the grocery industry to work with CIW and require their suppliers to improve workers wages and working conditions.

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.
- ◆ **Send postcards and emails, and drop off manager's letters to Publix, Kroger (Dillon's, Ralphs and 30 others), and Ahold (Stop 'n Shop and Giant) grocery chains**, calling on them to work with the CIW to elevate human rights for Florida tomato pickers. Visit www.pcusa.org/takeaction for resources.
- ◆ **Visit www.pcusa.org/fairfood** for the latest news, educational, worship, and action resources to inform and animate your congregation, and join the low traffic, fairfood listserv. Contact the Rev. Noelle Damico, PC(USA) Campaign for Fair Food noelle.damico@pcusa.org 631-751-7076 for further resources and to share your ideas.
- ◆ **Students; support the *Dine With Dignity Campaign*** launched by Student Farmworker Alliance, calling on campus foodservice providers, Aramark, Sodexo and Compass, to work with the CIW to improve farmworker wages and working conditions as other major food companies have already done. Visit www.sfalliance.org



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