

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 (such as the right to overtime and the right to organize), 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. Further, 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). See <http://les-pcusa.org/Business/Business.aspx?iid=388>.

A Brief History

Tomato pickers 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 prosecute 5 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.

www.pcusa.org/fairfood

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 pay farmworkers an extra penny per pound for tomatoes Taco Bell purchases, to work with the CIW on its code of conduct so that farmworker participation in the protection of their own rights is ensured, and to guarantee transparency in its tomato supply chain. For a more detailed history please visit www.pcusa.org/fairfood. The next step in the Campaign for Fair Food was to advance the precedents we'd achieved together throughout the retail food industry, turning first to McDonald's.

From March 2005 – April 2007, the farmworkers of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and allies in the faith, student and human rights communities called upon McDonald's to follow Yum! Brands' lead and work with the CIW to address sub-poverty wages and exploitative working conditions in McDonald's tomato supply chain. Though McDonald's initially resisted change, the CIW and its allies were able to effectively demonstrate poverty wages and serious human rights abuses. Faced with a potential boycott, McDonald's sought out CIW just days before the farmworkers' 2007 McDonald's Truth Tour was about to leave Immokalee. On April 9th, 2007, the CIW and McDonald's announced that they had reached an agreement. The agreement is founded on the principles established in the Yum! Brands agreement but goes a step farther. McDonald's and CIW will work together to create a third-party entity to monitor conditions in the fields. This is a watershed moment because the creation of such an entity provides a mechanism that can be used by the entire fast-food industry in partnership with the farmworkers to address human rights abuses in the fields. The CIW-McDonald's agreement lays the cornerstone for industry-wide change in fast-food and agriculture. In May 2007, Yum! Brands accelerated momentum for change by extending the Taco Bell-CIW agreement across *all* its brands: KFC, Pizza Hut, Long John Silver's, A&W Restaurants and, of course, Taco Bell.

The Burger King Campaign

The CIW and the PC(USA) began reaching out to Burger King in March of 2005, inviting the company to work with CIW as Taco Bell had done. Burger King and the CIW had periodic dialogue over almost two years. Then in February 2007, Burger King abruptly announced that it would not work with the CIW to end poverty wages and human rights abuses. Instead it said it would send Burger King recruiters to Immokalee and explore contributing to Immokalee -based charities to "improve farmworkers' lives." The CIW, the PC(USA) as well as allies in the Alliance for Fair Food decried Burger King's announcement. Following McDonald's decision to work with the CIW in April 2007, the CIW and its allies again reached out to Burger King encouraging the company to change course. But Burger King has stood shoulder to shoulder with the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, the growers' lobby, which has threatened to fine any of its grower-members who participate in the penny-per-pound agreements with Yum and McDonald's. The agreements with McDonald's and Yum are still in effect, and the companies are working with their suppliers to find a way to get the penny to the workers. Don't let Burger King and the FTGE roll-back the human rights gains which farmworkers deserve and which we've worked so hard to gain. Take action!

What you can do

- ◆ Pray for the farmworkers, Burger King, and the work of the Campaign for Fair Food. Give thanks for the ground-breaking agreements between CIW, McDonald's and Taco Bell/Yum!.
- ◆ Drop off "manager's letters" at your local BK restaurant <http://pcusa.org/fairfood/action.htm>
- ◆ Send postcards to Burger King calling on the company to work with the CIW to improve wages and advance real rights for farmworkers in their supply chains. Postcards are available from the CIW by writing workers@ciw-online.org or calling 239-657-8311.
- ◆ Use the educational, worship, and preaching resources to inform and animate your congregation, and join the low traffic, fairfood listserv at www.pcusa.org/fairfood for the latest updates. Contact the Rev. Noelle Damico, PC(USA) Associate for Fair Food, noelle.damico@pcusa.org 631-751-7076 for further resources and to share your ideas.

www.pcusa.org/fairfood