

Dear Publix Manager,

As a Publix customer, I am writing to urge Publix to work with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), an internationally recognized farmworker organization, to address the sub-poverty wages and abuses faced by the farmworkers who pick your tomatoes.

The human rights crisis in Florida's fields is urgent. Tomato pickers earn 40-50 cents for every 32-lb bucket of tomatoes—a rate that hasn't risen significantly since 1978. A worker must pick nearly 2.5 TONS of tomatoes just to earn minimum wage for a typical 10-hour day. Farmworkers' grinding poverty leaves them vulnerable to the most exploitative employers, often resulting in appalling labor rights abuses, up to and including modern-day slavery. Indeed, there have been seven federal slavery prosecutions in Florida's fields in the past dozen years alone.



Last December, two farm employers were sentenced to 12 years each in federal prison on charges of conspiracy, holding workers in involuntary servitude and peonage. As stated in the U.S. Department of Justice press release on the farm bosses' conviction, they "*pled guilty to beating, threatening, restraining, and locking workers in trucks to force them to work as agricultural laborers. They were accused of paying the workers minimal wages and driving the workers into debt, while simultaneously threatening physical harm if the workers left their employment before their debts had been repaid.*" The Fort Myers News-Press reported on March 12, 2009 that "[t]he bosses took their captive crews to work on farms owned by some of the state's major tomato producers: Immokalee-based Six L's and Pacific Tomato Growers in Palmetto." As a purchaser of tomatoes from both Six L's and Pacific, it is especially imperative that Publix work with the CIW to ensure that farmworkers are never again held against their will, beaten, and deprived of their pay.

There is a clear path toward ensuring fair wages and conditions for those who pick Publix's tomatoes. Yum Brands, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Bon Appetit, and Whole Foods are all working with the CIW to directly improve the wages and conditions in their tomato supply chains. I am extremely disappointed to see that Publix has instead responded by turning a blind eye to abuses, saying that "we respectfully decline the opportunity to participate in this program."

I urge Publix to ensure fair wages and dignity for the farmworkers who pick its tomatoes by working with the CIW to:

- Pay an additional penny per pound for tomatoes purchased to directly increase the wages of tomato pickers;
- Implement an enforceable code of conduct to ensure safe and fair working conditions for farmworkers, including zero tolerance for modern-day slavery;
- Ensure a voice for farmworkers in monitoring improvements and reporting abuses.

As a Publix customer, I look forward to Publix living up to its reputation as a good neighbor by partnering with the CIW to end the human rights crisis in our backyard.

Thank you,