

## Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Yum Brands Reach Historic Agreement for Human Rights *Taco Bell Boycott is Over; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Commended for Its Role*



**Jonathan Blum, Yum Brands (left) and Lucas Benitez, CIW on 3/8/05, photo by Evan Silverstein.**

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.

The PC(USA) has been at the heart of this struggle for fair food and human rights since the very beginning. In the 1990s, local Presbyterians in the Peace River and Tampa Bay presbyteries accompanied the CIW on strikes, marches, and hunger-strikes that drew attention to the sweatshop conditions in the fields. Responding to an overture from the Tampa Bay Presbytery, in June of 2002 the 214<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted to support the boycott. The Presbyterian Hunger Program was assigned implementation responsibilities and hired the Rev. Noelle Damico, a United Church of Christ minister, as the half-time National Coordinator of the Taco Bell boycott for the PC(USA). 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. Because of the role the PC(USA) had played, 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 also set several important precedents, establishing (a) the first-ever direct, ongoing payment by a fast-food industry leader to farmworkers in its supply chain to address sub-standard farm labor wages (nearly doubling the percent of the final retail price that goes to the workers who pick the produce); (b) The first-ever enforceable Code of Conduct for agricultural suppliers in the fast-food industry (including the naming of the CIW, a worker-based organization, as an investigative body for monitoring worker complaints); (c) Market incentives for agricultural suppliers willing to respect their workers' rights, even when those rights are not guaranteed by law; (d) 100% transparency for Taco Bell's tomato purchases in Florida (the agreement commits Taco Bell to buy only from Florida growers who agree to the pass-through and to document and monitor the pass-through, providing complete records of Taco Bell's Florida tomato purchases and growers' wage records to the CIW)..

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."

The victory in the Taco Bell Boycott established several key new principles that, taken together, represent a significant step toward social responsibility in the fast-food industry. But Taco Bell is only one major buyer among many, and the impact of its commitment to those new principles will fall only on those workers who pick tomatoes for Taco Bell. You can help hasten the day when all Florida farmworkers enjoy the same fundamental rights to a decent wage and fair working conditions. Write to **McDonald's**, **Burger King**, and **Subway** and urge them to commit their companies and their market power to making real the principles established in the CIW-Taco Bell agreement. Sample letters and background are available on [www.pcusa.org/fairfood](http://www.pcusa.org/fairfood). Together we have made history. Together, let's make the future.

### **A Prayer of Thanksgiving and Recommitment**

God who labors and rests, we give thanks for this historic agreement between CIW and Yum Brands. We give thanks for the church's role bringing our world closer to your vision of *shalom*. We have seen faith-made-visible through this struggle and we are tasting its first fruits in this victory for human rights. We ask that you would strengthen us, the workers, and Yum Brands as we spread this model throughout the fast-food industry. We remember those workers who still labor, exploited and enslaved. May your 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.

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