

Frequently Asked Questions

Has Gov. Crist been contacted before?

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) requested a meeting with Gov. Crist in September 2007 through his scheduler but were rebuffed. So a delegation of workers from Immokalee traveled 8 hours to Tallahassee to request a meeting in person. Though the governor was in his office, he refused to meet with the CIW delegation and an aide was sent to the receptionist's area to tell the workers that if they wanted to meet with the governor, they should request a meeting...through his scheduler (which they had attempted to do unsuccessfully). The CIW left a copy of "Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor and the Dark Side of the Global Economy," by John Bowe. This new book about modern-day slavery highlights the investigation and prosecution of a violent slavery operation in Lake Placid, Florida. The aide received the book and the CIW delegation expressed their interest in working with Gov. Crist to eradicate slavery in Florida and their hope that, after reading the book, Gov. Crist might become more interested. Unfortunately, there has been no response from Gov. Crist.

In December 2008, just prior to the sentencing of the seventh modern-day slavery case in Florida agriculture, a Ft. Myers News-Press reporter contacted Gov. Crist for comments and was referred to a spokesperson for the Dept. of Agriculture who stated "Of course, I say any instance is too many, and any legitimate grower certainly does not engage in that activity (slavery) but you're talking about maybe a case a year." Following this, many human rights and religious organizations contacted Gov. Crist to ask him to clarify that "a case a year" of slavery—adding up to well over 1,000 workers freed since 1997-- is of concern to Florida's government. Gov. Crist has made no public response to date.

What do the CIW's agreements with large tomato purchasers entail?

Yum! Brands (Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC and others in 2005), McDonald's (2007), Burger King (2008), Subway (2008) and Whole Foods Market (2008) have all reached agreements with the CIW to:

1. Pay at least a penny more per pound of tomatoes they purchase to directly improve farmworkers' wages, resulting in a 70% wage increase for tomatoes they purchase.
2. Implement an enforceable, human rights based code of conduct to improve conditions in the fields, including zero tolerance for slavery.
3. Guarantee a voice for farmworkers in monitoring and verifying improvements and work together toward an industry-wide third-party monitoring system.

The CIW and the Alliance for Fair Food have also called upon other large tomato purchasers in the supermarket and food service industries to do the same.

How do these agreements address 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 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 2003 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 as well as address the poverty and abuses that allow slavery to flourish by enforcing the code of conduct for fair 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 slavery.

Have the agreements been implemented?

Beginning in 2005, farmworkers harvesting for Taco Bell began receiving a check from Yum! Brands for the additional penny-per-pound of tomatoes harvested. For two seasons, workers received two checks at pay time, one from their employer and a second from Taco Bell for the penny per pound increase. The other Yum! companies (Pizza Hut, KFC, Long John Silvers, and A&W Restaurants), were due to initiate the penny-per-pound payment to farmworkers in the fall of 2007 as a result of a voluntary agreement by Yum Brands. The McDonald's penny per pound payments were also due to begin with the fall 2007

picking season. Abuses have also been addressed through the code of conduct. For instance, when a tomato picker was beaten at a company that supplied to Yum Brands, the supplier corrected this violation by removing the supervisor who had beaten the farmworker. However, in fall 2007, the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange stepped in to halt the penny-per-pound increase from going to the farmworkers.

What is the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange (FTGE)?

The Florida Tomato Growers Exchange is an agricultural cooperative of Florida tomato growers. It was first established in 1989 and gave member growers the ability to discuss pricing together and establish “floor” pricing and “trigger” pricing. The FTGE also provides public relations services on behalf of the tomato growers of Florida.

The business practices of Florida tomato growers are regulated by two key pieces of legislation: the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 and the Agriculture Marketing Agreement Act of 1934. The Capper-Volstead Act allowed agricultural producers to form voluntary cooperative associations for production, handling and marketing of their crops. In this way these cooperatives are exempt from antitrust laws. The Florida Tomato Committee (FTC) is a Federal Marketing Order granted the authority to self-govern and impose certain quality specifications on its growers and handlers. This authority does not extend to the power to lobby or gain influence with politicians. To do this other organizations were also created, including the Florida Tomato Exchange, Florida Tomato Growers Exchange and Florida Farmers Inc. Together, these organizations regulate tomato production standards in the state for all growers, as well as manage the public relations and political interests for Florida tomato growers, including lobbying. The FTC and the FTGE share the same business address and phone number, but are distinct legal entities.

What has the FTGE done?

In November 2007, the Miami Herald revealed that the FTGE had imposed a \$100,000 fine—per payroll period—upon any of its members who participated in the Yum or McDonald’s agreements. 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. Since the CIW’s agreement with Burger King in May 2008, industry sources say that the fine has been replaced by a prohibitive surcharge to be paid to the FTGE for any member-growers who would sell tomatoes under the agreements.

What do I do with the sign-on letter?

Once you have collected signatures, please send a copy to:

Interfaith Action of SW FL
PO Box 509
Immokalee, FL 34143
Or fax it to 239-657-5055

You can send the original directly to:

Office of Governor Crist
State of Florida
PL-05 The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

If you do not have access to a copy machine, please send the original to Interfaith Action.

For additional information, please visit www.ciw-online.org, www.interfaithact.org, or www.pcusa.org/fairfood