

Creating Fair Food Together

High School Curriculum

Supplies

- PBS Now Documentary (available from info@interfaithact.org)
- photo of farmworkers' hands
- bucket or container without handles, filled with 32 lbs. of rice or beans
- CIW supermarket postcard
- CIW manager letter
- paper for drawing
- colored pencils, markers or paint

Lesson

Sweatshop Visioning Exercise [2 minutes]

- How many of you know what a sweatshop is? What kinds of things are made in sweatshops? [**Clothes, shoes, basketballs etc.**]
- What are some conditions you might find in sweatshops? [**Low wages, dirty, no breaks, dangerous, etc.**]
- Where do you find sweatshops? [**China, El Salvador, Guatemala, etc.**]

If the U.S. is absent from students' answers, ask students: Do you think it's possible for sweatshops to exist in the United States? Why or why not?

We are going to watch a video now. Pay attention to see if you can identify any of the same conditions that we just associated with the sweatshops with what you see in the video.

PBS Now Documentary (May 2005) [20 minutes]

After watching the video, discuss. Reflect on what you saw in the video. What sweatshop conditions that we discussed earlier apply to tomato pickers in the Florida fields?

When was the last time farmworkers had a wage increase? [**Wages have been virtually stagnant for the last 30 years**]. Did food and clothing cost the same in 1978 as they cost today? [**No, today they cost much more; discuss inflation.**] What does this mean for farmworkers? [**Each year that they earn the same, their purchasing power actually goes down, meaning that they can afford less and less because the cost of living increases while their wages don't.**]

They must pick 2 and 1/4 tons of tomatoes to earn minimum wage for a typical 10-hr day and that is not always possible. How many pounds is this? [**4,500.**] What weighs 4,500 pounds? To do this, they'd have to pick, fill, haul, and empty a bucket every four minutes. Do you think this is fair?

What do farmworkers earn per bucket? [**50 cents.**] Could you support a family on 50 cents per bucket? How much of a raise are they asking for? [**One more penny per pound of tomatoes.**] What will this make their pay per bucket? [**1 penny per pound in a 32-lb bucket= 32 cents more + current 50 cents= 82 cents. That is a 64% wage increase.**]

Since this documentary was made, eight other food companies have made agreements with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. What are Taco Bell and these other companies working with the CIW to do? [**Pay a penny per pound increase to farmworkers and establish a code of conduct to improve working conditions.**] What companies do you think these are? [**McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods, Bon Appetit, Compass Group, Aramark, and Sodexo (these last four provide food at universities, convention centers, etc.)**]

Bucket Exercise [5 minutes]

We saw farmworkers in the video lifting and throwing buckets full of tomatoes. Who remembers how much they weigh? **[32 lbs per bucket.]** Now let's get a better sense of what 32 pounds is like. (Fill a bucket with 32 pounds of rice or other item. Invite the students to lift the bucket.)

Reflection: How did that feel? Imagine bending over to pick 32 pounds worth of tomatoes, carrying the bucket 100 ft. to the edge of the row, and then hoisting it on your shoulders to throw it up to someone in the truck. Imagine having to do it over and over again in the hot Florida sun. Would you like to do this for just 50 cents each time?

Modern-Day Slavery [15 minutes]

The documentary gives a snapshot into the conditions Florida farmworkers face in the tomato fields and how farmworkers and consumers are changing these conditions by holding corporations accountable for how the food they sell is produced. But there is more to the story.

There are not only farmworkers who are exploited and do not earn enough money to support themselves and their families there are some farmworkers who are enslaved. These are men and women who are held against their will and forced to labor for little or no pay.

Modern-day slavery doesn't happen in a vacuum. It occurs in workplaces where people face poor working conditions and they lack the rights and power to change these conditions. So slavery in the fields is the extreme point on a continuum whose other end is the poverty wages and poor conditions faced by exploited workers in the fields. *[You may wish to draw a line. On one end write "Poor Wages. No Rights." On the other end write "Modern Day Slavery."]*

Invite students to read several of the slavery case summaries from "Slavery in the Food We Eat" or just invite a student to read the paragraph below.

In a recent case, farmworkers were forced to pick tomatoes in the fields of growers. Every night they were chained inside a box truck. Then the truck itself was locked. If they tried to escape they were threatened or beaten. This case went to court and the crew leaders who held the farmworkers in slavery are now in prison for many years. But this is the seventh case to be prosecuted by the US government. In these cases from the Florida fields, more than 1,000 workers who were enslaved have been freed, thanks to the work of the CIW and government officials. But these are only the cases the government knows about. One US Attorney has said these seven cases are only the "tip of the iceberg." That means they think there are many more cases that are not discovered or brought to court.

Slavery doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens in situations where poverty wages and lack of rights are the norm. You don't see public school teachers enslaved; it's beyond comprehension. But in 21st century America, in the fields of Florida, modern-day slavery is alive and well.

The agreements that the Coalition of Immokalee Workers have created with seven major retail corporations all include a zero-tolerance policy for slavery. This policy is more than words. Following the latest sentencing in a recent farmworker slavery case, growers who turned a blind eye to slavery in their fields lost business as corporations cut or suspended their contracts.

Farmworkers are exploited and even enslaved to bring cheap tomatoes not only to the grocery store, but to you and me. We are connected to the farmworkers who pick the tomatoes we purchase. The question for us is, what can we do about the poverty and abuses faced by the farmworker who picked it?

God's Vision of a Fair World [10 minutes]

Many thousands of years ago, people were wondering about the kind of world that God wanted them to create. They saw the poorest people who planted and harvested food suffering. God spoke through the words of a prophet called Isaiah. Isaiah's followers wrote down many visions that described the sort of world God wanted. This is what they wrote:

“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.²² They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.²³ They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord— and their descendants as well.” [Isaiah 65:17-23].

God's vision of a world that is fair is a world where all people have what they need to thrive together. It's a world where in all that we do, consider how what we do affects others. And we make sure that we do not hurt others by the way we live.

How would you describe God's vision for a new world? [Expect a range of answers such as hopeful, idealistic, impossible, sustaining; tease out answers from students to explore their answer]

Why do you think God speaks this vision to people rather than just make it happen?

In your own life or in history, can you think of examples of where you've seen God's vision for a world that is fair coming to pass?

The Supermarket Campaign [5 minutes]

After Taco Bell/Yum Brands, the CIW and consumers together successfully called on many other companies to also improve wages and conditions for farmworkers. These are McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods Market, as well as Bon Appetit, Aramark, Sodexo and Compass Group, which are food service companies that provide food to college campuses and other places. These are big accomplishments. But there is more to be done. Who else do you think purchases large amounts of tomatoes? **[Supermarkets]**

Aside from Whole Foods Market, no other grocery chains have made an agreement with the farmworkers. We need to make sure that no matter where you buy a tomato – at the grocery store or on a hamburger at a restaurant, that the farmworkers who have picked the tomato are treated fairly.

People across the country are calling on grocery stores in their neighborhoods to work with the farmworkers. Among the largest grocery chains in the nation are Kroger, Ahold and Publix. [If any of the following grocery stores are in your area, you can mention them.]

- Kroger owns stores with 32 different names: Kroger, Ralph's King Soopers, Food 4 Less, Fry's, Dillons, City Market, Fred Meyer, Smith's, Foods Co., Hilander, Jay C., Pay Less, Owen's, Scott's, Gerbes, and QFC.
- Ahold owns Stop & Shop, Giant, Martin's and Ukrop's stores, which are mostly in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic.
- Publix is a supermarket located primarily in Florida, with other stores in the Southeast.

The Immokalee farmworkers and people across the country are asking these grocery chains to do the right thing and make sure that the farmworkers who pick the tomatoes that they sell are treated fairly. Unfortunately, these

companies have not done so. As a result, people are sending postcards to the heads of these grocery stores. People are dropping off letters of concern to the managers of their local stores, calling on the company to make an agreement with the farmworkers just as other major companies have done. [*You can show an example of a postcard and a manager letter.*]

The Campaign for Fair Food is about making sure that the production and purchasing of food is done in a way that respects the human rights of farmworkers; in a way that makes sure that farmworkers are paid fairly and work in decent conditions. Specifically, the Campaign for Fair Food seeks to improve wages and working conditions for Florida tomato pickers by calling on major buyers of tomatoes, in this case grocery stores, to pay a premium of one penny more per pound for their tomatoes, ensure that this penny is passed down directly to farmworkers, and work together with the CIW to establish and implement a code of conduct in their supply chains.

What can we do to help encourage grocery stores to join in ensuring fair wages and conditions for farmworkers?
[write letters, deliver postcards] {You can do a letter writing activity with the students.}

Closing

Changing things that are wrong in our world so that they are fair is not easy. But neither is it impossible. What is impossible for one person to do alone becomes possible when we work together. We've already seen that farmworkers and people across the country have been able to convince nine major companies to improve pay and conditions for farmworkers. If we keep working together, one day soon when we purchase tomatoes, we can be confident that the farmworkers who have picked that tomato were paid and treated fairly.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we give thanks for your vision of a fair word that we hear from the prophet Isaiah. We give thanks that many positive steps have been taken to ensure fair wages and humane working conditions for the farmworkers who harvest tomatoes. May our efforts help bring about a food system that ensures the well-being of all people. Amen.