

Creating Fair Food Together

Junior High Curriculum

Supplies

- tomato
- map of the U.S. with two pins and string/yarn
- photo of farmworkers' hands
- paper for drawing
- crayons, markers or paints
- bucket or container 32 lbs. of dry rice and beans
- supermarket postcard
- manager letter
- PBS Documentary (available from info@interfaithact.org)

Lesson

How do the tomatoes we eat come to our tables?

[Show a tomato to the students.]

What can you tell me about this tomato?

- It's red
- It's round.
- If there is a sticker on the fruit, what it says.

Where do tomatoes come from? **[the store, field, backyard garden.]** This tomato came from **(name your local chain.)** So we know a little bit about this tomato. We know it's red, it's roundish, and that I bought it at [name of grocery store]. Where do grocery stores get their tomatoes? **[From very large farms.]**

[Unfurl the map] Can anyone show me where we live on this map? *[Put a pin in the map. The pin should have a piece of yarn connected to it on the end of which is a second pin, long enough to stretch to southern Florida.]*

Did you know that about 90 percent of the fresh tomatoes produced in the United States during the winter come from Florida? This means 9 out of 10 of the tomatoes grown in the U.S. for us to eat on our sandwiches and salads come from Florida.

Can anyone show me where Florida is on this map? *[Put the second pin down in the southern part of Florida. The yarn should now stretch between your home and Florida.]* When we go to the grocery store to buy tomatoes during the winter, a lot of those tomatoes have traveled from Florida.

Do you know who picks these Florida tomatoes that we buy in the grocery store? **[Farmworkers: men and women, teenagers.]**

[Show a photo of farmworker's hands.] What does this photo (or video) tell us about picking tomatoes? Does it look like hard work or easy work?

A Day in the Life of a Florida Farmworker

OPTION 1: Invite several students to pantomime the story below as you or a student reads it. You could create signs to indicate which "scene" the story is in. You'll need the following actors: Juan, several farmworkers, a crew

leader. The full story is below.

OPTION 2: Alternatively, the story below can be read aloud while showing a photo essay depicting a day in the life of Immokalee farmworkers available at <http://ciw-online.org/inthefields-simple.html>

OPTION 3: View the PBS NOW documentary about the CIW (May 2005) available from info@interfaithact.org

OPTION 4: For limited time settings, share the following summary as an alternative to the longer story. It can be supplemented by selected photos; see above.

Tomato pickers harvesting in Florida, work long days in pesticide laden fields for 50 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. According to the US Department of Labor, they earn about \$10,000 a year.

Narrator: Immokalee, which rhymes with broccoli, is a town in south Florida. It's about 4 hours south of Walt Disney World and about 45 minutes west of Ft. Myers. Immokalee, which is a Seminole word meaning "my home," is the place where many thousands of farmworkers who pick tomatoes and citrus fruit live. Juan is a farmworker. He lives in a trailer with 10 other men in Immokalee. He lives with 10 other men because that's all he can afford.

Scene 1: Juan Wakes Up

Each morning Juan wakes up at 4:30am. It is very dark outside as he gets out of bed and makes tortillas for his breakfast and lunch. Then Juan walks to a parking lot in the center of town.

Scene 2: Looking for Work

At the parking lot, Juan joins many other men and women who are searching for work in the tomato fields. They wait. Soon old school buses pull into the parking lot and all the waiting people run toward the buses. The driver of the bus is in charge of picking people to work and watching them in the fields. He picks a few people. These people get on the bus and are driven to the tomato fields, anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours away. The rest are left behind. Perhaps they will get work, perhaps they will not. If they don't get work, they won't earn any money that day.

Scene 3: In the Tomato Fields

When the bus with the people who were picked for work gets to the fields, Juan and the others wait for the dew to dry. Their supervisor gives them buckets that can hold 32 pounds of tomatoes and sends them into the fields to pick. The fields are very hot and the sun is beating down. The plants are covered in pesticides. The farmworkers pick as quickly as possible.

There's a large truck at the edge of the rows. Every time farmworkers finish picking a bucket of tomatoes, they run to the truck, hoist the buckets on to their shoulders and toss it up to a man in the back of the truck. That man dumps the tomatoes into the truck, drops a metal token into the bucket and tosses the buckets back to the farmworker. For every token the farmworker will get 50 cents. The farmworkers must hold on to the tokens they've earned all day if they are to get paid for what they've picked. At the end of the day they give their tokens to the crew leader who writes down how many buckets they've picked. At the end of the week they'll get a check for the total amount of buckets they've picked during that week from each grower that they've harvested for. To earn minimum wage, a farmworker must pick, fill, haul to a truck and dump a 32-lb bucket every four minutes, all day, without stopping. For a typical 10-hour day, that'd be picking and hauling 2 and 1/4 tons of tomatoes. How many pounds is that? [4,500].

Scene 4: Going Home

Then Juan and the other men and women get back on the bus and are driven back to the parking lot. When the bus pulls into the parking lot it's getting dark. Juan walks back to his trailer where he lives with 10 other people. He waits a long time to be able to take his turn in the shower and at the stove to prepare dinner. He gets in bed and falls asleep exhausted. Tomorrow he will get up and look for work all over again.

[Thank the students and ask all the students to form two lines.]

Bucket Exercise: Fill a bucket with 32 pounds of rice or other item. Invite the students to try lifting it up. Note of caution: Be careful, 32lbs. is quite heavy. Make sure no one gets hurt.

Thinking Together about The Conditions in Which Farmworkers Work

How did it feel to lift up that bucket? Do you think you could carry it 100 feet on your shoulder? Throw it up in the air to the truck? Would you like to do that over 100 times every day?

How much money does a farmworker get for each bucket of tomatoes picked and carried? **[50 cents]**

Can you think of something that costs 50 cents? It's kind of hard – even a drink from a vending machine costs about \$1.00. *[Point to your shirt.]* This shirt cost me \$25.00 (or whatever it cost). A farmworker would have to pick about 50 buckets of tomatoes to earn enough money to buy this shirt.

According to the US Department of Labor, farmworkers earn about \$10,000 a year. Farmworkers and their families are extremely poor. It is very difficult to purchase shelter, food, clothing, or medicine when you earn so little. Do you think that it's fair that farmworkers work 10-12 hours a day, sometimes six days a week and still they cannot support themselves and their families well? *[Let the students think about and discuss this a bit.]*

Modern-Day Slavery in the Fields

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

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 Fields and the Food We Eat" (available online at <http://www.interfaithact.org/resources.html>) or invite a student to read the paragraph below.

In a recent case, farmworkers were forced to pick tomatoes in the fields of growers. At 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 1,200 workers who were enslaved have been freed. 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.

In July and September 2010, two more cases of forced labor involving Florida farmworkers were indicted by the U.S. Department of Justice. These are currently under federal prosecution (as of fall 2010).

[Pick up the tomato.] So now we know more about this tomato. We know that it could have been picked by a farmworker who is exploited, a worker who was not paid fairly for his work or possibly even picked by a farmworker who is enslaved, unable to leave and forced to harvest in the fields. The question for us is what shall we do about this?

God's Vision of a Fair World

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:

In God's new world people will live a long time because they will build homes and live in them. They will eat the food that they pick. They shall not simply build houses or pick food for other people. They will be like a flourishing tree. They will not work in vain – their work will provide for all their needs. Everyone will know God's loving presence. No one will hurt or destroy in God's new world. [Summary paraphrase of Isaiah 65:17-24].

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 speak this version 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?

How Farmworkers and Consumers are Creating Fair Food Together

People across the country have joined together with farmworkers to change these conditions through the Campaign for Fair Food. Students have played a central role in calling on companies to work with the farmworkers.

Who can tell me what a "consumer" is? **[A person who purchases a product.]** Consumers can influence companies because they are a company's customers. Companies must listen to what their customers are telling them if they want these customers to keep patronizing their stores.

If consumers don't like something a company is doing, what are some things that they can do? **[Write a letter, call the company, hold a peaceful protest, boycott a company and its products.]**

By writing letters, sending postcards, talking with restaurant and store managers, and participating in peaceful marches, and in one instance, successfully boycotting a company for four years, people across the country have joined with farmworkers from Immokalee to insist that restaurants and grocery stores improve conditions for farmworkers. As a result, the farmworkers of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers have made agreements with some of the largest food companies in the world to improve wages and conditions for farmworkers.

Can you name some fast-food restaurants? **[When the students name the restaurants, write them on the board.]** The CIW has made fair food agreements with the largest fast-food companies in the world, Yum! Brands (which owns Taco Bell, KFC, Pizza Hut among others), McDonald's, Burger King, Subway **[place a check mark next to their names on the board]**. They've also made agreements with corporations that serve food in schools and other places, Bon Appetit, Sodexo and Compass Group, and with one grocery store, Whole Foods Market.

These agreements have improved farmworkers' wages and mean that these companies will stop purchasing tomatoes from any growers who are found to have used slave labor to harvest their tomatoes. Following the most recent farmworker slavery case, for the first time growers who turned a blind eye to slavery in their fields lost business. These are big accomplishments. But there is more to be done.

The Supermarket Campaign

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 telling these grocery chains that they should do the right thing and make sure that the farmworkers who pick the tomatoes that they sell are treated fairly. 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.

Activity

Write letters to a supermarket or draw pictures to depict what you've learned. For addresses of where to send letters, visit www.interfaithact.org/supermarkets

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 no matter whether we purchase a tomato on a hamburger at McDonald's or **[name your grocery store]**, we will know that the farmworkers who have picked that tomato were treated fairly.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we give thanks for your vision of a fair world 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 insures the well-being of all people. Amen.