

Dear Publix Manager,

As a Publix customer, I am contacting you 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 Publix's 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 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 farm labor operations – involving well over one thousand workers in total – to be prosecuted for servitude in Florida in the past dozen years.**



In December 2008, two farm employers were sentenced to 12 years each in federal prison on charges of conspiracy, holding workers in involuntary servitude and peonage. According to a U.S. Department of Justice press release, the bosses *"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 that the "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."

Remarkably, Publix continues to purchase tomatoes from those same two suppliers. When asked recently about the company's relation to the two growers by the St. Augustine Record, Publix spokesperson Dwaine Stevens confirmed, "... the chain does purchase tomatoes from the two farms but pays a fair market price."

I am extremely disappointed that Publix has turned its back on human rights. **There is no fair market price for slavery and it is imperative that Publix -- as a purchaser of tomatoes from farms tainted by a slavery prosecution -- work with the CIW to help ensure an end to slavery and abuses in the fields.**

Fortunately, Publix has the opportunity to support social responsibility in the Florida tomato industry. **Several Florida tomato growers – including East Coast, the state's third largest producer – are implementing the CIW's Fair Food agreements with retail food industry leaders Yum Brands, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods Market, Compass Group, and Bon Appetit Management Company.** The agreements require those retailers to demand more humane labor standards from their Florida tomato suppliers, to pay a premium price for more fairly produced tomatoes, and to buy only from growers who meet those higher standards, including zero tolerance for slavery.

I urge Publix to seize this opportunity to be part of the solution to Florida's "harvest of shame" 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 your company living up to its reputation as a good neighbor by working with the CIW to ensure humane wages and working conditions for the people who harvest its tomatoes. For more information, please contact the Coalition of Immokalee Workers at 239-657-8311 or workers@ciw-online.org.

Thank you,