

Dear Manager:

As a customer of your supermarket, I am contacting you to urge your company to work with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to help end forced labor, poverty wages and other human rights abuses faced by farmworkers harvesting tomatoes for the U.S. retail food industry.

The CIW is an internationally recognized, award-winning farmworker organization based in Immokalee, Florida. It has assisted the FBI and U.S. Department of Justice in successfully investigating and prosecuting six cases of modern-day slavery in Florida agriculture. The CIW is also spearheading an innovative effort to promote principles and practices of socially responsible purchasing in the retail food industry that advance and ensure the human rights of farmworkers.



There is a well-documented human rights crisis in Florida's fields, and conditions facing farmworkers who harvest your company's tomatoes are as urgent as they are appalling. Tomato pickers earn 40-50 cents for every 32-lb bucket of tomatoes they harvest - a rate that has not risen significantly since 1978. A worker must pick nearly 2.5 tons of tomatoes just to earn minimum wage for a typical 10-hour day. Grinding poverty leaves farmworkers vulnerable to the most exploitative employers, often resulting in egregious labor rights abuses.

In December 2008, two farm labor employers in Immokalee were sentenced to twelve years a piece in federal prison for enslaving nearly a dozen tomato harvesters. Workers were held against their will, beaten, chained, locked in box trucks at night, and forced to work harvesting tomatoes. U.S. Attorney Doug Molloy called it one of Florida's "biggest, ugliest slavery cases ever." **This is the seventh such farm labor operation - involving well over one thousand workers in total - to be prosecuted for servitude in Florida in the past decade.**

Fortunately, your company has a new opportunity to support social responsibility in the Florida tomato industry. Today 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.

The news of farmworkers, growers, and retail food corporations cooperating to produce a fairer tomato prompted U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, a longtime observer of the campaign, to note, "Today marks the beginning of the end of the harvest of shame that has existed for far too long in Florida's tomato fields."

Yet much remains to be done. It is imperative that your company seize the opportunity to be part of the solution to Florida's longstanding shame of farmworker exploitation. **At the table is a proven model, the expertise of the CIW, and a tremendous opportunity to join other major food retailers in advancing the principles of Fair Food.** 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. Your leadership is necessary if we are to end this human rights crisis once and for all.

For more information, please contact the Coalition of Immokalee Workers at 239-657-8311 or workers@ciw-online.org.

Thank you,
