Farmworkers, Consumers to March on Downtown Tampa Publix Demanding Fair Labor Standards for Farmworkers

Pressure mounts for Florida-based supermarket chain to sign Fair Food agreement with Coalition of Immokalee Workers in light of historic breakthrough with Florida tomato growers

Immokalee, FL (Feb. 14, 2011) – On Saturday, March 5th, farmworkers from Immokalee, Florida – the men and women who harvest the state's $620 million tomato crop – will be joined by consumers from across the Southeast in three simultaneous marches through downtown Tampa converging at the 1313 S. Dale Mabry Highway store, where they will hold a rally to demand that the supermarket chain join a growing partnership among farmworkers, Florida tomato growers, and retail food giants aimed at ending decades of farm labor abuse in Florida.

What: Farmworkers and consumers march through downtown Tampa to call on Publix to do the right thing.

When: March 5th, Tampa, FL.
   • Major rally at Publix store at 1313 S. Dale Mabry Highway at 2pm.
   • Feeder marches depart from three Tampa Publix store locations at 10am and noon.
   Click here for details.

Who: Farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, religious leaders, students, and concerned consumers from across the Southeast.

“For years we have picked tomatoes in Florida’s fields under unimaginably harsh conditions,” said Leonel Perez of the CIW. “Today, however, we are finally beginning to see the first glimmers of more humane treatment at work, thanks to the Campaign for Fair Food. But Publix is standing in the way of progress, and their refusal to help improve farm labor wages and working conditions threatens to undermine the unprecedented – and still fragile – human rights advances that are just now starting to take root in the fields.”

“George Jenkins, founder of Publix, once said, 'Don't let making a profit stand in the way of doing the right thing.'” added Gerardo Reyes, also of the CIW. “We're asking that the men and women who run Publix today take this counsel to heart and and finally do the right thing by signing a Fair Food agreement to improve the lives of the thousands of men and women who pick the tomatoes sold in Publix supermarkets.”

Background:

Florida farmworkers have long faced brutal conditions in the fields, including sub-poverty wages, widespread labor rights violations, and even modern-day slavery. Today, however, there is hope on the horizon, thanks to the efforts of farmworkers, Fair Food activists, Florida tomato growers, and nine food industry leaders (including Publix competitor Whole Foods) who have joined in support of the CIW's Fair Food principles, including a penny-pound piece rate wage increase, a strict code of conduct, a cooperative complaint resolution system, a participatory health and safety program, and a worker-to-worker education process.

Last November, the CIW and the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange (FTGE) signed an agreement to extend these principles to over 90% of Florida's tomato fields. And though the implementation of that agreement is being phased in gradually over the course of this season and the next, many real, concrete changes have already taken root on some of the state's largest farms.
Publix, however, is refusing to do its part, and if they have their way, the unprecedented farm labor transformation promised by the CIW’s landmark agreement with the FTGE would be significantly diminished. That’s because the solution to farm labor exploitation and abuse contained in the Fair Food principles depends on the participation of all the major purchasers of Florida tomatoes. Each buyer must contribute its fair share – its penny-per-pound – for the pay raise to reach its full potential. Each buyer must commit to direct its purchases to those growers complying with the code of conduct – and away from those who don’t – for working conditions to get better and stay better. In the words of the FTGE’s Reggie Brown, “Everybody in the system has to be invested for it to work.”

In December, Publix’s Media and Community Relations Manager Dwaine Stevens stated to the The Bulletin, a Baldwin County, AL newspaper, “We don’t have any plans to sit down with the CIW.” He continued, “If there are some atrocities going on, it’s not our business. Maybe it’s something the government should get involved with.”

About the Coalition of Immokalee Workers:

The CIW (www.ciw-online.org) is a community-based farmworker organization headquartered in Immokalee, Florida, with over 4,000 members. The CIW seeks modern working conditions for farmworkers and promotes their fair treatment in accordance with national and international human rights standards. The CIW’s Campaign for Fair Food has won unprecedented support for fundamental farm labor reforms from retail food industry leaders. The Campaign for Fair Food taps the unique powers of all the elements of our country's food industry:

- **of consumers**, to demand the highest ethical standards for food production;
- **of food retailers**, to use their tremendous buying power both to demand higher labor standards of their suppliers and help raise farmworkers out of poverty through a price that supports sustainable production;
- **of growers**, to continuously improve their operations and meet consumer demand, keeping pace with an evolving marketplace, and,
- **of farmworkers**, to help expose and fix the worst abuses and apply their unique knowledge toward modernizing, and humanizing, our farm labor system.

### END ###
"If there are some atrocities going on, it's not our business."
– Publix spokesperson Dwaine Stevens, 12/11/10

Have the people who run Publix completely lost their minds?

Speaking to a reporter following a protest in Daphne, Alabama, last week, Publix spokesperson Dwaine Stevens actually said these words – "If there are some atrocities going on, it's not our business" – in response to questions about farm labor exploitation in the grocery giant's supply chain.

Here's the passage, from an article in the Baldwin County News, entitled, "Protesters picket Publix's Saturday grand opening over labor issues" (12/11/10):

“We don’t have any plans to sit down with the CIW,” Publix’s Media and Community Relations Manager Dwaine Stevens said, also citing that the company sells around 36,000 products in the stores and it cannot get involved with each product’s labor issues. “If there are some atrocities going on, it’s not our business. Maybe it’s something the government should get involved with.”

So, there you have it. A remarkably honest, almost naked, formulation of Publix's position on supply chain responsibility. "Atrocities" in our supply chain? Not our business.


Acceptable atrocities?

Among other things, Stevens' statement truly begs the question: Are there really no "atrocities" that would give Publix pause?

Maybe poverty wages, systemic labor abuse, and even slavery in Florida's fields aren't atrocious enough. But what about child labor, like that found in the blueberry fields of Michigan in October of last year? What if children were found, in large numbers, picking produce ultimately sold to Publix? Would that be Publix's "business," or would they turn their backs on child labor exploitation, too?

One has to assume that Publix would be shocked -- shocked! -- at such a revelation and quickly move to cut off the offending supplier.

Assuming that's the case, perhaps Mr. Stevens would like to clarify for its customers just where Publix draws the line between atrocities it finds acceptable and those it does not.

Consumers decide what's acceptable, not corporations....

Ultimately, however, it doesn't really matter what Publix thinks is acceptable or not, because, in the end, consumers will decide. And more and more every day, in industry after industry, from apparel to the latest electronics, consumers are holding corporations accountable for exploitation in their supply chains.

That's why the CIW's recent agreement with the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange was so widely lauded when it was announced one month ago in Immokalee. The agreement established a first-of-its-kind, industry-wide
collaborative effort to eliminate human rights violations in Florida's tomato fields.

In the joint press release announcing the new agreement, the CIW and FTGE didn't shy away from the reality of continued problems in Florida's fields. In the words of Reggie Brown of the FTGE:

"As we move forward, we can be certain that labor complaints will continue to arise in the foreseeable future, but it is how we deal with these complaints in this new partnership that will serve to demonstrate that we are serious and that our approach is working. As time goes by, we are confident that we will be able to weed out the bad actors and, working together, build a stronger, more sustainable industry that will be better equipped than ever to thrive in an increasingly competitive market place." [read more]

Rather than ignore or deny that unacceptable exploitation exists today in Florida agriculture, the new agreement embraces the challenge of identifying and eliminating farm labor abuse and puts a process in place to do so that taps the unique powers of all the elements of our country's food industry, from the bottom to the very top:

- of farmworkers, to help expose and fix the worst abuses and apply their unique knowledge toward modernizing, and humanizing, our farm labor system,
- of growers, to continuously improve their operations and meet consumer demand, keeping pace with an evolving marketplace,
- of food retailers, to use their tremendous buying power both to demand higher labor standards of their suppliers and help raise farmworkers out of poverty through a price that supports sustainable production, and
- of consumers, to demand the highest ethical standards for food production.

When corporations step away from responsibility, consumers must step in...

Those last two links in the process are absolutely crucial to its success. In the words of the CIW's Gerardo Reyes, during the press conference announcing the agreement with the FTGE:

“Nearly 50 years to the day since Edward R. Murrow shocked the nation with his landmark report Harvest of Shame – which aired the day after Thanksgiving, 1960 – a solution has appeared on the horizon through the Campaign for Fair Food,” added Gerardo Reyes, also of the CIW.

“For this new model to achieve its full potential, however, retail food industry leaders must also step up and support the higher standards,” concluded Reyes. “Key players in the fast-food and foodservice industries have already committed their support. It is time now for supermarket industry leaders to seize this historic opportunity and help make the promise of fresh – and fair – tomatoes from Florida a reality.”

Earlier this year, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in presenting the CIW's Laura Germino with the Trafficking in Persons Hero Award, echoed that same sentiment, speaking about the fight against modern-day slavery:

"All of us have a responsibility to bring this practice to an end... And we can’t just blame international organized crime and rely on law enforcement... It is everyone’s responsibility. Businesses that knowingly profit or exhibit reckless disregard about their supply chains... all of us have to speak out and act forcefully."

But Mr. Stevens' words leave no room for doubt: Publix has clearly -- one might say proudly -- abdicated all responsibility for labor conditions in its supply chain. "If there are some atrocities going on, it's not our business" is perhaps the quintessential expression of reckless disregard.
Protesters picket Publix’s Saturday grand opening over labor issues

_Publix’s stance: This is not the company’s issue_

By Devin R. Golden
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(Created: Saturday, December 11, 2010 10:00 PM CST)

DAPHNE, Ala.—Students from the University of West Florida and the University of South Alabama — along with members of the Worker’s Solidarity Alliance — stood along Highway 98 and protested the grand opening of Publix Supermarket in Daphne.

Protestors led chants and held up signs, some of which read: “Publix, where shopping is oppression”; “End farm worker exploitation”; and “Publix pay fair!”

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ campaign for Fair Food is requesting food retailers to pay 1 cent more per pound of Florida tomatoes to improve workers’ wages, and the alliance said Publix Supermarkets Inc. has not agreed to do so.

According to the CIW’s website, Florida tomato pickers work for 50 cents per 32-pound bucket of tomatoes with no benefits, and that rate has not changed since the 1980s. The website also states that most Florida farm workers earn less than $12,000 a year in wages.

“We’re asking Publix to sit down with the CIW and agree to pay 1 cent more per pound of tomatoes to Florida farm workers,” said Peter Stedman, a Pensacola, Fla., resident. “The wage price for picking tomatoes has been stagnant since the 1970s.”

Stedman said that if Publix pays 1 cent more per pound of tomatoes, the wage price for Florida farm workers would increase to poverty level.

“They’re working right now at sub-poverty,” he said. “At these wages, what we’re finding is that...
there is still slavery in Florida’s tomato fields.”

Publix’s stance is that this issue, while it may be a concern, does not involve the supermarket chain company.

“We don’t have any plans to sit down with the CIW,” Publix’s Media and Community Relations Manager Dwaine Stevens said, also citing that the company sells around 36,000 products in the stores and it cannot get involved with each product’s labor issues. “If there are some atrocities going on, it’s not our business. Maybe it’s something the government should get involved with.”

The alliance stated that some food retailers — including McDonald’s, Burger King, Subway, and Whole Foods — have agreed to work to address human-rights issues in Florida’s fields.

“Fairhope, Gulf shores and Orange Beach, all the Publixes in the area, they can expect us to come,” alliance representative Lee Pryor said. “We’re just expanding this campaign, and we will continue to do this until Publix sits down with the CIW.”

The grand opening saw a high number of residents coming to the supermarket store to do their shopping, and Publix is happy with the turnout and the event, Stevens said.

“We’ve been steady all day. We had people standing outside 45 minutes before we opened. The mayor and the chamber of commerce came out and they did a nice ribbon-cutting for us.”
Publix's stone wall starting to crumble
Rabbi Bruce Diamond

January 24, 2011
Fort Myers News-Press

Jon Esformes, operating partner of the family-owned Pacific Tomato Growers — one of the largest growers in the nation — quoted Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s famous dictum, “In a free society, few are guilty, but all are responsible,” when he announced an agreement with the 4,000-member Coalition of Immokalee Workers to implement a penny-a-pound raise for the workers and to improve their working conditions. (“Tomato grower, harvesters strike historic accord,” Oct. 14).

Soon afterwards, Six L’s followed suit as well as the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange representing 90 percent of the state’s tomato growers, which brought the long and difficult campaign with the growers to a successful conclusion.

The additional penny a pound, which McDonald's, Taco Bell, Burger King and Whole Foods had already agreed to pay for Florida tomatoes, can potentially raise a typical worker’s earnings from the 1970s level of $10,000 to a more livable $17,000.

However, the wage increase depends on the willingness of tomato retailers to pay that extra penny.

Publix, a major buyer of Florida tomatoes, adamantly refuses to join the penny-a-pound program.

The official position of Publix is not to intervene in labor disputes between suppliers and their employees.

While that might have been a plausible position to take in the past, now that the “labor dispute” has been resolved, what possible reason could Publix have to not add a mere penny a pound to the price it pays its suppliers so that they might pass it on to the workers who harvest its tomatoes?

And who among us would mind paying that extra penny knowing it would be passed along to the men and women whose backbreaking toil puts fresh produce on our tables?

But now it becomes clear that Publix’s refusal to cooperate had little to do with “labor disputes,” and that this was just a smokescreen.

Publix's Media and Community Relations Manager Dwaine Stevens recently told The Bulletin, an Alabama newspaper, "We don't have any plans to sit down with the CIW." ("Protesters picket Publix's Saturday grand opening over labor issues," Dec. 11.) He explained that Publix sells nearly 36,000 products in its stores and cannot address each product's labor issues. He added, "If there are some atrocities going on, it's not our business. Maybe it's something the government should get involved with."

This deplorable statement closely echoes the sentiments of Dachau’s townspeople regarding the infamous camp just outside of their town.

What a far cry from the idea that “in a free society, few are guilty, but all are responsible,” and the principle of fairness to working people that is shared by all the world’s great religions.

You don’t have to be a tea party member to understand that we don’t need government to tell us right from wrong,
nor do we need its permission to battle injustice! All that is needed is an informed and aroused public.

For sure, a coalition of subsistence workers taking on America’s largest privately owned supermarket chain seems a daunting if not impossible battle.

But men and women of faith know that when are you on the side of the angels, nothing is impossible! The News-Press’ recognition of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers as “People of the Year” give us the confidence that Publix’s stone wall is starting to crumble!

*Bruce Diamond is Rabbi at Fort Myers Community Free Synagogue and teaches Civic Engagement at Florida Gulf Coast University.*
Source: http://ciw-online.org/tis_the_season_to_be_greedy.html

December 19, 2010

'Tis the season to be greedy...

Publix, Ahold angling for a free ride on road to social responsibility

The disciplines of economics and philosophy rarely intersect, but one place where they have met over the years, a place visited by some of our greatest minds -- from Plato to Socrates, David Hume to John Stuart Mill -- is in a vexing quirk of collective action often called "The Free Rider Problem." From wikipedia:

"In economics, collective bargaining, psychology, and political science, "free riders" are those who consume more than their fair share of a public resource, or shoulder less than a fair share of the costs of its production... The name "free rider" comes from a common textbook example: someone using public transportation without paying the fare. If too many people do this, the system will not have enough money to operate."

Scottish philosopher David Hume provided another example in his reflection on this age old phenomenon:

"Two neighbours may agree to drain a meadow, which they possess in common; because 'tis easy for them to know each other's mind; and each must perceive, that the immediate consequence of his failing in his part, is, the abandoning the whole project. But 'tis very difficult, and indeed impossible, that a thousand persons shou'd agree in any such action; it being difficult for them to concert so complicated a design, and still more difficult for them to execute it; while each seeks a pretext to free himself of the trouble and expence, and would lay the whole burden on others."

(emphasis added) read more

At this point you may be asking yourself: What in the world does all this have to do with the Campaign for Fair Food.

Fair question. But, as it turns out, the answer is: Everything.

Our very own public good: Human rights in the food industry...

And here's why: You see, at this point in the campaign, we – farmworkers in Immokalee and Fair Food activists across the country – have succeeded in creating something from nothing. Through years of collective action, we have created a new public good: Respect for fundamental human rights in Florida's tomato fields.

In a variation on David Hume's words, we set out to drain not a meadow, but rather a swamp – a swamp of slavery, sexual harassment, wage theft, and grinding poverty.

That's no small feat, one that has come at the cost of great sacrifice. But having arrived here, the battle is far from over. In fact, it has only just begun. And that is because there is a significant cost involved not just in winning human rights in Florida's tomato fields, but in holding and defending that higher ground, too.

In other words, human rights are not free. And now that our agreement with the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange has established the Penny per Pound and the Fair Food Code of Conduct as industry standards – the twin pillars that buttress this new standard of farm labor rights – those in the "public" who enjoy this new good have to pay for it (and by "public" we don't mean consumers – the trillion-dollar food industry is more than capable of absorbing the new costs created by the Fair Food program, and prices in the fast-food and foodservice industry have not changed
as a result of the penny-per-pound).

A shared public good...

Who, exactly, is the "public" in our situation, then? Clearly farmworkers are the primary beneficiaries of this particular public good, and farmworkers have more than paid the price, through decades of poverty and degradation, and years of sacrifice and struggle. And CIW members will continue to contribute through the constant vigilance that will be necessary to monitor and enforce the nascent Fair Food standards. But the list hardly ends there.

Growers, whose industry has suffered for decades from the stain of extreme exploitation, certainly stand to benefit from greater social accountability. This is, after all, the very industry that spawned the infamous "Harvest of Shame." Abuses that previously festered in the shadows until they inevitably blew up in scandal, lawsuits, and headlines will now be actively identified and eliminated before they can explode. This helps workers, of course, but it also helps the industry as a whole to change the narrative that has dogged Florida agriculture for as long as anyone can remember, and in the process differentiate itself from other tomato producing regions of the world.

Buyers, too, benefit richly from this public good; within the marketplace they are ultimately the face of the produce they sell. Much as they may have preferred the days of old -- where what happened in Florida's fields stayed in Florida's fields -- those days are gone. Today's consumers are increasingly concerned about any exploitation behind the products they buy, and the market for sustainable food is growing daily. Social accountability is good for business.

A shared burden...

And so how exactly do growers and buyers pay their part to sustain this new public good? This is an important question, because understanding this question will go a long way to understanding why Publix and Ahold -- the want-to-be free riders on this shiny new bus -- must be brought, with every ounce of pressure we can exert, to do their part. They cannot be allowed, to quote Hume, to "seek a pretext to free (themselves) of the trouble and expence, and... lay the whole burden on others."

Let's start with the one cost the growers don't pay: The growers don't pay the penny-per-pound. This has been the source of considerable confusion since the announcement of the FTGE agreement among the press, the broader public, and even some longtime Fair Food activists. But this needs to be clear -- the growers did not agree to pay the penny-per-pound, but rather to pass the penny, paid by the buyers, on to their workers as part of their regular paychecks in the form of a "Fair Food bonus".

The growers do shoulder many other costs of the changes brought about by the new industry-wide standards, most having to do with the improvement of working conditions required by the Fair Food Code of Conduct. Shade in the fields, worker education on the clock, health and safety committees, and a real commitment to a new complaint investigation and resolution system all have associated costs, and all are borne by the growers. Systems designed to insure transparency and accountability, that is, the very systems to which the FTGE has now committed itself, require both time and money. Florida's tomato growers recognize this and have agreed to bear their part of the cost of valuing human rights. They are doing their part.

The buyers, on the other hand, are responsible for the Fair Food program's wage increase, which is built, buyer by buyer, penny by penny, based on each buyer's purchases. They also help support the improved working conditions by committing to condition their purchases on compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Thus, in theory, the Fair Food program, and the new respect for fundamental human rights in the Florida tomato industry to which it has given rise, are a classic example of a public good, achieved through collective action and supported by contributions by all those who benefit from the new good.

Theory thwarted...
And indeed, the nine multi-billion dollar, multi-national corporations that have already signed Fair Food agreements with the CIW are paying into the system.

But those food corporations that have not yet signed – principal among them supermarket industry leaders, with the sole exception of Whole Foods – are not. And now it is becoming increasingly clear that the strategy of those supermarket leaders, in particular Publix and Ahold, is to shirk their responsibility to pay into the system, short workers of their portion of the pay increase, and refuse to tie their purchases to the Fair Food principles. Instead, they hope to satisfy the public by simply buying from those growers where the Fair Food Code of Conduct is in effect, with no contribution to improved wages for the workers on those farms and no commitment to cut off purchases if violations of the Code of Conduct are found.

In short, they want social responsibility on the cheap, with all of the benefits and none of the costs. They want to ride the bus for free, while everyone else pays. Here's Publix's statement following the announcement of the CIW/FTGE agreement:

"Publix Super Markets, Inc. congratulates the Tomato Growers and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers for reaching a resolution... (W)e would assume that the resolution addresses farm worker pay in Florida. We would view the agreement to increase the workers pay by an additional penny per pound, in addition to the federal minimum wage the workers currently earn on their harvests as a confirmation of the industry's commitment to act ethically, responsibly and in the best interests of their employees. We applaud both parties for successfully reaching this agreement."

[read more]

Not content with washing their hands of the need to pay the extra penny to improve farmworker wages, Publix went on in a subsequent statement to make it abundantly clear that they feel no responsibility whatsoever for improved working conditions either:

“We don’t have any plans to sit down with the CIW,” Publix’s Media and Community Relations Manager Dwaine Stevens said, also citing that the company sells around 36,000 products in the stores and it cannot get involved with each product’s labor issues. “If there are some atrocities going on, it’s not our business. Maybe it’s something the government should get involved with.” (emphasis added) [read more]

Not to be outdone, Ahold has issued its own, equally unenlightened statement on their position vis a vis the Campaign for Fair Food. Here's an excerpt:

"On November 16, the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, which represents all of Ahold's major tomato growers and suppliers, announced an agreement with the CIW to accept the CIW's Fair Food Code of Conduct. We are pleased to learn about this agreement and believe that it is entirely consistent with our findings, specifically, that the growers from whom we source tomatoes in the Immokalee region are committed to treat employees and other workers fairly and with dignity and in accordance with the Ahold Standards of Engagement.

... We will not, therefore, participate directly with the growers' employees in CIW's proposed penny-per-pound program."

'Tis indeed the season to be greedy.

No ticket, no ride...

While Publix and Ahold appear to have paid close attention to the CIW/FTGE joint announcement, they both seem to have somehow overlooked this crucial passage:
“Nearly 50 years to the day since Edward R. Murrow shocked the nation with his landmark report Harvest of Shame – which aired the day after Thanksgiving, 1960 – a solution has appeared on the horizon through the Campaign for Fair Food,” added Gerardo Reyes, also of the CIW.

“For this new model to achieve its full potential, however, retail food industry leaders must also step up and support the higher standards,” concluded Reyes. “Key players in the fast-food and foodservice industries have already committed their support. It is time now for supermarket industry leaders to seize this historic opportunity and help make the promise of fresh – and fair – tomatoes from Florida a reality.” read more

Without Publix and Ahold -- and the rest of the supermarket industry -- paying into the penny-per-pound program and conditioning their purchases on the Fair Food principles, workers' raises are shorted and the push to improve working conditions is undermined. And, to paraphrase the words of the wikipedia page at the top of this post, if too many people do this, the system will not have enough money, or market strength, to operate.

Such an outcome would be doubly harsh given the active role supermarket giants like Publix and Ahold have played in creating -- by leveraging their volume purchasing power to demand ever lower prices for produce -- the poverty and brutal working conditions from which they have profited for so many years.

The victory announced last month in Immokalee is, without doubt, a watershed moment in the history of Florida agriculture. Never before have growers and workers joined together behind such progressive standards and at such a comprehensive level, covering over 90% of the entire Florida tomato industry. We – all of us – are making history.

But that victory will be diminished if Publix and Ahold are allowed to take the low road they seem so determined to travel. In the new year, let us gather our forces, meet them on that road, and turn them back to join the rest of the food industry on the path to true social responsibility.
The Coalition of Immokalee Workers

About the CIW

Consciousness + Commitment = Change: How and why we are organizing

The CIW is a community-based organization of mainly Latino, Mayan Indian and Haitian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. We strive to build our strength as a community on a basis of reflection and analysis, constant attention to coalition-building across ethnic divisions, and an ongoing investment in leadership development to help our members continually develop their skills in community education and organization.

From this basis we fight for, among other things: a fair wage for the work we do, more respect on the part of our bosses and the industries where we work, better and cheaper housing, stronger laws and stronger enforcement against those who would violate workers’ rights, the right to organize on our jobs without fear of retaliation, and an end to forced labor in the fields.

From the people, for the people: Who we are

Southwest Florida is the state’s most important center for agricultural production, and Immokalee is the state’s largest farmworker community. As such, the majority of our approximately 4,000 members work for large agricultural corporations in the tomato and citrus harvests, traveling along the entire East Coast following the harvest in season. Many also move out of agriculture and into other low wage industries that are important in our area, including the construction, nursery, and tourist industries.

We are all leaders: Our history

We began organizing in 1993 as a small group of workers meeting weekly in a room borrowed from a local church to discuss how to better our community and our lives. In a relatively short time we have managed to bring about significant, concrete change.

Combining three community-wide work stoppages with intense public pressure – including an unprecedented month-long hunger strike by six of our members in 1998 and an historic 234-mile march from Ft. Myers to Orlando in 2000 – our early organizing ended over twenty years of declining wages in the tomato industry. By 1998, we had won industry-wide raises of 13-25% (translating into several million dollars annually for the community in increased wages) and a new-found political and social respect from the outside world.

Those raises brought the tomato picking piece-rate back to pre-1980 levels (the piece-rate had fallen below those levels over the course of the intervening two decades), but wages remained below poverty level and continuing improvement was slow in coming. At the same time, the phenomenon of modern-day slavery was establishing a foothold in Florida’s fields.

Anti-Slavery Campaign

While continuing to organize for fairer wages, we also turned our attention to attacking involuntary servitude in our state. Our Anti-Slavery Campaign has earned national and international recognition, based on its innovative program of worker-led investigation and human rights education, and a track record of real success. Our latest victory against indentured servitude came in December of 2008, when employers César and Geovanni Navarrete were sentenced to 12 years each in federal prison for their part in what US Attorney Doug Molloy called “slavery, plain and simple.” This was the seventh major servitude case since 1997 (of a total of nine such operations during that period to have been successfully prosecuted) in which the CIW played a key role in the discovery, investigation, and prosecution of the operation, helping to liberate a total of well over 1,000 workers.

The CIW is a co-founder of the national Freedom Network USA to Empower Enslaved and Trafficked Persons. We are also co-founders and Southeastern US Regional Coordinator for the Freedom Network Training Institute, conducting trainings for law enforcement and social service personnel in how to identify and assist slavery victims, as well as advocating for the full prosecution of all traffickers, including corporations and their sub-contractors. At the state level, we are members of the US Attorney’s Anti-Trafficking Task Forces for Tampa and Miami, as well as Florida State University’s statewide Working Group against Human Trafficking through its Center for the Advancement of Human Rights. In June 2010, CIW’s Anti-Slavery Campaign Coordinator Laura Germino was recognized as a Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery by the US Department of State for “determination to eliminate forced labor in supply chains” – the first time that the recognition was awarded to a US citizen.

The Campaign for Fair Food

In 2001, we turned a new page in our organizing, launching the first-ever farmworker boycott of a major fast-food company – the national boycott of Taco Bell – calling on the fast-food giant to take responsibility for human rights abuses in the fields where its produce is grown and picked. The corporate food industry as a
whole – including corporations such as Ahold USA, Kroger, Publix, Trader Joe’s and Wal-Mart – purchases a tremendous volume of fruits and vegetables, leveraging its buying power to demand the lowest possible prices from its suppliers, in turn exerting a powerful downward pressure on wages and working conditions in these suppliers’ operations.

Over its four years, the Taco Bell boycott gained broad student, religious, labor, and community support, including the establishment of boycott committees in nearly all 50 states and a fast-growing movement to “Boot the Bell” from college and high school campuses across the country. Large scale national actions also helped move the boycott forward.

In March 2005, amidst this growing pressure, Taco Bell agreed to meet all of our demands to improve wages and working conditions for Florida tomato pickers in its supply chain. The boycott victory was widely celebrated by observers including the 21 members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, who said of the accord, “This is a truly historic agreement, marking perhaps the single greatest advance for farm workers since the early struggles of the United Farm Workers. To the workers and organizers of CIW, we express our deepest gratitude for their determined work for their own dignity and their historic contribution to advancing the cause of labor rights.”

Following the successful conclusion of the Taco Bell boycott, the national network of allies that had helped carry that campaign to victory consolidated to form the Alliance for Fair Food, signaling the corporate food industry that the Campaign for Fair Food would not stop at Taco Bell. The AFF has become a powerful new voice for the respect of human rights in this country’s food industry and for an end to the relentless exploitation of Florida’s farmworkers.

In April of 2007 – in the culmination of a two-year battle with the largest restaurant chain in the world, McDonald’s – the Campaign for Fair Food took an important new step forward. With an announcement at the Carter Center in Atlanta, McDonald’s and the CIW reached a landmark accord that not only met the standards set in the Taco Bell agreement, but also committed the fast-food leader to collaborate with the CIW in developing an industry-wide third party mechanism for monitoring conditions in the fields and investigating abuses.

Following a persistent, year-long campaign, Burger King became the third fast food giant to agree to work with the CIW. Later that year, the campaign broke new ground with its first agreement in the supermarket industry when leading organic foods retailer Whole Foods agreed to do the same. By the end of 2008, Subway, the largest fast food purchaser of Florida tomatoes, had also come to the table.

We then turned our focus to the food service provider industry, and agreements with Bon Appétit Management Co., Compass Group, Aramark and Sodexo followed in 2009-2010.

**Immokalee Today: Nothing is Impossible...**

In late 2010, we signed an agreement with the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange to extend the CIW’s Fair Food principles – including a strict code of conduct, a cooperative complaint resolution system, a participatory health and safety program, and a worker-to-worker education process – to over 90% of the Florida tomato industry. This watershed moment ended a 15-year impasse and followed the establishment, just weeks earlier, of two direct agreements between the CIW and two of the largest growers in the industry, Pacific and Six L’s.

As a result of these agreements, we are on the cusp today of an unprecedented transformation of farm labor conditions in Florida’s tomato fields, but the pace, depth and breadth of that transformation will ultimately depend on the participation of all the major purchasers of Florida’s tomatoes.

Despite widespread support for the innovative, collaborative solution at the heart of the Campaign for Fair Food, the supermarket industry (with the lone exception of Whole Foods) has yet to do its part, and is thus the only remaining obstacle in the way of long-awaited, urgent change in the fields.

Over the past several years, through the Campaign for Fair Food and our anti-slavery work, Immokalee has evolved from being one of the poorest, most politically powerless communities in the country to become today an important public presence with forceful, committed leadership directly from the base of our community – young, migrant workers forging a future of livable wages and modern labor relations in Florida’s fields.

In recognition of their work, three CIW members were presented the prestigious Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, the first and only time the award had gone to a US-based organization. In recent years, the CIW and the Campaign for Fair Food have also been recognized as 2010 “People of the Year” by the Ft. Myers (FL) News-Press and by the 2009 Salem Award for Human Rights and Social Justice; the 2008 Sister Margaret Cafferty Development of People Award by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development; the 2007 Anti-Slavery Award by Anti-Slavery International (the oldest international human rights organization in the world); World Hunger Year’s 2006 Harry Chapin Self-Reliance Award; the Freedom Network’s 2006 Wellstone Award; and the Business Ethics Network’s 2005 BENNY Award.
SELECTED NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF THE CIW AND ITS MEMBERS

• **2010 Trafficking in Persons Hero Award, U.S. Department of State.** On the occasion of the State Department's release of the 10th annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, which for the first time included the United States in its rankings. In recognition of “perseverance against slavery operations in the U.S. agricultural industry” and “determination to eliminate forced labor in supply chains.”

• **2010 People of the Year, Fort Myers (FL) News-Press,** in recognition of the CIW’s “years of groundbreaking advocacy” and “landmark efforts, which have far-ranging implications beyond Southwest Florida.”

• **2010 Adela Dwyer-St. Thomas of Villanova Peace Award,** Villanova University, Center for Peace & Justice Education.

• **2009 Benny Award,** Business Ethics Network, for outstanding contribution to corporate ethics.

• **2007 Anti-Slavery Award,** Anti-Slavery International of London (world’s oldest human rights organization) for exceptional contribution towards tackling modern-day slavery in the U.S. agricultural industry.

• **2006 Paul and Sheila Wellstone Award,** Freedom Network USA, for outstanding contributions to combating human trafficking and modern-day slavery in the U.S.

• **2005 Letter of Commendation** from F.B.I. Director Robert Mueller.

• **2005 Benny Award,** Business Ethics Network, for outstanding contribution to corporate ethics.

• **2005 Harry Chapin Self-Reliance Award,** World Hunger Year, for leadership in the fight against poverty.

• **2003 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award,** RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights.

• **2002 NOW Woman of Courage Award,** National Organization for Women.

• **1999 Grand Prize Brick Award,** Rolling Stone magazine and Do Something Foundation.

• **1998 Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award,** Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

TOMATO INDUSTRY PARTNERS

• Florida Tomato Growers Exchange
• Pacific Tomato Growers
• Six L's Packing Company

CORPORATE PARTNERS

• Yum Brands, Inc. (Taco Bell, KFC, Pizza Hut)
• McDonald’s Corporation
• Burger King Corporation
• Subway  
• Whole Foods Market  
• Bon Appetit Management Company  
• Compass Group  
• Aramark  
• Sodexo

SELECTED ANTI-SLAVERY PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

• Legislature-appointed member, Florida Statewide Task Force on Human Trafficking  
• Southeastern US Regional Coordinator, Freedom Network Training Institute on Human Trafficking  
• Florida Dept. of Law Enforcement (FDLE), curriculum for Advanced Investigative Techniques in Human Trafficking  
• Collier County Sheriff’s Department Anti-Trafficking Unit  
• US Attorney’s Anti-Trafficking Task Forces, Tampa and Miami districts  
• International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), roll-call video and guidebook  
• National Sheriff’s Association, guidebook  
• Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I), Supervisory Special Agents In-Service trainings  
• North Carolina State Troopers Training Academy, training  
• Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Vienna presentation  
• 15th World Congress of Criminology, Barcelona panel  
• U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Anti-Trafficking Unit, Washington, DC

SELECTED MEDIA AND PUBLICATIONS

• Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor and the Dark Side of the New Global Economy, John Bowe, 2007  
• The Slave Next Door, Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter, 2009  
• Wall Street Journal, 2010  
• CBS Evening News, 2010  
• Gourmet magazine, 2009  
• The Independent, U.K., 2008  
• Glamour magazine, 2007  
• PBS NOW with David Brancaccio, 2005  
• New Yorker magazine, 2003  
• National Geographic magazine, 2003

About the Coalition of Immokalee Workers

The CIW (www.ciw-online.org) is a community-based farmworker organization headquartered in Immokalee, Florida, with over 4,000 members. The CIW seeks modern working conditions for farmworkers and promotes their fair treatment in accordance with national and international human rights standards. The CIW’s Campaign for Fair Food has won unprecedented support for fundamental farm labor reforms from retail food industry leaders.
Facts and Figures on Florida Farmworkers

(1) “A labor force in significant economic distress:” In January 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) sent a letter to members of the United States Congress reporting on the stark realities facing agricultural workers. ¹ Entitled The Agricultural Labor Market: Status and Recommendations, the letter described farmworkers as “a labor force in significant economic distress.” The report cited farmworkers’ “low wages, sub-poverty annual earnings, (and) significant periods of un- and underemployment” to support its conclusions.

Other findings from the DOL letter include:

- “Production of fruits and vegetables has increased and global demand for American produce continues to grow, but agricultural worker earnings and working conditions are either stagnant or in decline.”

- “Farm workers not only lost ground relative to other workers in the private sector, they lost ground absolutely.”

According to the 2008 USDA Profile of Hired Farmworkers: “While farmworkers face workplace hazards similar to those found in other industrial settings, such as working with heavy machinery and hard physical labor, they also confront factors more common to agricultural production such as pesticide exposure, sun exposure, inadequate sanitary facilities, and crowded and/or substandard housing.” ²

(2) Farmworkers earn poverty-level wages: According to the same 2008 USDA report, farmworkers remain “among the most economically disadvantaged working groups in the U.S.” and “poverty among farmworkers is more than double that of all wage and salary employees.” ³

The National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) provides a periodic account of hired farmworker salaries. ⁴ The study sample includes wages of managers and supervisors, resulting in a definite upward skewing of the NAWS figures. Nevertheless, the figures still show farmworkers earning at or below poverty level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Farmworker Salary, NAWS 2005</th>
<th>2007 Federal Poverty Guidelines, HHS</th>
<th>Living Wage for Immokalee, FL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>$10,000 – 12,499</td>
<td>$10,210</td>
<td>$18,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>$15,000-17,499</td>
<td>$20,650 (family of four)</td>
<td>$44,993 (family of four)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) No right to overtime or to organize: As a result of intentional exclusion from key New Deal labor reform measures, including the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, farmworkers do not have the right to overtime pay or the right to organize and collectively bargain

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³ Ibid (7).
with their employers. Due to the seasonal and unpredictable nature of agricultural work, therefore, farmworkers face periods of long hours with no overtime pay and yet, “on average, experience rates of unemployment double those of wage and salary workers.”

(4) Thirty years of stagnant piece rates in the tomato harvest: Tomato pickers often toil 10-12 hour days in grueling conditions and earn no benefits whatsoever. Like textile workers at the turn of the last century, tomato harvesters are still paid by the piece.

The average piece rate today is 50 cents for every 32-lb bucket of tomatoes they pick, a rate that has remained virtually stagnant for more than three decades. At the current rate, a worker must pick more than 2.25 tons of tomatoes to earn minimum wage in a typical 10-hour workday—nearly twice the amount a worker had to pick to earn minimum wage thirty years ago.

To put this into perspective, if the 1980 piece rate of 40 cents per 32-lb bucket had simply kept up with inflation, it would equal $1.06/bucket in 2010. Thus, in real terms, per bucket, tomato pickers today actually earn about half of what they earned 30 years ago.

(5) Modern-day slavery: In the most extreme conditions, farmworkers are held against their will and forced to work for little or no pay, facing conditions that meet the stringent legal standards for prosecution under modern-day slavery statutes. Federal Civil Rights officials have successfully prosecuted seven slavery operations involving over 1,000 workers in Florida’s fields since 1997, prompting one federal prosecutor to call Florida “ground zero for modern-day slavery.” In 2010, federal prosecutors indicted two more forced labor rings operating in Florida.

A Sample Workday for a Florida Tomato Picker

4:30 AM: Wake up. Prepare lunch in your trailer.

5:00 AM: Walk to the parking lot or pick-up site to begin looking for work.

6:30 AM: With luck, a contractor will choose you to work for him for the day. The job may be 10 miles to 100 miles away. Board the contractor’s converted school bus to go to the fields.

7:30 AM: Arrive at fields and begin weeding or simply waiting while the dew evaporates from the tomatoes. You are usually not paid for this time.

9:00 AM: Begin picking tomatoes – filling buckets, hoisting them on your shoulder, running them 100 feet or more to the truck and throwing the bucket up into the truck – all for a token worth, on average, 50 cents. Work fast because you must pick 2.5 tons of tomatoes in order to earn minimum wage today. This may or may not be possible depending on the time of year and quantity of tomatoes on the plants.

12:00 PM: Eat lunch as fast as you can, often with your hands soaked in pesticides. Return to work under the smoldering Florida sun.

5:00 PM (sometimes much later, depending on the season): Board bus to return to Immokalee.

Between 5:30 and 8:00 PM: Arrive in Immokalee and walk home.

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7 http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl
Slavery in the Fields and the Food We Eat

In 21st century America, slavery remains woven into the fabric of our daily lives. On any given day, the tomatoes in the sandwiches we eat or the oranges in the juice we drink may have been picked by workers in involuntary servitude. Captive workers are held against their will by their employers through threats, and all too often the actual use of violence.

The CIW's Anti-Slavery Campaign is a worker-based approach to eliminating modern-day slavery in the agricultural industry. The CIW helps fight this crime by uncovering, investigating, and assisting in the federal prosecution of slavery rings preying on hundreds of farmworkers. Through this work, the CIW has brought the abysmal state of human rights in U.S. agriculture today to public light.

**Florida farm labor slavery prosecutions, 1997-2010:**

**U.S. vs. Flores:** In 1997, Miguel Flores and Sebastian Gomez were sentenced to 15 years each in federal prison on slavery, extortion, and firearms charges, amongst others. Flores and Gomez had a workforce of over 400 men and women in Florida and South Carolina, harvesting vegetables and citrus. The workers, mostly indigenous Mexicans and Guatemalans, were forced to work 10-12 hour days, 6 days per week, for as little as $20 per week, under the constant watch of armed guards. Those who attempted escape were assaulted, pistol-whipped, and even shot. The case was brought to federal authorities after five years of investigation by escaped workers and CIW members.

**U.S. vs. Cuello:** In 1999, Abel Cuello was sentenced to 33 months in federal prison on slavery charges. He had held more than 30 tomato pickers in two trailers in the isolated swampland west of Immokalee, keeping them under constant watch. Three workers escaped the camp, only to have their boss track them down a few weeks later. The employer ran one of them down with his car, stating that he owned them. The workers sought help from the CIW and the police, and the CIW worked with the Department of Justice (DOJ) on the ensuing investigation. Cuello worked for Manley Farms North Inc., a major Bonita Springs tomato supplier. Once out of prison, Cuello supplied labor to Ag-Mart Farms, a tomato company operating in Florida and North Carolina.

**U.S. vs. Tecum:** In 2001, Jose Tecum was sentenced to 9 years in federal prison on slavery and kidnapping charges. He forced a young woman to work against her will both in the tomato fields around Immokalee, and in his home. The CIW assisted the DOJ with the prosecution, including victim and witness assistance.

**U.S. vs. Lee:** In 2001, Michael Lee was sentenced to 4 years in federal prison and 3 years supervised release on a slavery conspiracy charge. He pled guilty to using crack cocaine, threats, and violence to enslave his workers. Lee held his workers in forced labor, recruiting homeless US citizens for his operation, creating a “company store” debt through loans for rent, food, cigarettes, and cocaine. He abducted and beat one of his workers to prevent him from leaving his employ. Lee harvested for orange growers in the Fort Pierce, FL area.

**U.S. vs. Ramos:** In 2004, Ramiro and Juan Ramos were sentenced to 15 years each in federal prison on slavery and firearms charges. The men, who had a workforce of over 700 farmworkers in the citrus groves of Florida and in the fields of North Carolina, threatened workers with death if they were to try to leave, and pistol-whipped and assaulted—at gunpoint—passenger van service drivers who gave rides to farmworkers leaving the area. The case was brought to trial by the DOJ after two years of investigation by the CIW. The Ramoses harvested for Consolidated Citrus and Lykes Brothers, among others.

**U.S. vs. Ronald Evans:** In 2007, Florida employer Ron Evans was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison on drug conspiracy, financial re-structuring, and witness tampering charges, among others. His wife Jequita Evans was also sentenced to 20 years, and Ron Evans Jr. to 10 years. Operating in Florida and North Carolina, Ron Evans recruited homeless US citizens from shelters across the Southeast with promises of good jobs and housing. At Palatka, FL
and Newton Grove, NC area labor camps, the Evans' deducted rent, food, crack cocaine and alcohol from workers' pay, holding them “perpetually indebted” in what the DOJ called “a form of servitude morally and legally reprehensible.” The Palatka labor camp was surrounded by a chain link fence topped with barbed wire, with a No Trespassing sign. The CIW and a Miami-based homeless outreach organization began the investigation and reported the case to federal authorities in 2003. In Florida, Ron Evans worked for grower Frank Johns. Johns was 2004 Chairman of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, the powerful lobbying arm of the Florida agricultural industry. As of 2007, he remained the Chairman of the FFVA's Budget and Finance Committee.

**U.S. vs. Navarrete:** In December 2008, employers Cesar and Geovanni Navarrete were sentenced to 12 years each in federal prison on charges of conspiracy, holding workers in involuntary servitude, and peonage. They had employed dozens of tomato pickers in Florida and South Carolina. As stated in the DOJ press release on the farm bosses’ conviction, “[the employers] 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 to the Navarretes.” Workers first reported the abuse to Collier County police, and additional workers sought help from the CIW. The CIW collaborated with the DOJ and the police on the year-long investigation and prosecution.

**US vs. Bontemps:** In July 2010, Cabioch Bontemps, Carline Ceneus, and Willy Edouard were indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of conspiracy to commit forced labor. DOJ officials accuse the three of holding over 50 guestworkers from Haiti against their will in the beanfields of Alachua County, Florida. The indictment states that Bontemps raped one of the workers in his employ and threatened her if she were to report it. The employers held the workers’ passports and visas, and forced them to work in fields recently sprayed with harsh pesticides, causing permanent scarring. The grower, Steven Davis, asked the judge during the court hearing to release Bontemps since he was key to the harvesting operation. “All these people [the workers] look up to him,” Davis said. “All these people respect him. All these people worship him.” As of September 2010, the prosecution is ongoing. The CIW trained local law enforcement and church groups shortly before the workers were rescued, and assisted in referring the case to the DOJ.

**US vs. Global Horizons:** In September 2010, staff of guestworker recruiting giant Global Horizons were charged with operating a forced labor ring active in 13 states, including Florida. Global Horizons President Mordechai Orian and six others are accused of holding hundreds of guestworkers from Thailand against their will, in what prosecutors call “the largest human trafficking case in US history.” FBI Special Agent Tom Simon described the latest case as “a classic bait-and-switch what they were doing. They were telling the Thai workers one thing to lure them here. Then when they got here, their passports were taken away and they were held in forced servitude working in these farms.” The prosecution is ongoing, with more details to emerge about the various states workers lived in and what crops they picked.

It must be stated that these situations are not the norm in agriculture today. Rather, modern-day slavery occurs along a continuum of systemic abuse that can best be described as “sweatshop” conditions, including sub-poverty wages, no right to overtime pay, and no right to organize. The CIW believes that the ultimate solution to modern-day slavery in agribusiness lies on the “demand side” of the US produce market – the major food-buying corporations that profit from the artificially-low cost of US produce picked by workers in sweatshop conditions which, in the worst cases, tip over into slavery. **Ultimately, these corporations must leverage their vast resources and market influence as major produce buyers to clean up slavery and other labor abuses in their supply chains once and for all.**

The CIW is a founding member of the national Freedom Network USA to Empower Victims of Slavery and Trafficking. As a regional coordinator for the Freedom Network Training Institute on Human Trafficking, the CIW trains state and federal law enforcement and social services personnel throughout the Southeastern US on how to recognize and assist enslaved people. The CIW’s anti-slavery efforts have gained national and international recognition, including the 2003 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, a 2005 letter of commendation from FBI Director Robert Mueller, and the 2007 Anti-Slavery Award by Anti-Slavery International of London, the world's oldest international human rights organization. In June 2010, CIW’s Anti-Slavery Campaign Coordinator Laura Germino was recognized as a Trafficking in Persons Hero by the U.S. Department of State – the first time ever that the recognition was awarded to a resident of the United States.
Human Trafficking: Not Someone Else's Problem

Greg Kaufmann: For the First Time, the US Includes Itself in a Report on Nations with Human Trafficking

(The Nation) Greg Kaufmann is a contributor to The Nation.

In the ornate Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room at the US State Department—before a standing-room-only crowd that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described as "one of the biggest we’ve had here"—Clinton recognized Laura Germino, the antislavery campaign coordinator for the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), as an "anti-Trafficking Hero." In the ten years that the award has been given to individuals who have shown an extraordinary commitment and leadership in the fight against slavery, Germino is the first US-based recipient.

The occasion was the release of the State Department’s 10th Annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. Clinton said the report provides "in-depth assessments and recommendations for 177 countries” on how to reach the goal of "abolishing the illicit trade in human beings.” In another first, the report includes an assessment of trafficking in the United States.

It reads in part that "the United States is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced labor, debt bondage and forced prostitution. Trafficking occurs primarily for labor and most commonly in domestic servitude, agriculture, manufacturing, janitorial services, hotel services, construction, health and elder care, hair and nail salons, and strip club dancing….” More investigations and prosecutions have taken place for sex trafficking offenses than for labor trafficking offenses, but law
enforcement identified a comparatively higher number of labor trafficking victims as such cases often involve more victims.”

Clinton described the significance of including the United States in the TIP report.

"This report sends a clear message to all of our countrymen and women: human trafficking is not someone else’s problem,” she said. "Involuntary servitude is not something we can ignore or hope doesn’t exist in our own community.”

Ambassador-at-Large Luis CdeBaca, a longtime federal prosecutor and now director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking, agreed. "In our first Trafficking in Persons Report, we cited the US only as a destination or transit country, oblivious to the reality that we, too, are a source country for people held in servitude,” he said. “We have an involuntary servitude problem now just as we always have throughout history.”

Which is exactly why Germino was honored along with eight other activists from Brazil, Burundi, Hungary, India, Jordan, Mauritania, Mongolia and Uzbekistan. Germino and her colleagues at CIW have helped the US Department of Justice prosecute seven slavery operations in Florida over the last fifteen years, resulting in the liberation of over 1,000 farmworkers, as the plaque presented to Germino attests.

CdeBaca introduced Germino who spoke on behalf of all of the TIP Heroes. "In the early 1990s, Laura began to not just give a voice to escaped slaves, but traveled to Washington on her own dime to hold the federal government accountable to investigate and prosecute these cases. And when I say ‘federal government,’ I mean me,” he laughed. "There have been many cases exposing servitude for both sex and labor in Florida. And the Coalition of the Immokalee Workers and Laura Germino have always been there. They’ve been important partners and, more importantly, an independent and pressing voice as they uncover slavery rings, tap the power of the workers, and hold companies and governments accountable.”

Holding companies accountable was a theme not only voiced by CdeBaca but also Clinton-and not just the primary perpetrators of slavery but the corporations that use those companies in their supply chains. That concept has been the driving force behind CIW’s Campaign for Fair Food, demanding that companies take responsibility for the conditions of their supply chain in order to alleviate the poverty and powerlessness at the root of the agriculture industry. It is the central argument CIW has waged in successfully obtaining pay raises and enforceable code of conduct
agreements from the four largest fast food companies in the world, the two largest food service companies, and the largest organic grocer. (Watch out Publix and other grocers, you’re next.)

So when the Secretary spoke these words-"It is everyone’s responsibility. Businesses that knowingly profit or exhibit reckless disregard about their supply chains…all of us have to speak out and act forcefully”-you could almost feel the chills traveling up the spines of the hundreds of activists from all over the world who packed the room. Some broke into grins, cameras flashed.

“Now you have Secretary of State Clinton saying we need to have corporate responsibility in the supply chain,” Germino later told me. “That’s huge. We have to get to the point of prevention where slavery doesn’t happen anymore, and right now the most effective way to get that done is through market consequences. Any corporate buyer of fruits and vegetables who still is not willing to take ownership of this issue has no excuses left.”

When Germino took the stage she thanked the other award recipients for their “unflagging courage and grace and progress made under extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances in which you work overseas.” She pledged that together they would continue “our collective fight to wipe slavery off the face of this earth.”

She delivered a hopeful message in citing the progress that has already been made.

“Twenty years ago, there was no State Department TIP Report. There was no Justice Department Anti-Trafficking Unit. There was no Trafficking Victims Protection Act, no freedom network of NGOs,” she said. “There was no admission yet by this great nation that the unbroken threat of slavery that has so tragically woven through our history, taking on different patterns, but always weaving the horrendous depravation of liberty-that it was a constant…. So when we struggle with our frustration at the pace of change, we remember those days and realize how far things have come in such a short time.”

With a nod to the Secretary, Germino offered that “it takes a village to raise a child; it takes a whole community to fight slavery.”

Germino recognized her colleagues at CIW-and that wasn’t just lip service. In many years of working for and covering NGOs, I’ve never seen one that operates so efficiently as a collective-in the decisions they make, the actions they take, the wages they earn, and the shared credit for victories. CIW simply doesn’t distinguish its parts from the whole.
I think that’s a key reason this community-based organization in tiny Immokalee, Florida is able to have such a powerful national impact. It’s why parked outside of the State Department during the ceremony-and on the National Mall today and tomorrow-was CIW’s Modern Day Slavery Museum. And it’s why one of CIW’s many heroes found herself standing in the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room, hearing the central tenets of CIW’s fight against slavery echoed by the US Secretary of State.

By Greg Kaufmann:
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