



August 31, 2007

Mr. John Chidsey, CEO
Burger King Holdings Inc.
5505 Blue Lagoon Drive
Miami, FL 33126

Mr. Chidsey:

We have come to Burger King headquarters today to bring you a message on behalf of the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA). We represent many thousands of young consumers at dozens of communities and high school, college and university campuses across the U.S. who are organizing in partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to advance justice and human rights for farmworkers and our dignity as consumers and youth. We are also members of national organizations such as United Students Against Sweatshops, Student Labor Action Project, United Students for Fair Trade, Student Action with Farmworkers, Student Environmental Action Coalition, and MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlan).

We are here today because our patience is wearing thin. For over two years, you have been given the opportunity to work with the CIW and take responsibility for the extreme poverty and degradation faced by thousands of women and men who harvest tomatoes for your hamburgers, poverty to which Burger King's tomato purchasing practices have contributed directly.

While Burger King continues to stand in the way of progress, workers face sweatshop conditions every day in the fields, including:

- Sub-poverty wages: Tomato pickers earn, on average, \$10,000/year;
- No raise in nearly 30 years: Pickers are paid virtually the same per-bucket piece rate today as they were in 1980. At the going rate, workers have to pick nearly 2 TONS of tomatoes in one day just to earn \$50;
- Denial of fundamental labor rights: Florida farmworkers have no right to overtime pay and no right to organize or bargain collectively.

In the most extreme cases, workers face conditions of modern-day slavery.

Today, both Yum Brands, the largest restaurant company in the world, and McDonald's, the largest restaurant chain in the world, are working with the CIW to improve conditions in the fields that supply their tomatoes. These changes came after years of relentless campaigning by farmworkers and their allies, including countless students and young people who engaged in coordinated national actions, hunger strikes, innumerable educational events, and the removal or prevention of 22 Taco Bell restaurants from high schools and colleges. We are here today to tell you that we are ready to take similar action against Burger King should you continue your current unconscionable course.

When Taco Bell was the only major chain to raise its standards, Burger King's defense was to claim that it is simply not possible to institute those same principles in your supply chain. Now that McDonald's has joined with Taco Bell, Burger King's "defense" can no longer be considered serious. Your company has continued to opt for the low road, resorting to lies and half-baked excuses to avoid taking responsibility. We are almost as disappointed by these transparent maneuvers as we are angered with the myriad of marketing schemes you roll out in a futile attempt to gain our loyalty and posit your company as "the King of cool" (USA Today, 2/07).

While Burger King profits from brutal exploitation in Florida's fields, you were recently found to be one of the highest-paid CEO's in the Miami area and your company has posted record profits.

Your unilateral “response” to the CIW earlier this year was a brazen affront to the people who break their backs every day to harvest your tomatoes and an insult to the intelligence of consumers everywhere. Burger King actually suggested that it would eliminate farmworker poverty by eliminating farmworkers – offering to “retrain” them to work in your restaurants. Further, you offered to make monetary contributions to Immokalee-based charities. Farmworkers who perform such a vital job to your company and the economy of this country do not need to be “re-trained” and do not need charity. Although the CIW rejected this “offer” from the moment it was announced, you still insist on making the libelous claim that the CIW “requested Burger King write a check to the organization” (University Daily Kansan, 8/07).

Adding insult to injury, Burger King recently announced an initiative to improve the humane treatment of farm animals in its supply chain, after which Burger King Vice President Steve Grover ironically declared, “We want to be doing things long before they become a concern for consumers... Like a hockey player, we want to be there before the puck gets there.” (New York Times, 3/07). In other words, Burger King recognizes the influence that comes with its bulk purchasing power and strives to be a leader in social responsibility when the well-being of farm animals is in question, but not that of farmworkers.

Clearly, Burger King's position is untenable. Perhaps you're hoping to hide the reality of the exploitation in your food behind your slick marketing. Today, however, we declare that no amount of video games, big-headed mascots, Hollywood tie-ins, or advertisements featuring Puffy are going to fool us or dissuade us from our tenacious and proven partnership with farmworkers. You implore us to “Have it Your Way,” but we're not havin' it.

Mr. Chidsey, we implore you to stop colluding with the backward Florida tomato industry and start listening to the increasing chorus of your consumers, including your youth target demographic, calling on Burger King to truly work with the CIW. Your recent responses to the CIW have not only proven to be dismal failures, but have actually been destructive, serving to give comfort to growers who, for the first time in decades, are under pressure to institute real labor reforms in the wake of the historic Yum and McDonald's agreements.

As a result of your actions, your company now stands on the brink of a protracted conflict. Your only exit is to work directly with the CIW to ensure fairer wages and real rights for farmworkers. We firmly believe these changes are inevitable. The question is simply how long will it take.

We would like nothing more than for the myriad plans we make this weekend as members of the SFA network gather in Immokalee to be for naught; but if necessary, you can be sure that you will hear from us again soon. You will hear from us in November at the national protest planned for Burger King's annual shareholders meeting here in Miami. And you will hear from us from Austin to New York, from southern Texas to Minnesota, from classrooms to the doorsteps of your restaurants. Exactly what happens next is your decision to make.

Sincerely,

Student/Farmworker Alliance

cc: Steve Grover, Vice President for food safety, quality assurance and regulatory compliance
cc: Steve Ells, CEO, Chipotle Mexican Grill