Dear Governor Crist,

In December of last year, federal prosecutors from the Department of Justice wrapped up yet another farm labor slavery case in Florida, a case the Chief Assistant US Attorney called “one of Southwest Florida’s ‘biggest and ugliest slavery cases ever,’” according to the Ft. Myers News-Press. I am writing today to demand that you use every resource at your command to ensure that it be the last slavery case ever in Florida’s fields.

This latest case – in which, according to court documents, workers were chained to poles, locked inside trucks, beaten, and robbed of their pay – was the seventh such case in just over a decade. Indeed, so shameful is Florida’s record of farm labor abuse that another federal prosecutor was prompted to call the state “ground zero for modern-day slavery” in the pages of the New Yorker magazine. Yet, when a reporter called your office for a comment on the most recent case, you declined to comment and instead passed the call off to the spokesperson for Florida’s Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Terrence McElroy, who gave the impression that one slavery case per year is somehow no cause for alarm. Given an opportunity to clarify his statement, Mr. McElroy only underscored his disregard for the victims of this most brutal of human rights violations, terming seven slavery cases in ten years, involving well over 1,000 workers, a “rarity.” His comments rightly set off a groundswell of outraged reactions by human rights, religious, consumer, and labor organizations and leaders across the country.

Governor Crist, even a single case of slavery in the twenty-first century is too many. As the leader of the state and the single most powerful voice for the protection of every Floridian’s fundamental human rights, you must repudiate the words of your spokesperson, and do so with no further delay.

But you must do more than that. The key to ending farm labor slavery is to eliminate the degrading and inhumane working conditions faced by all Florida’s farmworkers on a daily basis, as these conditions are what allow slavery to flourish. The everyday exploitation of Florida’s farmworkers includes:

- **Sub-poverty wages** - Tomato pickers make, on average, only $10,000/year;
- **No raise in nearly 30 years** - Pickers are paid virtually the same per bucket piece rate (roughly 45 cents per 32 lb. bucket) today as they were in 1980. At today’s rate, workers have to pick nearly 2.5 TONS of tomatoes just to earn minimum wage for a typical 10-hr day;
- **Denial of fundamental labor rights** - Farmworkers in Florida have no right to overtime pay, even when working 60-70 hour weeks, and no right to organize or bargain collectively.

You must do everything in your power to ensure an end to those conditions and help lay the groundwork for a future of dignified wages and humane working conditions for farmworkers. Specifically, I join my voice to that of thousands of other concerned consumers of Florida produce to call upon you to:

1. Publicly condemn the existence of modern-day slavery in Florida;
2. Commit the full power of your office to immediately and comprehensively address the plague of abuse and modern-day slavery in Florida’s fields by:
   a) meeting with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and federal officials who prosecute slavery, and
   b) demanding that the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange renounce its opposition to implementing the agreements that socially responsible fast food and supermarket companies have signed to insure better pay and working conditions for tomato pickers, so as to eliminate the conditions that give rise to slavery.

Thank you,
Name City, State, Zip