

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 18, 2008

Reggie Brown
Executive Vice President
Florida Tomato Growers Exchange
800 Trafalgar Court, Suite 300
Maitland, FL 32751

Dear Mr. Brown:

We write asking the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange to participate in a proposed initiative to increase the piece rate for tomato workers. Recent reports suggest that the per bushel piece rate that farm workers in Immokalee, Florida, are paid has not increased in the past two decades. Reports also indicate that slavery cases have been successfully prosecuted against individuals in the region's tomato industry. In addition, we have heard firsthand that living conditions of local workers are among the worst in the agriculture industry.

In light of these concerns, we support recent industry actions to increase the piece rate paid to these workers. Both McDonald's Corporation and Yum! Brands have taken important steps to providing the region's farm workers with an additional penny per pound of tomatoes harvested. Such an increase would have a meaningful effect for these workers.


Recent actions taken by your organization demonstrate that the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange is actively opposed to the penny-per-pound program. It is alarming to hear that the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange has threatened its individual grower members with legal action and fines of up to \$100,000 per offense should they participate in the penny-per-pound program.


We can find no legitimate reason for the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange to take such an uncompromising position against the penny-per-pound program. Your expressed concern that the penny-per-pound program violates antitrust law does not hold up to even minimal legal scrutiny. The direct and administrative costs of implementing the program would be borne by tomato buyers rather than tomato growers, and would thus not affect the profit margins of your growers. Furthermore, the experiences of McDonald's Corporation and Yum! Brands in setting up appropriate mechanisms to pay workers indicate that the logistical challenges of the program are not insurmountable.

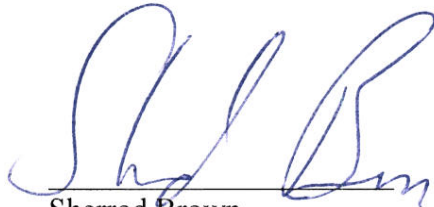
According to your website, the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange is, "leading a progressive movement in support of long-term comprehensive solutions that improve the lives of farm workers and their families". The position you've taken with regard to the penny-per-pound program is a glaring contradiction of this assertion.

We respectfully request that you inform us in writing of your position on this matter within ten days. Thank your for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Richard J Durbin
United States Senator


Bernie Sanders
United States Senator


Sherrod Brown
United States Senator