Inexpensive Food, High Cost

Do you ever think about the near miracle it is to enjoy a delicious meal? When we say a prayer of grace, we can also pray for all those responsible for bringing that food to our plate. Oftentimes, an exploited farmworker was involved.

A History of Exploitation

- In 1997, 400 male and female indigenous Mexicans and Guatemalans farmworkers, were forced to work 10-12 hour days, 6 days per week, for as little as $20 per week. Armed guards assaulted those who attempted escape.
- In 2008, dozens of farmworkers reported being forced into servitude, and peonage. They were beaten, threatened, restrained, and locked in trucks as they were forced to work as agricultural laborers. They were paid minimum wages and threatened with physical injury if they attempted to leave before their debts, they were forced to take on, were repaid.
- In 2010, six hundred guest workers from Thailand were held against their will in what is called “the largest human trafficking case in U.S. history.” Thai workers were being lured to work in the U.S. Once they arrived, their passports were confiscated and immediately forced into servitude as farm workers.

These are some of cases that have been brought to justice. However, in Florida, millions of tomatoes are harvested by documented and undocumented farmworkers who are paid by the pound; $0.50 for every 32 pound bucket of tomatoes that are shipped all around the U.S. Unlike most employees who may receive an annual cost of living adjustment, farmworkers wages have not changed in 30 years!

Success Story: The Fair Food Program

Established in 1993, The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is internationally recognized for its achievements in the fields of corporate social responsibility, community organizing, and sustainable food.

As a leader in the growing movement of Food Justice, CIW has instituted the Fair Food Program (FFP) a unique partnership among workers, growers, and retail purchasers that monitors and enforces the worker-designed Fair Food Code of Conduct.

- FFP empowers consumers to eliminate labor exploitation of farm workers by urging retail food companies to comply with Food Justice Standards through humane wages and working conditions for the workers who pick fruits and vegetables on participating farms.
- FFP includes the participation of 90% of Florida’s tomato growers who support the wage increase and are required that a human-rights-based Code of Conduct to be implemented on the farms that grow their tomatoes.

“The Fair Food Program is a smart mix of tools. We are eager to see the Fair Food Program... serve as a model elsewhere in the world.”

- United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights
Fair Food Program Transforms Florida Labor Fields

Through a partnership with the Fair Food Program (FFP), Florida’s workplaces are now rooted in mutual respect and basic human dignity for farmworkers. Improvements include:

- Mandating shade tents for the workers to escape from the sun
- Growers must clock in workers as soon as they arrived to the fields
- Farms must have a health and safety committee
- Workers can receive an extra $60 - $80 per week with the additional 1 penny/pound
- Zero tolerance for forced labor
- Educates and empowers workers to serve as monitors
- Workers learn to identify and expose slavery operations
- A 24-hour hotline for workers
- Encourages growers’ participation to actively police their own operations

Fair Food Campaign Agreements with “Big Food”

The Fair Food Campaign has won agreements with the following multi-billion dollar food retailers:

- Walmart
- McDonald’s
- Burger King
- Subway
- Taco Bell
- Chipotle
- Trader Joe’s
- Whole Foods
- Bon Appetit
- Sodexo
- Compass Group
- Aramark

What You Can Do

1. Support and advocate for the Fair Food Program to strengthen and expand it to workers in other crops and states. Click here to find a place in your area: http://bit.ly/SupportFairFood

2. Urge Publix Super Markets, a major U.S. chain, to join the FFP. They continue to buy tomatoes from growers where workers are not protected from labor exploitation and are exposed to modern slavery: http://bit.ly/PublixSuperMarkets

3. Deliver a letter Wendy’s, the only one left of the 5 largest fast food corporations who has refused to join the FFP: http://bit.ly/WendysFFP


7. Learn about the marches and actions that have taken place: http://bit.ly/CIWmarches

Thank you to these companies for their corporate social responsibility. Agreements are often regional. The next step is to help these agreements spread to different states and to enlist other large corporate buyers.