



Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida

Partnering people of faith with farmworkers to cultivate justice in the fields

NEWSLETTER

FALL HARVEST 2011

A harvest like none before

Dear Interfaith Action supporter,

In southwest Florida, this time each season our communities dramatically transform as cherished friends and neighbors -- both "snowbirds" as well as harvesters -- return. In Immokalee, the rapid influx of arrivals from up north signifies the start of our nation's fresh tomato harvest -- but this year is unlike any before it! As the CIW's accords with 90% of Florida tomato farms take root, there is truly a new dawn breaking in the Sunshine State's fields!

Yet, Publix -- the omnipresent grocery chain and largest corporation in Florida -- continues to reject the CIW's Fair Food agreements, accords that lift wages and enact broad new rights in what the New York Times praised as "possibly the most successful labor action in the U.S. in 20 years." While the nation's largest fast-food and food-service retailers have committed to breaking ties with farms that violate the debuting Fair Food Code of Conduct, major supermarkets are carefully eyeing the Southeast U.S.'s dominant grocer Publix -- based

in the very state where federal officials have prosecuted nine agricultural slavery cases since 1997.

Publix's refusal to buy only from farms that comply with the new Fair Food Code of Conduct threatens to undermine the prevailing call for human rights in the fields; simply put, Publix offers a market for exploitation-tainted tomatoes, and inspires other grocers to follow suit.

With your help -- spiritually, physically, financially, or any combination thereof -- Interfaith Action will work hard this season to convince the supermarket industry to be part of the solution to injustices in the fields, rather than the persisting problem. We warmly invite you to join us -- perhaps with even greater fervor than ever before -- as we witness the inception of a more modern, more humane agricultural industry.

This Thanksgiving, we want to convey our gratitude to all of you who have made this historic season possible as well as for those of you who are newly



The Rev. Bill Klossner and CIW member Wilson Perez join in prayer for Publix at Congregational United Church in Punta Gorda

joining us in compelling the supermarket industry -- and that means Publix -- to embrace a more ethical tomato supply.

Lastly, this season we must bid farewell to our brilliant colleague Brigitte Gynther as she at last leaves Immokalee after nearly a decade of spearheading faith-based efforts in the Campaign for Fair Food. She is taking her remarkable talents and unquenchable passion for justice to Guatemala, and while she will surely be sorely missed, we are overjoyed at this important next chapter in the life of an exceptional friend, ally and co-worker.

for Interfaith Action,
Jordan Buckley

The Fair Food Code of Conduct

Today, for the first time, there is hope for real, durable respect for human rights in Florida's fields thanks to the changes we have won together.

Indeed, because of the combined efforts of thousands of workers from Immokalee, tens of thousands of Fair Food activists across the country, several of the state's largest tomato growers, and nine multi-billion dollar food industry leaders, we stand today on the threshold of an unprecedented transformation in agricultural labor conditions in Florida.

Last November, the CIW and the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange signed an agreement 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 Florida's tomato fields this season. These changes impact an estimated 33,000 workers and include:

Worker Education: The CIW will educate farmworkers on the Fair Food Code of Conduct, their new rights in the fields, and how to report problems that arise. These trainings take place at the company, as part of the work day, so that company support for the new Code is a clear part of the message.

Pay Increase: Growers will pass on the Fair Food Premium (penny-per-pound) from participating major buyers of tomatoes (Subway, McDonald's, Whole Foods, etc.) to farmworkers in their paychecks. The penny-per-pound bonus is reflected as a line item in the paycheck that workers can see. Growers will be audited to verify correct distribution of the wage increase.

Clocking-in: The Code of Conduct requires a reliable mechanism to keep track of farmworkers' hours and requires payment of workers for all the hours they are on the job. In the past, farmworkers normally would get up at around 5 am to be picked up for work at 6 am, only to spend several hours waiting in the fields without pay. Not only does that enable workers to get sufficient sleep, but parents are now able to be with their children and get them ready for school.

No More Over-filling of Buckets: Until now, it was standard practice for workers to have to overfill their buckets-- which meant upwards of 10% of each worker's labor was going unpaid. Now, farmworkers need only fill the bucket to the top in order for the bucket to be paid.

Report Abuses without Fear: Farmworkers now have the right to report abuses or violations of the Code of Conduct -- to the CIW, to a third-party, or to the farm itself -- confidentially and without fear of retaliation from their bosses. This includes instances of sexual harassment, violence, wage theft, and discrimination. Abuses reported by workers trigger an investigation and enforcement process to fix the problem and hold violators accountable.



These changes -- and more, including shade in the fields and nascent health and safety committees -- constitute the first real, tangible labor reforms in the modern history of Florida agriculture. And with the support of the 9 major corporations creating real market consequences for companies that violate these rights, they represent a bridge between a history of shameful farm labor exploitation and a future of more modern, more humane working conditions in Florida's fields.

The Pilgrimage to Publix: “A modern David vs. Goliath”

For more than two years, Publix has ignored all of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' requests to meet to discuss the grocery giant's potential participation in the Campaign for Fair Food.

So this August, “in a modern David vs. Goliath, Florida farmworkers and faith-based supporters of the Campaign for Fair Food bicycled 200 miles from Immokalee – one

of Florida’s poorest towns – to Lakeland – home of Florida’s largest corporation,” reported Pax Christi USA about the Pilgrimage. The bicyclists’ intention was simple: To deliver an in-person invitation to CEO Ed Crenshaw to visit Immokalee so that he could learn firsthand about the Campaign for Fair Food.

With a beautiful outpouring of support, congregations and people of faith

welcomed them along their journey, nourishing their bodies and spirits at every stop. As the bicyclists arrived in Lakeland, those same faces welcomed them once more—this time, the first workday back after Labor Day, with a moving prayer vigil outside the headquarters.



CIW staff member Oscar Otzoy is turned away at Publix headquarters in Lakeland

“And don't forget to pray that Publix CEO Crenshaw has a change of heart, and ‘gets with the program!’”

*Rabbi Bruce Diamond
in the Ft. Myers News-Press*

But even after all that distance, the Publix CEO did not accept the farmworkers' invitation. He didn't even show his face. Like time and time before, he dispatched someone from the PR department to anonymously turn them away.

Publix's shocking display of indifference to the plight of

farmworkers in its home state—and to the concerns of Publix customers who support the Campaign for Fair Food—left the workers and their allies who gathered in Lakeland for the ride’s culmination deeply frustrated.

And while people hailing from countless faith communities around Florida and indeed across the country wrote to express this shared sense of frustration, each of them also vowed to renew and strengthen their commitment to the Campaign for Fair Food as a result.

Right:

Bishop Frank Dewane shows his support by blessing the cyclists’ meal and journey as they ride through Venice in route to Publix headquarters.



“The Publix Guarantee’ is at risk, the famous vow to customers that, ‘we will never knowingly disappoint you.’ The company’s indefensible refusal to support the best hope for more ethical standards in Florida’s tomato fields is nothing if not disappointing.”

*The Rev. Dr. Jack Barnes,
retired Disciples of Christ pastor,
in an op/ed in the Bradenton Times*

Faith leaders launch new Faith Moves Mountains Campaign

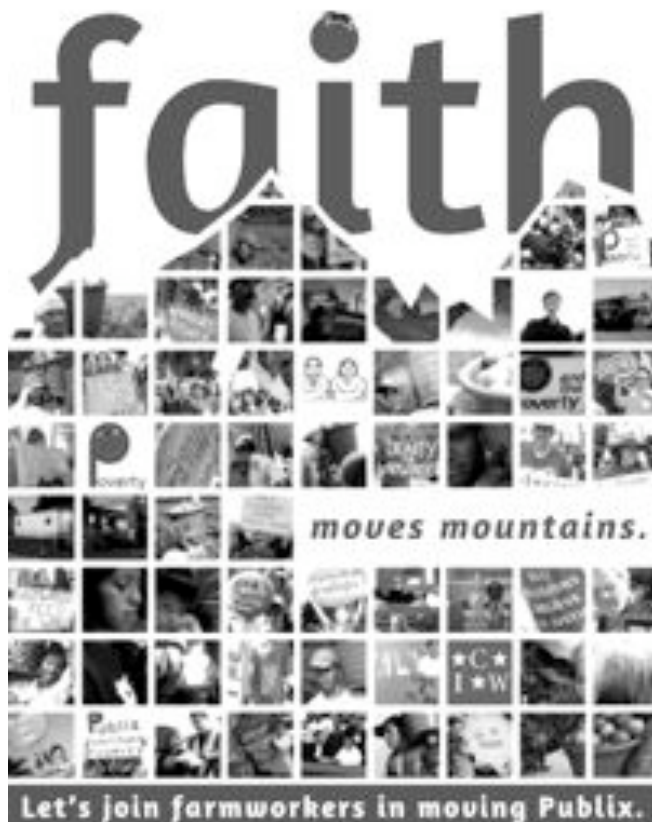
by the Rev. Noelle Damico, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Faith Moves Mountains is a spiritual campaign that urges Publix Supermarkets to work together with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to advance human rights for farmworkers and corporate accountability. We believe that with G-d's help, Publix's isolation and hesitation can be transformed into communication and cooperation with the CIW.

Through personal and congregational prayer as well as prayerful actions, Christian and Jewish individuals and congregations are counting on G-d who "executes justice for the oppressed" (Psalm 146) to make a way forward with Publix. "I believe that the Campaign for Fair Food reflects who Publix is and who they want to be," explains the Rev. Kennedy McGowan of First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood.

Farmworkers harvesting tomatoes continue to face stagnant poverty wages while working to surmount generations of human rights abuses in the Florida fields. Faith Moves Mountains focuses the transformative power of our religious traditions to ensure Publix's business practices promote well-being for all. Online video and written resources for education, worship, and action will soon be available at www.interfaithact.org/FaithMovesMountains.

As the CIW's Fair Food agreements with nine other corporations continue to bring improved wages and unprecedented human rights advances to Florida's tomato pickers, Publix stands firmly on the sidelines. But people of faith are not discouraged, for we believe that faith moves mountains!



"May we always be encouraged to continue to cry out to God to speak to Mr. Crenshaw to stop withholding good from our brothers and sisters who work to bring us food from the fields to our tables! Let us also realize that it is in our power to act in prayer, to cry out daily for transformation to come to this broken world, and to continue calling out to Publix to finally do what is right."

*Lauren Maxwell
in an "Urban Cusp" article
reflecting on Proverbs 3:27*



The Rev. Cesar Olivero of Port Charlotte's St. James Episcopal Church prays with members of Interfaith Action and the CIW.

Trader Joe's locks the doors to clergy

While many of us may not be familiar with Trader Joe's, this supermarket with a reputation for progressive practices is rapidly expanding across the United States, including a new location in Naples, FL early next year. This season, two members of Interfaith Action headed to California to prepare for a giant demonstration in support of the Campaign for Fair Food.

On October 21, Trader Joe's headquarters was met with a 400-person march and rally for farmworker justice. Thirty religious leaders led the call with farmworkers from Immokalee for the national retailer to live up to its image of an ethical corporation.

During the event, the clergy delegation attempted to meet with Trader Joe's representatives and deliver several letters, one signed by ninety Southern California religious leaders. "The Fair Food agreements are being implemented now and dramatically improving the lives of farmworkers," it read. "That Trader Joe's would scorn these agreements and their achievements is, frankly, unconscionable." When TJ's representative's refused to speak with the delegation, religious leaders peacefully taped their letters to the TJ's door—only to have an employee rip them down and crumple them up.

"We left our letters signed by dozens of Southern California Interfaith leaders beseeching Trader Joe's to live up to its progressive reputation... Seconds after we left, however, the doors opened and our letters were ceremoniously ripped up before our very eyes. I have never seen such an act of disrespect! As a pastor who cares about safe working standards and fair wages, I am disappointed in any corporation who does not value human dignity over low prices. As a Trader Joe's customer, I am ashamed. I had expected better."

*the Rev. Dr. Sarah Halverson,
Fairview Community Church
in an op/ed in the Monrovia Patch*

Left: Rev. Liz Muñoz leads the 400-person march to Trader Joe's headquarters.

Right: Rev. Sarah Halverson and Rabbi Jonathan Klein face closed doors in the response to their request for dialogue.



"Catholic teaching centers on the dignity of the human person and calls us to act to defend the inherent dignity of our brothers and sisters. The CIW's Fair Food program is an important initiative in advancing respect for the dignity of the men and women who harvest our tomatoes. I urge Trader Joe's to recognize the dignity and humanity of farmworkers by working together with the CIW to implement the Fair Food Program without delay."

*Bishop Gabino Zavala of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles
urges Trader Joe's to sign the Fair Food Agreements
in a letter to CEO Dan Bane*



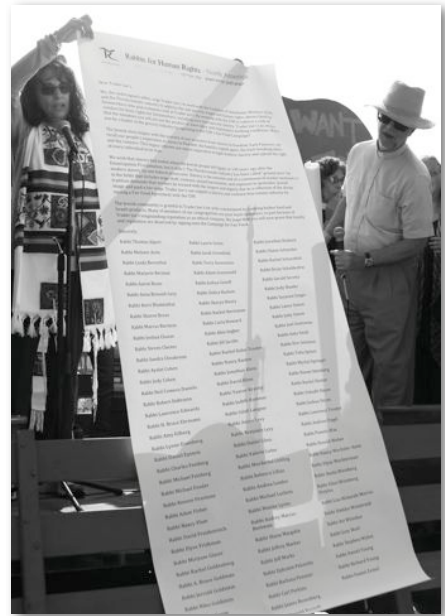
Archdiocese of
LOS ANGELES

Seeking sukkahs of justice

In gratitude for the bounty of the harvest this fall, Jewish communities celebrated the seven days of Sukkot as tradition has shaped: inside the temporary dwelling of a sukkah, beneath roofs of thatched reed and bamboo.

But this year, emboldened by a call to action from Rabbis for Human Rights-North America (RHR-NA), congregations around the country took their time in the sukkah one step further, pausing to discuss exactly because of whom it was that year after year, their plates were no less full. No longer would a plentiful harvest be a cause sufficient to celebrate; these congregations now committed to take action to ensure a just harvest.

It was powerful to watch this fall as innumerable manifestations of the call to action unfurled. Rabbis across the country delivered sermons on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur on holding taut to the fabric of Judaism by standing with today's enslaved. During Sukkot, Philadelphia Fair Food constructed a Fair Food Sukkah to honor the men and women who harvest the fruits that sustain us—and often earn too little to adequately sustain themselves. And at the height of a 400-person march to Trader Joe's headquarters in Monrovia, CA, eight rabbis delivered a RHR-NA letter co-signed by over 100 rabbis across the country.



Rabbi Suzanne Singer unfurls a letter to Trader Joe's co-signed by over 100 rabbis nation-wide.

“Our Torah teaches, Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor. The workers in Immokalee have cried out. And they have taken action. They cannot do it alone. As Jews who knew the pain of slavery – in Egypt and just 70 years ago in the forced labor and concentration camps of Europe – we must not turn a deaf ear.”

*Rabbi Debra Hachen
Yom Kippur Morning Sermon
Temple Beth-El in New Jersey*

Twenty-six cities speak out across the nation

Bookended by World Food Day and National Food Day and falling on the Jewish Harvest Holiday of Sukkot, faith allies and CIW supporters around the country gathered to join their voices with those of farmworkers toward collectively transforming our food system.

Peaceful pickets and other public expressions took place in over 26 cities from coast to coast and erupted all over the state of Florida from St. Pete to Orlando, Miami to Deland, Gainesville, Ocala and Jacksonville. The message rang out loud and clear: We do all in our power to stand with our brothers and sisters and call on the major tomato retailers to partner with the CIW for a future of food in which we can all take pride.



A CIW member joins 250 people to protest a Sarasota Publix opening.

Prayer in the produce aisle

A cold linoleum floor, the chilling blast of refrigeration, and the intermittent squeak of a shopping cart—not the typical environment for prayer. And yet in August the Publix in Naples was transformed into a space of worship, gratitude, and prayer by faith leaders who gathered there together.

A throwback to the days of the Civil Rights movement, this group of fifteen clergy and congregants had decided that in support of the CIW's Campaign for Fair Food and in honor of the men and women who toil tirelessly day after day to bring food to our tables, they would hold a Fair Food pray-in, a unique expression of their various traditions rooted in justice.

The chosen venue for such an act was the produce aisle of their local Publix. Gathering in the tomato aisle, some stood with their heads bowed and others knelt as they joined together prayer.



Fifteen clergy and congregants decide to hold a pray-in with members of Interfaith Action and the CIW in the produce aisle of their local Publix.

“You are the God of compassion and fairness. Guide Ed Crenshaw to be a man of compassion and fairness like his grandfather. Guide the associates of Publix not to disappoint us customers who feel connected by the food we eat both to them and to the hard workers of Immokalee.”

Brian McLaren, as he leads the gathered in prayer

Since the seeds of the pray-in were planted, similar gatherings have spontaneously sprouted up with leaders from a wide range of faith traditions gathering in public prayer. In September, fifteen Rabbis and two rabbinical students encircled a tomato island in a Naples Publix, singing traditional songs and prayers. In October, fifteen Gainesville clergy of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths held a prayer service at the Millhopper Publix. They prayed for divine guidance for Publix executives to move their hearts and end their stonewall refusal to sit down with the men and women who harvest the tomatoes sold in their stores.



Left: A message at the UCC's 28th General Synod meeting in Tampa this summer, where 450 attendees spontaneously marched to a Publix.

Right: Fifteen rabbis gather around a Publix tomato island in blessing and prayer.

Deepen your involvement with the Campaign for Fair Food!

Deliver a letter to the manager of your local Publix, Trader Joe's, Kroger, or Ahold supermarket.

Learn more and educate your community. Contact us at info@interfaithact.org or (239) 657-8311 to have educational material mailed to your home.

Come on an immersion visit to Immokalee. Bring a group from your congregation to Immokalee to hear directly from CIW farmworker leaders, go on a walking tour of the farmworker community, and learn firsthand about the Campaign for Fair Food and how you can get involved in Interfaith Action's work.

Make a gift support Interfaith Action's work for justice. Send your fully tax-deductible contribution to Interfaith Action at PO Box 509, Immokalee, FL 34143.



Thank you for your support! Interfaith Action's work of supporting farmworkers in their struggle for justice would not be possible without it.



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