

An open letter from Gainesville clergy to Publix Super Markets, Inc.

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether of your own people or a stranger. (Deuteronomy 24:14)

Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. (James 5:4)

Men shall have the benefit of what they earn, and women shall have the benefit of what they earn. (Holy Qur'an 4:32)

We, the undersigned, are united as faith leaders in our call for better working conditions and higher pay for Florida farm workers who labor in the tomato fields. Our traditions emphasize the dignity of every human being, and the responsibility of businesses and society at large to provide all workers with decent wages and working conditions. We are especially sensitive to migrant and seasonal workers who are most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and who receive the least protection from U.S. labor laws. The demands of conscience, of the Godly requirements of justice and compassion, call us to support the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) in its Campaign for Fair Food.

Those who perform the backbreaking labor of harvesting tomatoes have historically been among the poorest paid and most-abused workers in America. In recent decades, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers has organized Florida farm workers in a successful campaign to secure safer working conditions and higher rates of pay. The success of this campaign depends on the willing participation of companies who purchase the lion's share of tomatoes from the Florida fields.

We call on our friends at Publix to join with Whole Foods, McDonald's, Taco Bell, and other food industry leaders by signing on to the Fair Food Code of Conduct and to pay an additional penny per pound for tomatoes. If the supermarket industry fails to pay into the penny-per-pound program and refuses to condition its purchases on the Fair Food principles recently agreed to by CIW and the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, the gains made thus far will be undermined.

As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. teaches us, "In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." Farm workers, supermarkets, and consumers—we are all bound together.