

Dear Giant Manager in the D.C. Metro Area,

As we celebrate Thanksgiving - a holiday made possible by the hard work of men and women in America's agricultural fields - I urge Giant and its parent company, Ahold USA, to respect the dignity of farmworkers by joining the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program.

Florida tomato pickers have long faced severe poverty (earning just 50 cents per 32-lb bucket of tomatoes they pick) and abuses such as wage theft, sexual harassment, and - in the most extreme cases - modern-day slavery.

The good news is that there is a solution underway. The CIW is working with nine major retail food companies (including McDonald's, Subway, and Whole Foods) and the Florida tomato industry to implement the Fair Food Program. These retailers have committed to pay a small premium - similar to that paid for certified Fair Trade products - for the tomatoes they purchase to

improve farmworker wages. They are also working with the CIW to develop and enforce a code of conduct, which includes a voice for farmworkers to report abuses without fear of retaliation and zero tolerance for forced labor.

In December 2008, two farm labor employers were sentenced to 12 years each in federal prison on charges of conspiracy, holding workers in involuntary servitude and peonage. As stated in the U.S. Department of Justice press release on the farm bosses' conviction, they "*pled guilty to beating, threatening, restraining, and locking workers in trucks to force them to work as agricultural laborers. They were accused of paying the workers minimal wages and driving the workers into debt, while simultaneously threatening physical harm if the workers left their employment before their debts had been repaid.*" The Fort Myers News-Press reported on December 20, 2008 that the farm employers in this case "took their crews to work on farms owned by some of the state's major tomato producers: Immokalee-based Six L's and Pacific Tomato Growers in Palmetto. Both tomato growers are part of the Socially Accountable Farm Employers (SAFE) program."

In light of these revelations, I am extremely disappointed to see that Harriet Hentges, Ahold's Vice President for Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, responded to an invitation to improve wages and conditions by instead claiming "our [tomato] supplier is audited by SAFE." It is appalling that Ahold is relying on a discredited, agricultural industry-controlled program that certified two farms where enslaved workers were taken to work as "socially accountable."

I expect better from Giant: Nothing less than real corporate responsibility.

This Thanksgiving, as we give thanks for the food that nourishes us, I urge Giant to end the public relations excuses and join the CIW's Fair Food program.

For more information, please visit www.ciw-online.org,

Sincerely,

