

ALLIANCE FOR FAIR FOOD

PEOPLE OF FAITH IN THE CAMPAIGN FOR FAIR FOOD

People of faith have become a vital force in the struggle for justice in the fields. Alongside students and youth, food justice advocates, and consumers of conscience, people of faith from a number of traditions and denominations represent a central constituency in the vibrant multi-cultural and multi-generational Alliance for Fair Food.

Working in partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, an internationally recognized farmworker-led organization successfully transforming human rights in U.S. agriculture, the Alliance for Fair Food is a national network comprised of many voices, united by our commitment to following farmworker leadership and organizing in our own communities to understand – and act on – our role in the movement for farmworker justice.

Beginnings: Abuse in the fields

When a group of six farmworkers first came together in 1993 for a now-fabled meeting to discuss conditions in the fields, they found welcome in Immokalee's Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, which understood their pursuit of justice as part of a critical creed of all major religions: that true justice would be done when the poor and oppressed would arise to change conditions for themselves and those coming after them. Within a couple years, thousands of farmworkers laboring in Florida's tomato fields had come together with the vision of transforming the agricultural industry to eliminate declining, sub-poverty wages, abusive working conditions, and modern-day slavery. They called themselves the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW).

By 1997, workers had organized hundreds of meetings, led dozens of demonstrations, and held three community-wide work stoppages, all for the simple request that growers engage with them in dialogue. At the end of that year, six farmworkers undertook a thirty-day hunger strike broken with communion by Bishop Nevins of the Diocese of Venice before a thousand parishioners. Meanwhile, congregations of many faiths outside of Immokalee heeded the call and formed Religious Leaders Concerned, later to become Interfaith Action and, finally, today's Alliance for Fair Food.



Today: A new day for farmworkers

In the nearly two decades since, as part of the Alliance for Fair Food network, people of faith have followed farmworkers' lead in calling on major food retailers to forge agreements with the CIW in the Campaign for Fair Food (2001 - ongoing), participating in fourteen major accords with corporations such as McDonald's and Walmart. Collectively, these victories enabled the birth of the Fair Food Program (2011 - ongoing), a proven mechanism for preventing abuses in the agricultural industry, called on the front page of the *New York Times* "the best workplace monitoring program... in the U.S."

Communities and individuals of faith from all across the country have contributed by bringing to bear spiritual uplift, grounding in religious tradition, and the moral weight of voices of faith in society. Houses of worship have been centers of mobilizing, moving community members from pews to public demonstrations, while housing and feeding innumerable farmworkers and allies during their tours and demonstrations. Denominations have passed national and state-wide resolutions calling on corporations to join the Fair Food Program; religious bodies and orders have helped pass shareholder

resolutions at corporations' annual general meetings; and thousands of people of faith have joined farmworkers in putting their faith in action through prayers, pickets, pray-ins, fasts, and marches.

The result of 25 years of farmworker leadership and 15 years of people of faith and conscience standing with them has been nothing short of astonishing. The Fair Food Program has ushered in a transformation of human rights in the Florida tomato industry, ensuring never-before-seen rights, from access to shade and water to freedom from sexual harassment and slavery. Tens of thousands of workers have been educated by their CIW peers on their rights in the workplace, and nearly \$20 million have been paid by the corporations participating in the Fair Food Program into workers' paychecks as the first real wage increase in thirty years. Said one worker recently, "Our dignity has been restored."



The future of farmworker rights is far from guaranteed. Get involved!

Currently, tens of thousands of farmworkers in Florida's tomato fields benefit from new rights guaranteed by the Fair Food Program. Since the summer of 2015, the CIW has begun to expand those rights beyond Florida and beyond the tomato crop for the first time, in hopes that it would be the first step of many in order for one day all 2-3 million farmworkers in the U.S. agricultural industry to likewise labor in an environment rooted in justice.

The CIW has already proven that the dream of dignity upheld in the fields is possible. Now, we must partner with them to convince more corporate retailers to join the Fair Food Program so that human rights standards are adopted in further states and crops. **Currently, the Campaign for Fair Food is focused squarely on Wendy's, the only major fast food retailer to still refuse to join the Fair Food Program, with a national boycott launched by farmworkers in March 2016. The Campaign also focuses on supermarket holdout Publix Supermarkets, the predominant grocer in the Southeast U.S.**

Join the historic movement for farmworker justice. Here are just a few ways you can become involved:

- * Contact us to arrange for a farmworker to speak with your congregation about their struggle for justice.
- * Organize a group to visit Immokalee to meet with farmworkers and see first-hand the living and working conditions of farmworkers.
- * Write a piece for your congregation's bulletin, email list, or website on the issues facing farmworkers (or contact AFF for a bulletin insert), or a letter to the editor or an op/ed in your local paper to amplify farmworkers' call for Fair Food.
- * Seek your congregation, denomination, tradition, or organization's endorsement of the Wendy's Boycott.
- * Pray for or reflect on the reality of all workers, especially those who work under sweatshop-like conditions and those who are leading their own struggle for justice.