

# Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## Coalition of Immokalee Workers reaches agreement with Walmart

World's largest retailer officially joins Fair Food Program

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Walmart representatives John Amaya (left), Tom Leech (center) and CIW's Lucas Benitez look on as CIW's Gerardo Reyes Chavez (far right) signs historic agreement at a Lipman Produce farm outside of Immokalee. —CIW

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### LOUISVILLE

In its largest victory to date, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) has signed an agreement with Walmart and its Florida tomato suppliers to uphold a stringent set of labor standards, rigorous enforcement mechanisms, and increased pay – including an immediate “penny a pound” increase for tomato pickers in the company’s tomato supply chain.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – a key backer of the CIW’s efforts to improve wages and working conditions in Florida’s fields – congratulated Walmart, the world’s largest retailer, for reaching the agreement and signing on to the Fair Food Program.

At the signing of the agreement, the CIW’s Cruz Salacio said, “Through this collaboration, not only will thousands of hard-working farmworkers see concrete improvements to their lives, but millions of consumers will learn about the Fair Food Program and of a better way to buy fruits and vegetables grown and harvested here in the U.S.”

Founded in 1993, CIW has previously secured agreements with 11 major food retailers, including Yum Brands, McDonald’s, Compass Group, Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe’s. In 2010, the campaign resulted in the creation of the Fair Food Program, following a historic agreement between the CIW and the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange to implement these labor reforms on 90% of the state’s tomato farms, affecting approximately 30,000

acres of production and tens of thousands of workers.

PC(USA) General Assembly Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons said of the Walmart agreement, “We applaud this achievement and see it as a victory for farmworkers and part of a broader movement toward a faithful economy where all who labor are respected, empowered, and compensated with a living wage. The PC(USA) will continue to stand with the CIW and lend our support as the farmworkers push for agreements with companies which have not yet seen the advantages of doing the right thing. Presbyterians are invested in seeing these successes spread throughout the entire food system.”

In attendance at the announcement, made at a tomato farm just outside Immokalee, was Alexandra Guáqueta, chair of the United Nations’ Working Group on Business and Human Rights, who said: “It’s great to see the world’s biggest retailer, Walmart, join this kind of ground-breaking accountability arrangement, which combines law enforcement with rules agreed to by the parties that goes beyond existing regulation. Together these deliver respect for human rights and better living standards for workers.”

A joint press release, issued after the signing ceremony, outlines the scope and breadth of the agreement, reinforcing the Fair Food Program within Florida, while working to “strengthen and expand” the gains beyond the state and to other crops.

“The addition of Walmart’s unequalled market power will translate into tremendous, tangible gains for upwards of 30,000 farmworkers overnight, including the additional bonus in their weekly paychecks and/or increased support for the human rights protections now already guaranteed by the Program,” said Andrew Kang-Bartlett, the Presbyterian Hunger Program’s associate for national hunger concerns. “And, as a model for the change that can occur within an industry, the agreement marks a new chapter in the world of social responsibility within the world’s food system.”

The Walmart agreement highlights the resistance of another major retailer, Publix Supermarkets, based in Lakeland, Fla., which for more than four years has refused to even sit down with farmworkers. With Walmart on board the Fair Food Program, the pressure also increases on Wendy’s and Kroger to reach an agreement with CIW.

Topics: Food, Justice

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