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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Farmworkers, consumers to launch two-week, 200-mile “March for Rights, Respect, and Fair Food” calling on Publix to support historic human rights advances in Florida tomato fields**

### **March to highlight farm labor reforms underway thanks to Fair Food Program, Publix’s unconscionable decision to turn its back on social responsibility**

**Immokalee, Florida (February 22, 2013)** – On Sunday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, hundreds of farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and their consumer allies from across the state and country will gather at Jesus Obrero Catholic Church in Ft. Myers, Florida, to begin a two-week, 200-mile march to Publix corporate headquarters in Lakeland, Florida. Marchers will be calling on the Florida-based grocery giant to honor the breakthrough social responsibility partnership for farm labor reform known as the Fair Food Program (FFP).

The FFP brings together farmworkers, growers, consumers, and eleven multi-billion dollar retail food leaders (including Publix competitors Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s) in support of fair wages and humane labor standards for tomato harvesters. Despite the FFP’s unprecedented success in bringing about long-overdue labor reforms in Florida’s \$500-million tomato industry, Publix, one of the largest purchasers of Florida tomatoes, refuses to support the program and continues to buy tomatoes from the handful of Florida growers where workers are denied access to the FFP’s higher standards, complaint mechanism, and “penny-per-pound” bonus.

“After decades of what Edward R. Murrow called the ‘Harvest of Shame,’ the Fair Food Program is something the Florida tomato industry, something all of us can all be proud of -- labor rights advances that are setting the bar for social responsibility in the US produce industry today,” said Gerardo Reyes of the CIW. “But while the changes we are seeing in farmworkers’ lives today are indeed unprecedented, there is still much to be done. With each new corporation that joins, the wage increases and labor reforms grow and deepen, which is why Publix’s decision to turn its back on the FFP is so unconscionable. Its support, which would cost Publix little or nothing, could significantly

change the lives of some of the state's hardest workers, yet the \$28 billion company won't even show farmworkers the respect of granting us a meeting to discuss the Fair Food Program face-to-face."

Marchers will begin in Ft. Myers and head north up the west coast of Florida along Highway 41, one of the state's busiest commercial corridors, to Tampa, where they will then turn inland to complete the two-week, 200 -mile trek to Publix's corporate headquarters in Lakeland. Along the way, they will talk with tens of thousands of consumers about the Fair Food Program and Publix's failure to meet the program's social responsibility standards.

"We are going to take our case directly to the consumers through our presence in the streets, through nightly meetings with supporters in churches, schools, and community halls along the way, and through our voices in the media," added the CIW's Oscar Otzoy. "We will not rest until Publix realizes that the 21<sup>st</sup> century supermarket cannot afford to turn its back on human rights."

### **March Highlights:**

**March 3, 11:00 AM (Ft. Myers):** Workers and allies will launch the 200-mile march from Jesus Obrero Catholic Church in Ft. Myers, beginning with a special blessing and then a march through Ft. Myers.

Jesus Obrero Catholic Church  
881 Nuna Ave

**March 9, 7:00 PM (Sarasota):** In the evening, the Sarasota community and New College students will gather to greet marchers, highlighted by a popular education theatre piece.

Caples Bayfront Campus at Waterfront  
5313 Bayshore Rd

**March 17, 4:00 PM (Lakeland):** Joined by hundreds more allies from across the country and Florida, the culmination of the march will be at the Publix Headquarters, with a celebration of the 200-mile journey.

Publix Corporate Headquarters  
3300 Publix Corporate Highway

**### END ###**

**About the Coalition of Immokalee Workers:** The CIW ([www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)) is a community-based farmworker organization headquartered in Immokalee, Florida, with over 4,000 members. The CIW seeks modern working conditions for farmworkers and promotes their fair treatment in accordance with national and international human rights standards. The CIW's Campaign for Fair Food has won unprecedented support for fundamental farm labor reforms from retail food industry leaders, with the goal of enlisting the market power of those companies to bring about more humane labor standards in their tomato suppliers' operations.