



## Coalition of Immokalee Workers

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### Farmworkers, Consumers to Protest Trader Joe's Demanding Fair Labor Standards for Farmworkers

Pressure mounts for fast-growing supermarket chain to sign Fair Food agreement with Coalition of Immokalee Workers in light of [historic breakthrough](#) with Florida tomato growers

**Immokalee, FL** (Feb. 21, 2011) – On Monday, February 28th, a busload of farmworkers from Florida – the men and women who pick the tomatoes New Yorkers eat from October to May every year -- will be joined by members of the [NYC Community/Farmworker Alliance](#) at Trader Joe's Upper West Side store location, where they will rally to demand that the supermarket chain join a growing partnership among farmworkers, Florida tomato growers, and retail food giants aimed at ending decades of farm labor abuse in Florida. The protest is part of a week-long East Coast tour encouraging supermarket chains that buy Florida tomatoes to “[Do the Right Thing!](#)”

**What:** “[Be a Fair Trader, Joe!](#)” Farmworkers from the [Coalition of Immokalee Workers](#), students, and community activists from across New York City demand fair farm labor standards.

**When:** Monday, February 28th, 1pm.

**Where:** Trader Joe's Upper West Side store location. 2075 Broadway, New York, NY 10023 (72nd & Broadway).

“We pick New York's tomatoes, and for years those tomatoes have been harvested in Florida's fields under unimaginably harsh conditions,” said Leonel Perez of the CIW. “Today, however, we are finally beginning to see the first glimmers of more humane treatment at work, thanks to the [Campaign for Fair Food](#). But Trader Joe's is standing in the way of progress, and their refusal to help improve farm labor wages and working conditions threatens to undermine the unprecedented – and still fragile – human rights advances that are just now starting to take root in the fields.”

“What's even worse,” Perez continued, “is Trader Joe's insistence that it's buying ethically sourced tomatoes. Certainly, if Trader Joe's were claiming to sell Fair Trade coffee while refusing to pay the Fair Trade premium and instead paying the straight market price, consumers would be justifiably outraged. Fair Trade standards – including better wages and working conditions for the people who pick the coffee – are not without cost, and the Fair Trade premium is essential to making those improved conditions possible. For more and more consumers shopping at Trader Joe's, claiming to sell ethically-sourced tomatoes from Florida while refusing to pay the Fair

Food premium and instead paying the straight market price is likewise unacceptable.”

**Background:** Florida farmworkers have long faced [brutal conditions](#) in the fields, including sub-poverty wages, widespread labor rights violations, and even modern-day slavery. Today, however, there is [hope on the horizon](#), thanks to the efforts of farmworkers, Fair Food activists, Florida tomato growers, and nine food industry leaders (including Trader Joe's competitor Whole Foods) who have joined in support of the CIW's Fair Food principles, including a penny-per-pound piece rate wage increase, a strict code of conduct, a cooperative complaint resolution system, a participatory health and safety program, and a worker-to-worker education process.

Last November, the CIW and the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange (FTGE) [signed an agreement](#) to extend these principles to over 90% of Florida's tomato fields. And though the implementation of that agreement is being phased in gradually over the course of this season and the next, many real, concrete changes have already taken root on some of the state's largest farms.

Trader Joe's, however, is [refusing to do its part](#), and if they have their way, the unprecedented farm labor transformation promised by the CIW's landmark agreement with the FTGE would be significantly diminished. That's because the solution to farm labor exploitation and abuse contained in the Fair Food principles depends on the participation of all the major purchasers of Florida tomatoes. Each buyer must contribute its fair share – its penny-per-pound – for the pay raise to reach its full potential. Each buyer must commit to direct its purchases to those growers complying with the code of conduct – and away from those who don't – for working conditions to get better and stay better. In the [words of the FTGE's Reggie Brown](#), “Everybody in the system has to be invested for it to work.”

**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. The Campaign for Fair Food taps the unique powers of all the elements of our country's food industry:

- **of consumers**, to demand the highest ethical standards for food production;
- **of food retailers**, to use their tremendous buying power both to demand higher labor standards of their suppliers and help raise farmworkers out of poverty through a price that supports sustainable production;
- **of growers**, to continuously improve their operations and meet consumer demand, keeping pace with an evolving marketplace, and,
- **of farmworkers**, to help expose and fix the worst abuses and apply their unique knowledge toward modernizing, and humanizing, our farm labor system.

### END ###