

Florida Tomato Pickers' 200-Mile "March for Rights, Respect, and Fair Food" Culminates this Weekend in Lakeland at Offices of Grocery Giant Publix with Actions Saturday, Major Rally Sunday

The Most Rev. John Noonan, Bishop of the Diocese of Orlando, and bestselling Christian author Shane Claiborne among hundreds due to join march that highlights farm labor reforms underway thanks to Fair Food Program and Publix's unconscionable decision to turn its back on social responsibility

Lakeland, Florida – On Saturday, March 16th, hundreds of farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and their consumer allies from across the Southeastern U.S. will march into Lakeland as part of a two-week, 200-mile trek to Publix corporate headquarters. On Sunday, March 17th, the marchers' ranks will swell with the arrival of hundreds of more consumers from across the state of Florida for a huge rally outside Publix corporate headquarters in Lakeland. Marchers are 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.

The marchers will celebrate their arrival in Lakeland on Saturday with a massive, colorful picket at Publix's flagship store at the Southgate shopping plaza on Florida Avenue. Then on Sunday, the marchers and their consumer allies will join in a rally outside Publix's headquarters with music, speeches, and a unique theater piece performed by workers from Immokalee starting at 4 pm.

Roman Catholic Bishop John Noonan of the Diocese of Orlando, who will join the farmworkers' march outside of Publix's Produce Distribution Center on Saturday, wrote last spring: "The challenge for all of God's people is to work to create the reality of the kingdom right here, right now ... We pray for Publix corporate leaders that God will inspire them to work in collaboration with the Immokalee Workers to advance the rights of agricultural workers. We pray for all who labor that during this season of Lent that justice will be achieved through just wages and that the dignity and rights of those who work to bring food to our tables be respected."

"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, 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."

Final Day of March for Rights, Respect and Fair Food: Sunday, March 17th

11:30 AM: Gathering at Southgate Publix, 2515 S. Florida Ave, to march the final six miles

2 PM: Gathering at Oakbridge Publix, 3636 Harden Blvd, to march the final three miles

4 PM: Arrival at Publix Headquarters, 3300 Publix Corporate Pky, with live music, speeches from religious and community leaders, and a theatrical performance by farmworker leaders about the importance of Publix joining the Fair Food Program

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