Creating Fair Food Together

Elementary Curriculum

Supplies

- tomato
- map of the U.S. with two pins and string/yarn
- photo of farmworkers' hands
- paper for drawing
- crayons, markers or paints
- bucket or container 32 lbs. of dry rice and beans
- supermarket postcard
- manager letter

Lesson

How do the tomatoes we eat come to our tables?

[Show a tomato to the children.]

What can you tell me about this tomato?

- It's red
- It's round.
- If there is a sticker on the fruit, what it says.

Where do tomatoes come from? **[the store, field, backyard garden.]** This tomato came from **(name your local chain.)** So we know a little bit about this tomato. We know it's red, it's roundish, and that I bought it at [name of grocery store]. Where do grocery stores get their tomatoes? **[From very large farms.]**

[Unfurl the map] Can anyone show me where we live on this map? *[Put a pin in the map. The pin should have a piece of yarn connected to it on the end of which is a second pin, long enough to stretch to southern Florida.]*

Did you know that about 90 percent of the fresh tomatoes produced in the United States during the winter come from Florida? This means 9 out of 10 of the tomatoes grown in the U.S. for us to eat on our sandwiches and salads come from Florida.

Can anyone show me where Florida is on this map? *[Put the second pin down in the southern part of Florida. The yarn should now stretch between your home and Florida.]* When we go to the grocery store to buy tomatoes during the winter, a lot of those tomatoes have traveled from Florida.

Do you know who picks these Florida tomatoes that we buy in the grocery store? **[Farmworkers: men and women, teenagers.]**

[Show a photo of farmworker's hands.] What does this photo (or video) tell us about picking tomatoes? Does it look like hard work or easy work?

A Day in Immokalee

[Photos that illustrate this story can be found at http://ciw-online.org/inthefields-simple.html]

Juan is a farmworker. He lives in a trailer with 10 other men in a town called Immokalee. Immokalee is in south Florida and is a place where thousands of farmworkers who pick our food live.

Each morning Juan wakes up at 4:30am. It is very dark outside as he gets out of bed and makes tortillas for his breakfast and lunch. Then Juan walks to a parking lot in the center of town where thousands of men and women go to find work. They wait. Soon old school buses pull into the parking lot and all the waiting people run toward the buses.

The driver of the bus is the crew leader. He's in charge of picking people to work and watching them in the fields. The crew leader picks a few people. They get on the bus and are driven to the tomato fields, which can be from 30 minutes to 2 hours away. The rest are left behind. They might get work, or they might not. If they don't get work, they won't earn any money that day.

When the bus with the people who were picked for work gets to the fields, Juan and the others wait for the dew to dry. Then the crew leader gives them buckets that weigh 32 pounds when filled with tomatoes and sends them into the fields to pick. It is very hot and the sun is beating down. The plants are covered in pesticides. The farmworkers pick as quickly as possible.

Activity: Get a bucket or container without handles and put 32 pounds of rice or other non-perishable food. Invite the children to try picking it up just a little. Be careful and watch the children so they don't get hurt. How does it feel to try to lift this up? **[Heavy, difficult, etc.]** Would you like to carry this bucket all day?

Resume explaining story: There's a large truck at the edge of the field. Every time farmworkers finish picking a bucket of tomatoes, they put the buckets on their shoulders, and walk or run with it to a truck. Then they have to throw the bucket up in the air to a man up inside the truck. That man dumps the tomatoes into the truck and tosses the bucket back to the farmworker. For every 32 pound bucket they pick, they will be paid 45 cents.

Discussion: What can you buy with 45 cents? **[Gumball, a stamp to mail a letter, not much.]** It's kind of hard – even a drink from a vending machine costs about $1.00. **[Point to your shirt]** This shirt cost me $25.00 (or whatever it cost). A farmworker would have to pick about 50 buckets of tomatoes to earn enough money to buy this shirt!

To earn 50 dollars, a farmworker must pick about two tons of tomatoes, which is the weight of a large car. Do you know how many pounds is in a ton? **[2,000]** Then how many pounds is 2 tons? **[4,000]** Can you imagine carrying 4,000 pounds everyday? **[responses]** All that for $50. Do you know what you can buy with $50? **[shirts, clothes]** What do you think farmworkers need to buy with that money to take care of their families? **[food, clothes, backpack for kids, shoes, etc.]** How much do shoes cost? What about clothes? *[Discuss answers and how this all adds up quickly.]* What else do you think they have to pay for? **[doctor visits, etc.]** Farmworkers don't own their houses, so they also have to pay rent for a trailer. How much do you think they have to pay for rent? **[$50 a week]** So rent for a week is one day of work! Some days, farmworkers can't pick the 4,000 pounds of tomatoes so they earn less money. Some days it rains all day so they earn nothing. Do you think farmworkers have enough money to take care of their families?

The farmworkers often work picking tomatoes all day. Then Juan and the others get back on the bus and are driven back to the parking lot. When they get home it's dark. It might be 7pm, and they left early in the morning and have been gone 10-12 hours. Would you like to work that long? They walk back to a trailer where they live with 10 other people. It is hard work so they are tired. They often have to wait to take their turn in the shower and at the stove to cook dinner. They get in bed and fall asleep exhausted. Tomorrow they will get up and look for work all over again.

Thinking Together

Would you like to work as a farmworker? Why or why not?

Do you think that it's fair that farmworkers work very hard all day long, sometimes six days a week and still they cannot take care of their families well? *[Let the children think about and discuss this a bit.]*
Sometimes, in the most extreme cases, some farmworkers who are enslaved. What does it mean to be a slave? [Can't leave, held against your will] These are men and women who are held against their will and forced to work for little or no pay and many times are beaten or hit if they want to leave. In a recent slavery case, farmworkers were locked inside a box truck at night. They had to sleep on the floor of the truck and they couldn't get out. They didn't have a bathroom or a bed in the truck. This case went to court and the people who held the farmworkers in slavery are now in jail for many years.

What do you think about this? Is it fair? Should people be locked in a truck?

[Pick up the tomato.] So now we know more about this tomato. We know that it was either picked by a farmworker who was not paid a fairly for his or her work, or maybe even by a farmworker who was enslaved. Do you want to eat a tomato that was picked by someone who wasn't paid or treated fairly? Do you think we can do something about it?

God's Vision of a Fair World

Many thousands of years ago, people were wondering about the kind of world that God wanted them to create. They saw the poorest people who harvested food suffering. God spoke through the words of a prophet called Isaiah. Isaiah's followers wrote down many visions that described the sort of world God wanted. This is what they wrote:

God is helping us create a whole new world. In this new world people will live a long time because they will build homes and live in them. They will eat the food that they pick. They shall not simply build houses or pick food for other people. They will be like a flourishing tree. They will not work in vain – their work will provide for all their needs. Everyone will know my loving presence. No one will hurt or destroy in my new world. [Summary paraphrase of Isaiah 65:17-24].

God's vision of a world that is fair is a world where all people have what they need to thrive together. How do you think what the prophet Isaiah said relates to what we are learning about farmworkers? Do you think that we can help create a fairer world, for farmworkers and for everyone?

What Farmworkers and Families Are Doing Together

People all across the country don't think the conditions farmworkers face are fair and are joining together with farmworkers to improve conditions.

Can you name some fast-food restaurants? **[Taco Bell, Burger King, McDonald's, etc.]** Do these restaurants have tomatoes on their hamburgers or tacos? **[Yes.]** Where do you think they get their tomatoes? [Many from Florida] Do you think they buy a lot of tomatoes for all their restaurants across the entire country! [Yes] Millions and millions of pounds.

The farmworkers of a group called the Coalition of Immokalee Workers or CIW asked these companies to make sure that the farmworkers who picked the companies' tomatoes were paid a fair wage so that they can take care of their families and that are treated fairly. Most companies did not respond at first. So what do you think the farmworkers did? They asked people like us to tell these companies to do the right thing. How do you think people did this? **[Writing letters, sending postcards, taking a letter to the manager when they go shopping, and marching in peaceful protests with the farmworkers.]**

After many, many people across the country joined with the farmworkers, Yum! Brands (Taco Bell, KFC, Pizza Hut), McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods Market, Bon Appetit and Compass Group agreed to improve the

rate the farmworkers are paid per bucket. These companies will also stop purchasing tomatoes from any growers who are found to have used slave labor to harvest their tomatoes. These are big accomplishments. But there is more to be done.

Supermarkets

Where else you get a tomato besides a restaurant? **[Supermarkets.]** Aside from Whole Foods Market, no other grocery chains have made an agreement with the farmworkers. We can help convince the supermarkets to do the right thing so that farmworkers can take care of their families.

People across the country are calling on grocery stores in their neighborhoods to work with the farmworkers. Among the largest grocery chains in the nation are Kroger, Ahold and Publix. [If any of the following grocery stores are in your area, you can mention them. Otherwise, mention a supermarket in your area.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we give thanks for your vision of a fair word that we hear from the prophet Isaiah. We remember the farmworkers from Immokalee who pick our tomatoes. We ask you would bless them and us as we work to create a world that is fair to all people. Amen.