

# Dear Kroger<sup>®</sup>

During the Thanksgiving season, we pause to spend time with friends and family, to give thanks for the food on our tables, and to reflect on the importance of community. As a part of our community, Kroger takes pride in giving back through its charitable contributions, especially to organizations that feed families in need and provide hunger relief. Indeed, the very people who harvest the food that Kroger sells in its stores are sometimes unable to afford a Thanksgiving meal themselves. Despite their strenuous work, farmworkers' pay is often so low that they do not have the resources to adequately provide for their own families.

Thankfully, tremendous progress has been made in alleviating farmworker poverty and exploitation through the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program (FFP). From the fields once dubbed "ground zero for modern-day slavery" by federal prosecutors, the CIW has pioneered a proven solution to forced labor in agriculture, and in the process turned those fields into what one expert called "the best working environment in American agriculture," on the front page of the New York Times.

Under this program, major retailers direct their purchases to growers who meet worker-driven human rights standards and pay a small premium for their produce that is then passed through to farmworkers by the growers for whom they work. Since 2011, the Fair Food Program has distributed over \$44 million to workers through the premium, thus giving farmworkers the resources they need to provide for their families all year round.

As a customer, I was shocked to learn that for over a decade, Kroger has chosen to remain on the wrong side of history by refusing to join the Fair Food Program. This failure on Kroger's part is even more appalling given the Department of Labor's recent announcement that Kroger directly purchased produce harvested by workers subjected to modern-day slavery. In the latest federal slavery prosecution to come out of Florida, *US v. Moreno*, Kroger sold watermelons harvested by modern-day slaves to its unsuspecting consumers. While harvesting watermelons and other produce, these workers in Kroger's own supply chain were trapped in dilapidated housing surrounded by barbed wire, forced into a deep pit of illegal debt, and threatened with physical harm to themselves or their families if they attempted to leave.

As an ally of farmworkers who demand dignity and respect in the fields and a consumer who believes strongly in the responsibility of corporations in addressing abuse in their supply chains, I call on Kroger to join the Fair Food Program without further delay. This holiday, as we share the food that farmworkers make possible, I ask you to deepen your commitment to giving back to the community by taking part in a real, sustainable solution to farmworker poverty and exploitation. Now is the time to take a stand for human rights. Now is the time to champion the only proven solution to systemic forced labor in agriculture, the Fair Food Program.

**A concerned customer**