

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers

Headquarters:	Immokalee, Florida, USA
Established:	1993
Web site:	www.ciw-online.org
Number of employees:	Approx. 10
Number of members:	Over 3,500 farm workers, predominantly Latinos, Haitians and Mayan Indians
Area of activity:	The Coalition of Immokalee Workers aims to end modern-day slavery in Florida's fields, and to bring about fair salaries and humane working conditions. In addition, it wants to promote corporate responsibility for labor rights abuses. It gave support to the FBI's operations against slavery, which led to the release of over 1,000 farm workers from modern-day slave labor. It informs consumers about human rights violations in the farming industry and shows them how to support the goals of the farm workers.
Main objectives:	The equitable treatment of Florida farm workers, conforming to national and international labor standards.

Summary

In 2001, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) launched a nationwide boycott in the U.S. against the Mexican fast-food restaurant chain Taco Bell, for tolerating the payment of starvation wages and the practice of modern-day slave labor by its tomato suppliers. Under pressure from the campaign, Yum! Brands, the parent company of Taco Bell, agreed to raise farm worker's wages by one cent per pound of tomatoes in March 2005. It also introduced a code of conduct for the purchase of agricultural products.

Reasons for the submission

Two phenomena have had a negative impact on the tomato industry in Florida: the restructuring of U.S. food markets and the increase in tomato imports from Mexico. As a consequence, volume suppliers and large distributors, as intermediaries, have an even more dominant position in food sales in the U.S. Under these circumstances, small tomato farmers in particular cannot negotiate a fair price; they must yield to price pressure and further reduce production costs, which has resulted in wages below the poverty line and even modern-day slavery in U.S. agriculture. In addition, overtime is not paid, farm workers are forbidden from organizing in order to better represent their interests, and working conditions can severely infringe upon U.S. labor laws.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers wants to call large distributors to account and hold them responsible for labor rights infractions in the fields. In 2001, the coalition launched a nationwide boycott against the Mexican fast-food restaurant chain Taco Bell for refusing to take action against suppliers guilty of human rights violations. As a subsidiary of Yum! Brands Inc., Taco Bell is a volume buyer of Florida tomatoes.

Campaign activities

The boycott campaign against Taco Bell brought together networks of activists, students and religious communities as well as human and labor rights groups. The campaign was a combination of a targeted media campaign, large-scale activities and Internet-based public relations. It included hunger strikes, marches and protests. The primary objective of the campaign was to reveal Taco Bell's complicity in modern-day slavery in the U.S.

As a result, 22 universities banned Taco Bell from their campuses or hindered the opening of new outlets. Campaigns were organized against Taco Bell in over 300 colleges and 55 high schools before the boycott was ended in March 2005. Between 2002 und 2005, the coalition organized so-called "Truth Tours" to the headquarters of Taco Bell and Yum! Brands, as well as smaller regional tours. Public protests, activities of solidarity with local activists, and information events with farmers were all held within the scope of the "Truth Tours."

The CIW Web site described the work of the coalition in detail and provided updates on the boycott as well as continuing media coverage. Videos about the "Truth Tours" were also shown. The campaign was supported by prominent personalities such as former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson.

Results of the campaign

On March 8, 2005, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers attained a decisive victory in the national boycott against Taco Bell. Under pressure from the campaign, the parent company Yum! Brands agreed to work together with the farmer organization in Florida to improve wages and working conditions for the workers in Florida's tomato industry. Taco Bell agreed to pay an additional cent per pound for tomatoes harvested, which met the worker's demands and also corresponded to a doubling of their wages. In addition, Yum! Brands introduced the first code of conduct for the purchase of agricultural products in the U.S. industry.

What happens next?

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers wants to use its success with Taco Bell to place further pressure for reform on volume and retail businesses. Possible targets include other multinationals such as McDonalds, Burger King or Wal-Mart. Once McDonalds stated that it only wanted to serve "fair trade" coffee in the U.S., the coalition invited the fast-food chain in November 2005 to join in the effort to improve wages and working conditions for tomato pickers.

Detailed submission: www.publiceye.ch/nominierungen

Further information and links:

[- www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)