

# HUMAN RIGHTS FOR FARM WORKERS



## STATEMENT

We, the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, compelled by the Gospel and by our heritage to be responsive to the “dear neighbor” without distinction, call corporations and businesses with farm workers in their supply chains<sup>1</sup> to ensure workers are treated justly. Drawing on our Sacred Scriptures that proclaim each person is created in the image of God, and, therefore, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, we believe that all farm workers should be:

- Paid a living wage that allows them to meet the basic needs of their families.
- Provided with healthcare benefits for them and their families.
- Employed by companies that abide by all applicable laws including overtime payment and fair working conditions.
- Able to freely join a collective bargaining unit without harassment, intimidation or retaliation as stated by the law.

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING STATES

“When workers come from another country or district and contribute to the economic advancement of a nation or region by their labor, all discrimination as regards wages and working conditions must be carefully avoided. All the people, moreover, above all the public authorities, must treat them not as mere tools of production but as persons, and must help them to bring their families to live with them and to provide themselves with a decent dwelling; they must also see to it that these workers are incorporated into the social life of the country or region that receives them. Employment opportunities, however, should be created in their own areas as far as possible.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A supply chain is the network of all the individuals, organizations, resources, activities and technology involved in the creation and sale of a product - from delivery of raw materials to supplier, manufacturer and consumer.

<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution On the Church In the Modern World. #66

## IMPACT ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) identifies agriculture as the most dangerous industry for youth. Despite this fact, current U.S. law allows children as young as 12 to work in the fields.

Many employers do not have policies in place to deter supervisors and other employees from participating in acts of harassment. Female workers suffer from institutionalized sex discrimination and acts of sexual harassment. In fear of losing their jobs, the targeted females resign themselves to living under these degrading conditions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Food Empowerment Project

*They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;  
for they will be a people blessed by God, they and their descendants with them.*

Isaiah 65:23

## TALKING POINTS

- Farm workers in the U.S. earn extremely low wages with an average annual individual income of \$12,500 to \$14,999.
- Injustice in the farm worker industry is an outcome of corporate supply chains' focus on maximizing profits at the expense of workers' health, safety and quality of life.
- Many of the farm workers are actively recruited by labor contractors who promise them a good job and a better quality of life. These labor contractors charge workers a high recruitment fee, causing them to be indebted before their work contract begins.
- Farm workers deserve fair working conditions and just wages and to not be forced to work in slavery conditions
- Corporations need to protect farm workers' fundamental human rights in their supply chains.

## ACTION STEPS

- Educate ourselves and others regarding the work of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.
- Insist growers join the fundamental human rights movement and support farmworkers who do the backbreaking and underpaid work to put food on our tables.<sup>1</sup>
- Urge Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program and commit to provide farmers fair working conditions, just wages, shade and rest breaks from their grueling work, and zero tolerance for sexual harassment, all which promote slavery.<sup>2</sup>
- Require corporations to be responsible and accountable in their supply chain to respect farm workers' human rights.
- Demand legislators support the Business Supply Chain Transparency on Trafficking and Slavery Act (S.1968).

1 Coalition of Immokalee Workers

2 Alliance for Fair Food



Photos from Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)

The U.S. Federation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph is a dynamic union of all the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the United States who claim a common origin in the foundation at LePuy, France in 1650. Today there are approximately 7,000 vowed members as well as 2,800 Associates in the United States. World-wide there are over 13,500 Sisters of Saint Joseph in over 50 countries.

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