

The Fair Food Program

Fast-food boycotts and other efforts led by migrant farmworkers significantly improved working conditions and increased wages for tomato pickers in Florida and other US states.

Florida produces 90 percent of the United States' winter tomatoes every year, but its 30,000 migrant farmworkers have long been disenfranchised and mistreated. They have historically faced wage theft, racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and terrible physical and verbal abuse—all while frequently working 70 to 80 hours per week for annual wages of \$10,000 to \$12,000.

Yet with incredible persistence, a breakthrough strategy, and targeted philanthropic support, these impoverished and oppressed workers have succeeded in systematically bringing many of the nation's largest restaurants and grocers—from McDonald's, Burger King, and Taco Bell to Walmart, Whole Foods, and Trader Joe's—to concede to their demands for better wages and working conditions, and force the exploitative farms to comply. For these workers, the result has been a 50 to 70 percent increase in their take-home pay, along with substantially improved and independently monitored working conditions in the fields.

It all started in the early 1990s, when a group of fed-up farmworkers formed a grassroots organizing group known as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). In 1996, after one worker was severely beaten for asking for a water break, CIW dramatically stepped up its efforts and began organizing marches and hunger strikes. In 2000, after making some

This case study is part of a series that accompanies The Bridgespan Group article “Audacious Philanthropy: Lessons from 15 World-Changing Initiatives” (*Harvard Business Review*, Sept/Oct 2017). See below for 15 stories of social movements that defied the odds and learn how philanthropy played a role in achieving their life-changing results.

- [The Anti-Apartheid Movement](#)
- [Aravind Eye Hospital](#)
- [Car Seats](#)
- [CPR Training](#)
- [The Fair Food Program](#)
- [Hospice and Palliative Care](#)
- [Marriage Equality](#)
- [Motorcycle Helmets in Vietnam](#)
- [The National School Lunch Program](#)
- [911 Emergency Services](#)
- [Oral Rehydration](#)
- [Polio Eradication](#)
- [Public Libraries](#)
- [Sesame Street](#)
- [Tobacco Control](#)

notable but limited gains, CIW shifted its strategy to focus on a much more powerful leverage point—large-scale, consumer-facing restaurant and grocery companies that were the country’s leading purchasers of tomatoes. CIW made a simple yet very specific set of demands of these companies: Pay an extra penny per pound of tomatoes to increase farmworker wages and hold growers to a worker-designed code of conduct. Partnering with religious organizations and the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA)—and with some modest philanthropic support—CIW first organized a boycott of Taco Bell on high-school, university, and college campuses, successfully removing or blocking Taco Bell from 25 campuses. With earned media coverage and pressure on college administrations, they won their desired concessions from Taco Bell, and then from McDonald’s. Larger scale philanthropy began to flow (including from the Ford Foundation and the W.K Kellogg Foundation), and CIW won commitments from many of the largest fast-food, food-service, and grocery companies.

But growers fought back in 2007, when the penny-a-pound payout was poised to begin. The Florida Tomato Growers Exchange announced a \$100,000 fine for any members who participated in paying the premiums. For the next three years, the CIW took its battle to Capitol Hill, as well as continuing to pressure and win over large-scale buyers like Subway, Burger King, and Whole Foods. Meanwhile, the Ford Foundation and other philanthropies stepped up funding for CIW’s Campaign for Fair Food.

With political and corporate pressure building, in 2010, one of Florida’s oldest and largest tomato growers, the Pacific Tomato Growers, signed the CIW’s Fair Food agreement and its code of conduct. Weeks later others began to sign on until all Florida tomato growers relented en masse, effectively transforming the state industry. The penny-a-pound premiums from buyers, which buyers had held in escrow since 2007, began to flow. With major support from foundations like Kellogg and the Kresge Foundation, CIW also set up the Fair Food Standards Council (FFSC), a standalone nonprofit responsible for monitoring and enforcement of the Fair Food Code of Conduct.

The movement’s momentum continues today: In the past five years, food retail chains including Trader Joe’s, Chipotle, Fresh Market, Stop and Shop, Giant, and Wal-Mart have joined the Fair Food program. CIW agreements now cover more than 90 percent of Florida’s tomato production—improving working conditions and wages for over 30,000 workers—and the organization is now spreading the model to cover workers in other states and agricultural industries as well.

Philanthropy's Role in Large-Scale Change

Our research shows that breakthrough social initiatives share a set of [five practical approaches to large-scale change](#). In the case of CIW, philanthropy significantly backed three of these approaches:

- **Craft an emotionally-compelling winnable milestone:** A key element of CIW's successful strategy was its focus on a compelling and concrete demand—adding just “one penny per pound” to the price that workers were paid to harvest tomatoes. This was a brilliantly simple yet highly effective target and slogan, a demand that for most people would be both memorable and quite reasonable, yet one that when enacted was able to increase worker earnings by 50 to 70 percent. The small organization developed this while largely supported with only modest philanthropy, most notably from faith-based funders such as the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock, as well as the unpaid efforts of the farmworkers themselves.
- **Drive demand, don't assume it:** In its early days, CIW had modest political capital and small amounts of funding from foundations that backed community organizing, such as Abelard Foundation-East, which gave \$10,000 in 2001, and the Public Welfare Foundation, which made its first grant in 2003. Both forms of capital—along with unpaid leave taken by workers—supported CIW's work to organize protests, marches, and tours across the country to raise awareness and support a boycott of Taco Bell. This captured the attention of local and national media outlets and helped generate broader demand for change. Church and student volunteer groups joined the campaign and also put consumer pressure on some of the growers' most important customers. By 2005, Public Welfare and other foundations grew grant monies to advance the Campaign for Fair Food. For example, the Ford Foundation gave a total of \$750,000 from 2005 to 2011, while the Marguerite Casey Foundation granted \$1 million from 2004 to 2013. Public Welfare's giving totaled more than \$1 million by 2015.
- **Embrace course correction:** CIW's focus shifted from tomato growers to tomato buyers when organizers realized they could use—and more easily influence—the buyers' purchasing power. Then, when buyer pressure influenced the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange to sign the Fair Food pledge and code of conduct, CIW needed to assure compliance. Here large foundations backed the development of a sophisticated, independent monitoring organization, the Fair Food Standards Council, to audit growers for compliance, enforce corrective action, and staff a 24-hour hotline for worker complaints, then investigate and resolve them. Since 2008, the Kellogg Foundation has granted more than \$2 million, and the Kresge Foundation \$1.3 million, among others, to the cause of CIW and the FFSC.

Researched and written by Consultant Phil Dearing of The Bridgespan Group, based on Bridgespan interviews with Gerardo Reyes, leader and organizer of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers; Yaissy Solis, national co-coordinator of the Student/Farmworker Alliance; Sean Sellers, co-founder of the Fair Food Standards Council; and Hon. Judge Laura Espinoza, co-founder and executive director of the Fair Food Standards Council, as well as selected sources.

Selected Sources

Coalition of Immokalee Workers. "About CIW: Consciousness + Commitment = Change." <http://www.ciw-online.org/about/>.

Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Florida Tomato Growers Exchange. "Historic Breakthrough in Florida's Tomato Fields." http://www.ciw-online.org/blog/2010/11/ftge_ciw_joint_release/.

Fair Food Standards Council. "2015 Annual Report." fairfoodstandards.org/15SOTP-Web.pdf.

Grace, Stephanie. "Justice in the Fields." Brown Alumni Magazine, January/February 1998.

Greenhouse, Steven. "In Florida Tomato Fields, a Penny Buys Progress." The New York Times, April 24, 2014.

Nielsen, Kirk. "Organizing the Fields." The Progressive, December 2008.

Rojc, Philip, and David Callahan. "The Funders Behind the Farm Workers." Inside Philanthropy, March 31, 2016.

Student/Farmworker Alliance. "Born in Action: Our Story." <http://www.sfalliance.org/our-history>.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Examining Ending Abuses and Improving Working Conditions for Tomato Workers. 110th Cong., 2nd sess., April 15, 2008.

THE BRIDGESPAN GROUP

BOSTON 2 Copley Place, 7th Floor, Suite 3700B, Boston, MA 02116 USA. Tel: +1 617 572 2833

NEW YORK 112 West 34th St., Ste. 1510, New York, NY 10120 USA. Tel: +1 646 562 8900

SAN FRANCISCO 465 California St., 11th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94104 USA. Tel: +1 415 627 1100

MUMBAI Bridgespan India Private Limited Company, 1086, Regus, Level 1, Trade Centre, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra East, Mumbai, 400051 Maharashtra, India. Tel: +91 2266289639



www.bridgespan.org

contact@bridgespan.org