

# FROM THE GROUND UP

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## Organizing and Resistance in the Poultry and Hog Industries

### Case Farms Settles Two-Year Lawsuit with Workers

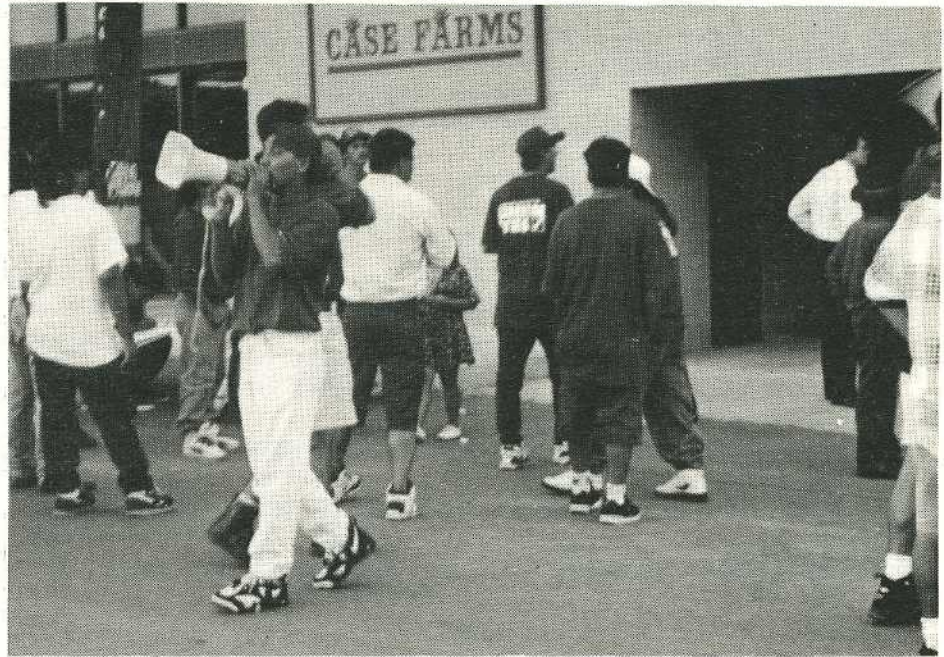
In 1996, poultry workers at the Case Farms processing plant in Morganton, NC walked off their jobs in protest of the arrest of two workers who filed grievances about their working conditions. Initially, the workers demanded that the personnel manager be fired and the arrested workers' grievances be addressed. When the company did not comply, workers requested the support of the Laborers' International Union of North America, (LIUNA) and voted in favor of unionizing that same year. The company contested the vote, prolonging the union's enactment until 1997.

Negotiations began between the workers and Case Farms in 1998, but halted in 1999 when the company called a partial lockout, cutting one day of the work week and threatening to close the plant if the union continued to operate. Case Farms then circulated a petition for workers to sign, stating that they no longer wanted to be part of the union. Felipe Lopez, LIUNA union organizer at Case Farms, says the workers, fearful for their jobs, signed the petition because they were told if they signed it the lockout would end. With the signed petitions, the company withdrew the conditions of the union; LIUNA quickly followed suit, bringing Case Farms to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) on unfair labor practice and contempt charges.

On Monday, April 2, 2001, Case Farms settled the case with the NLRB and agreed to recognize the union and negotiate with workers. The settlement, according to Lopez, can be attributed to some workers who testified as key witnesses that the company circulated the petition.

Lopez hopes that the settlement will mean positive changes for workers, starting possibly as soon as May. Since the workers have not received a raise since 1997, LIUNA expects a raise to be one of the first benefits negotiated for the workers.

Although there are no guarantees as to what Case Farms will agree, the workers' union has the strong expectation that "the company will come back to the table to negotiate in good faith." Congratulations to LIUNA and the workers at Case Farms on their success!



Case Farms workers on strike in 1996

Photo courtesy of LIUNA

### Did you know?

- "Even those [hog processing] factories in full compliance with the latest laws and regulations still rely on primitive open-air waste lagoons and sprayfields to manage vast amounts of hog waste. This waste technology does not protect people or the environment when used in such high volume and concentrated in North Carolina's wet climate, sandy soils, and flat coastal region." —Hog Watch website at [www.hogwatch.org](http://www.hogwatch.org)
- "In 1995, research indicated that over 73 percent of poultry farmers earned a below poverty level income from their poultry operations. Many farms face bankruptcy, and families are being forced off the land." —Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance website at [www.dpja.com](http://www.dpja.com)
- "Poultry workers prepare more birds per hour of work while hourly wages decline. On average, workers processed 190 birds per hour in 1995, up from 143 per hour in 1985. Real wages for poultry workers have fallen in the past decade, from an average of \$5.87/hr in 1987 to \$5.66/hr in 1997." —UFCW website at [www.ufcw.org](http://www.ufcw.org)

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