

FROM THE GROUND UP

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The Coalition of Immokalee Workers: The People's Farmworker Movement

Who profits in the Florida Tomato Industry?

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- According to U.S. Department of Labor data, the piece rate paid to tomato harvesters in 1980 was 40 cents per 32 pound bucket. Today, harvesters are paid the same piece rate, earning one-half of what they did twenty years ago in inflation adjusted dollars.¹
- Workers must pick and haul two tons of tomatoes to make \$50 dollars a day. Taco Bell could double the earnings of tomato harvesters by agreeing to pay just one penny more per pound of tomatoes.¹
- In 1995, the median personal income for farmworkers in the Southeast was between \$5000-\$7500, the same as in 1988.³
- The vast majority of tomato harvesters receive no benefits or overtime pay, despite the fact that the average farmworker labors 12 or more hours a day.³
- Taco Bell's 1999 revenues totaled \$5.2 billion.¹
- Six L's Packing Co. Inc., one of Florida's largest tomato growers and a distributor to Taco Bell, averaged \$120 million in annual revenue since 1986.¹
- Industry numbers reveal that the cost of containers per 1400 acres of tomatoes in southwest Florida is \$1,050, while the harvest and haul cost for those same tomatoes is \$1,078.²

Sources

1. Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Executive Summary Tomato Harvester Fact Sheet, February 1998.
2. Smith, Scott A. and Timothy G. Taylor. Production Cost for Selected Vegetables in Florida, August 1996.
3. Student Action with Farmworkers, Farmworkers in the United States Fact Sheet, 2000.

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Image courtesy of CIW

Who are the Coalition of Immokalee Workers?

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The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is a community-based worker organization located in Southwest Florida, with a diverse membership of Latino, Haitian, and Mayan Indian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. The CIW strives to strengthen their community on a basis of reflection and analysis, constant attention to coalition building across ethnic divisions, and an ongoing investment in leadership development to help workers continually develop their skills in community education and organization.

The CIW fights for, among other things: a fair wage, more respect from bosses and the industries where they work, better and more affordable housing, stronger laws and stronger enforcement against those who violate workers' rights, the right to organize on the job without fear of retaliation, and an end to indentured servitude in the fields.

Southwest Florida is one of the nation's most important centers for agricultural production, and Immokalee is home to Florida's largest farmworker community. As such, the majority of CIW members are farmworkers who spend 8-9 months of the year in Southwest Florida then travel north during the summer months for other jobs in agriculture. Many CIW members move out of agriculture and into other low-wage industries, including construction, nursery, and tourism.

