



TACO BELL and the FTAA: Displacing Workers and their Dignity

Do you want U.S. trade policies that create more poverty and inhumane conditions for workers? The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) will do just that!

It will bring you NAFTA but worse: more sweatshops, more sub-poverty wages, more economic refugees, more displaced US workers losing jobs to countries with lower wages and fewer protections for workers, and larger profits for multinational corporate giants like Taco Bell.

Taco Bell: Benefitting from Sweatshops in the Field

Free trade policies have forced millions of people throughout Latin America to abandon their communities, and join a growing wave of migration in a desperate search for employment and a means to feed their families.

This steady stream of migration has fed the farm labor market in the US for nearly 20 years. Once here, these economic and political refugees face a choice that is no real choice at all: hunger, on the one hand, or working for starvation wages with absolutely no benefits or job security, no overtime pay, no right to organize without fear of retaliation, and, in the most extreme cases, under conditions of modern-day slavery.

Fast-food corporations like Taco Bell benefit directly from the poverty of immigrant workers who pick the produce that goes into the food they sell. In Immokalee, Florida, farmworkers who pick tomatoes for Taco Bell are among the worst paid, least protected workers in the country. Taco Bell receives cheap, high-quality US tomatoes - boosting its bottom line - thanks to the hard-working Florida farmworkers who toil in sweatshop conditions.

But today, farmworkers with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) have had enough. The CIW is spearheading a national boycott against Taco Bell, calling for an end to sweatshops in the fields.



Farmworker in Immokalee, FL picking tomatoes

 **Sub-poverty wages:** For 20 years, Florida tomato growers have paid virtually the same picking piece rate - 40-50 cents per 32 lb. bucket. Farm workers earn a median annual income of \$7,500. The latest US Department of Labor report strongly condemned conditions in US fields, finding "low wages, sub-poverty annual earnings, significant periods of un- and underemployment...all add up to a labor force in significant distress." (USDOL Report to Congress, 1/2002)

 **Subhuman conditions:** Workers toil for long hours in sweltering fields, with no overtime pay, sick leave, health insurance, holiday pay or any kind of pension, are housed in shacks, and denied the right to organize without fear of retaliation.

 **Modern-day slavery:** In South Florida, the US Department of Justice has prosecuted five cases of modern-day slavery over the past five years alone, involving hundreds of workers forced to work in the fields against their will through violence or the threat of violence.

WHAT IS THE FTAA?

The FTAA is an expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the entire Western Hemisphere with the exception of Cuba. It involves 34 countries in the Americas and the Caribbean. It will include new policies designed to give corporations greater rights and freedoms than those that NAFTA provides and will reduce the rights of the approximately 800 million people who reside in FTAA countries.

It is currently being negotiated in secret and at the end of October 2002 there will be a trade ministerial in Quito, Ecuador to finalize agreement on this negotiating phase. The formal agreement is set to be implemented in 2005 at the conclusion of all negotiations.

NAFTA, contrary to proponents' promises, has resulted in a reduction in the manufacturing base in Canada, Mexico and the U.S., and manufacturing wages have decreased by 25%. However, sweatshops ("maquiladoras") in Mexico mushroomed from 11.7% before NAFTA to 73.1% by 1995. Under free trade agreements such as these, the effect is to usher in sub-poverty wages and subhuman working conditions for millions of people.

WHY TACO BELL?

POWER - Taco Bell is a major buyer of Florida tomatoes. Given the sheer volume of Florida tomatoes it buys to supply its worldwide operations, and given its size and economic strength, Taco Bell has the power to help bring about more just and fair labor conditions in Immokalee's tomato fields.

PROFIT - Taco Bell profits directly from farmworkers' sub-poverty wages, unpaid overtime, and total lack of benefits in the form of low-cost tomatoes. With inexpensive ingredients, Taco Bell is able to invest more in advertising campaigns, growth, and executive salaries than it could if it were to pay a price for its ingredients that adequately compensated those at the base of the industry.

POSSIBILITY - It is perfectly possible for Taco Bell to pay the penny or two more per pound of Florida tomatoes necessary to significantly improve farmers' wages. Even if Taco Bell were to pass on the entire cost of the increased tomato price onto its consumers, the result would be only a fraction of a penny more per menu item.



FTAA = DISPLACEMENT ➡ EXPLOITATION ➡ LARGER PROFITS FOR COMPANIES

The connections are clear - and that's why farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a Florida-based workers' rights organization, have joined with religious, environmental, consumer, labor, and other organizations to oppose the FTAA, because they know that the FTAA will worsen sweatshop conditions in the fields for them and other farmworkers.

What You Can Do:

1. Contact your representatives in Congress!

- Tell them that you are opposed to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and that they should oppose it, too.
- Cite Taco Bell as an example of how workers rights are threatened by trade agreements that give corporations greater rights and freedoms at the expense of people who reside in FTAA countries.
- Tell them you want congressional hearings about the impact the FTAA will have on the environment and the 800 million people living in the Western Hemisphere.
- Demand that the information on the United States' negotiating position be made public before the ministerial in Quito, Ecuador (Oct. 29-Nov. 2). The second draft of the FTAA will be presented at this meeting with the aim of resolving any disagreements.
- Demand that the U.S. Government refrain from bullying and arm-twisting other countries to go along with their agenda.



2. Get on the FTAA listserv so that you can receive regular updates on what is happening in the negotiations, and in the movement to stop the FTAA. To sign up send an email to: karen@art-us.org

3. Call, write or fax Taco Bell today and ask them to meet with representatives of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to discuss how Taco Bell could help bring about long-denied justice for Florida Farmworkers.

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4. JOIN THE TACO BELL BOYCOTT!

For more information contact: Coalition of Immokalee Workers - www.ciw-online.org
For more information on the Anti-FTAA Corporate Campaigns contact:
Campaign for Labor Rights: Severina.Rivera@clrlabor.org,
or Alliance for Responsible Trade: www.art-us.org

