

Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Verité Partner for the Implementation and Monitoring of the Historic 'Fair Food' Program

Verité Will Ensure That Farm Workers Receive “Penny-Per-Pound” Raise and Improved Working Conditions Promised By Major Food Corporations

November 30, 2009 – The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a Florida-based farm worker organization, and Verité, a non-governmental organization that promotes and monitors fair labor practices across the globe, announced today their partnership in the implementation of a program to significantly improve wages and working conditions in the Florida tomato industry. The program comes as a result of the CIW’s landmark “Fair Food” agreements with food industry leaders including Yum Brands, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods, Compass, and Bon Appétit.

The “Fair Food” agreements require those companies to demand more humane labor standards from their Florida tomato suppliers, to pay a premium price for more fairly produced tomatoes, and to shift their purchases to growers who meet those higher standards. Early support for this effort has come from East Coast Growers and Packers as well as specialty growers Alderman Farms and Lady Moon Farms. These companies have agreed to pass along the pay premium to their tomato harvesters.

“These developments are truly unprecedented. Through the Campaign for Fair Food, we are moving, step by step, toward a more modern, more humane tomato industry in Florida,” said Gerardo Reyes from CIW. “Together with Verité, we are working this season to develop and test the standards and procedures that will ensure that those changes are real and measurable. Change of this magnitude is never easy, but all of us in this partnership -- CIW, the participating growers, and our retail food partners -- are determined, as the saying goes, 'to make the road by walking'. And it is good to have someone with us like Verité, who has been down this road before,” Reyes added.

Verité will oversee and conduct onsite verification of payment assessments in all participating buyer and grower operations through a standard accounting validation and verification process especially designed for this program. The accounting will be supplemented with worker interviews to confirm receipt of payments.

“We are privileged to be able to put into place a program that ensures that the farm workers who harvest tomatoes in the fields of Florida will benefit from this increase, upholding the commitments that buyers and growers of major food companies have made,” said Dan Viederman, Executive Director of Verité.

About the Coalition of Immokalee Workers

The CIW is a community-based farm worker organization headquartered in Immokalee, Florida, with over 4,000 members. The CIW seeks modern working conditions for farm workers and promotes their fair treatment in accordance with national and international labor

standards. Among its accomplishments, the CIW has aided in the prosecution by the Department of Justice of six slavery operations and the liberation of well over 1,000 workers. The CIW uses creative methods to educate consumers about human rights abuses in the U.S. agriculture industry, the need for corporate social responsibility, and how consumers can help workers realize their social change goals. The CIW's Campaign for Fair Food has won unprecedented support for fundamental farm labor reforms from retail food industry leaders, with the goal of enlisting the market power of those companies to demand more humane labor standards from their Florida tomato suppliers. For more information, visit www.ciw-online.org.