

NATIONAL FARM WORKER MINISTRY
MCDONALD'S STATEMENT December '05

The National Farm Worker Ministry urges McDonald's to seize the opportunity presented to them by the Coalition of Immokalee Worker to improve the lives of farm workers, their company and the agribusiness industry. McDonald's should work with the Coalition to establish and ensure fair wages and safe working conditions for the farm workers who pick tomatoes for McDonald's products.

National Farm Worker Ministry includes national denominations, religious organizations, local congregations and thousands of individuals nationwide who yearn for justice for the workers who pick the food we eat. In over 80 years of ministry with farm workers, we have witnessed first hand, the suffering and abuse experienced by farm workers in Florida and across the country, including low wages and underpayment of wages, forced labor, lack of health care, exposure to dangerous pesticides, overcrowded and unsanitary housing conditions, sexual harassment, lack of drinking water or toilets at work sites, and heat related deaths. Farm workers face harassment and firing if they complain about such abuses.

Farm workers are still excluded from many of the laws and regulations protecting other workers and there is minimal enforcement of those that are in place. Labor agreements, in which the workers have a protected role in ensuring enforcement of negotiated wages and working conditions, are the surest way to achieve some measure of fairness for all in the agricultural industry. History has proven that growers and workers both benefit from such agreements.

McDonald's Code of Conduct states that they will only do business with those suppliers who act according to their corporate principles, which include that all workers be treated with dignity and respect, that all workers be compensated fairly, and that all work environments be clean, safe and sanitary.

If McDonald's is honest about its insistence that suppliers adhere to these principles, it should not rely on a system such as SAFE whose founders include growers who have been violating these principles for years. Rather it should look for new models that include a substantive role for those who are most affected - the farm workers. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers has established such a model with Taco Bell. McDonald's may be a global leader in the food industry; but this time, they should follow Taco Bell's lead.