

Dear Trader Joe's Manager,

As we celebrate Thanksgiving – a holiday made possible by the hard work of men and women in America's agricultural fields – **I urge Trader Joe's to respect the dignity of farmworkers by joining the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program.**

Florida tomato pickers have long faced severe poverty (earning just 50 cents per 32-lb bucket of tomatoes they pick) and abuses such as wage theft, sexual harassment, and – in the most extreme cases – modern-day slavery.

The good news is that there is a solution underway. The CIW is working with nine major retail food companies (including McDonald's, Subway, and Whole Foods) and the Florida tomato industry to implement the Fair Food Program. These retailers have committed to pay a small premium – similar to that paid for certified Fair Trade products – for the tomatoes they purchase to improve farmworker wages. They are also working with the CIW to implement and enforce a code of conduct, which includes a voice for farmworkers to report abuses without fear of retaliation and zero tolerance for forced labor.

**The statement released by Trader Joe's late last month was and continues to be nothing more than a public relations ploy. It lacks real commitment, transparency, verification and farmworker participation.**

Trader Joe's claims that it is currently paying a premium of 3 cents per pound for an undisclosed percentage of its Florida tomato purchases. As far as we are concerned, Trader Joe's could claim to be paying a premium of 3 *dollars* per pound, but outside an agreement with the CIW, there is no way to verify – or trust – this assertion. And while Trader Joe's says it is buying tomatoes only from growers who abide by the CIW's Fair Food Code of Conduct, it refuses to talk to the CIW to learn who these growers are. Does trader Joe's expect to learn this from the growers themselves? What grower would self-report that it is no longer complying with the Code?

**I expect better from Trader Joe's: Nothing less than real corporate responsibility.**

This Thanksgiving, as we give thanks for the food that nourishes us, I urge Trader Joe's to end the public relations excuses and join the CIW's Fair Food program.

For more information, please visit [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)

Sincerely,



## CIW response to Trader Joe's October 2011 announcement

[http://www.ciw-online.org/ciw\\_response\\_to\\_TJ\\_1021.html](http://www.ciw-online.org/ciw_response_to_TJ_1021.html)

Hypocrisy is *not* sustainable...

In Trader Joe's latest public relations communiqué, issued the day before hundreds of Fair Food activists marched to its corporate headquarters in Monrovia, CA, the retailer now claims it is complying fully with the CIW's Fair Food Program, but that it is simply doing so **without the CIW**.

**No partnership. No verification. No commitment. Just Trader Joe's announcing that it will do the right thing.**

In effect, Trader Joe's is saying "Trust us."

Oh, and, "Stop protesting us," too.

Yes, Trader Joe's – a virtual black box of a company whose management was dubbed "obsessively secretive" by CNN Money magazine – is asking the CIW and Fair Food activists around the country to *take it on faith* that the company will now pay a Fair Food premium on all tomatoes it purchases from Florida and only buy tomatoes from growers found to be in compliance with the CIW's Fair Food Code of Conduct.

[In that same article, entitled "Inside the secret world of Trader Joe's," the reporter writes, "Trader Joe's business tactics are often very much at odds with its image as the funky shop around the corner that sources its wares from local farms and food artisans." *Sound familiar?*]

**The company's position is not only unverifiable and without any binding, long-term commitment once the public spotlight fades – the twin problems that have dogged Trader Joe's response to the campaign from the start – but it is also, on its face, full of holes.**

Let's start with the unverifiable, non-binding part. Trader Joe's has not agreed to report anything to anyone. There is no way for the CIW or its auditors to know which growers are supplying Trader Joe's. Even if Trader Joe's were to, at a later date, publicly report that it is buying tomatoes from Growers X and Y, there is no means for independent confirmation of that information, and no way to know if Grower Z – or A, B and C for that matter – were also part of Trader Joe's tomato supply chain.

Likewise, there is no way to know if the money Trader Joe's claims it is paying to its tomato suppliers covers all, or only part, of its Florida tomato purchases. In its announcement, the company says it buys about 3 million pounds of Florida tomatoes a year. But, again, there is no mechanism in place to independently verify that amount. For all we – or anyone else – knows, 3 million pounds could be 90%, 75%, or 50% of the company's total purchases.

That's why the Campaign for Fair Food can't yet pack up the signs, break down the sound stage, and walk away. That, and the fact that this announcement only came as a result of the escalating pressure on Trader



Joe's to sign a Fair Food agreement. **What possible guarantee can be found in Trader Joe's announcement that it will continue if the public pressure were to stop?**

**Short answer: None. No guarantee at all. Trader Joe's unilateral "fair food" program could end tomorrow and no one would be the wiser.**

But that's not all that's wrong with Trader Joe's attempt to avoid real accountability. Not by a long shot. Trader Joe's says it is buying tomatoes only from growers who abide by the CIW's Fair Food Code of Conduct. **But how would Trader Joe's know whether a grower is actually abiding by the Code or not? Certainly they don't expect to learn that from the CIW, because they won't even talk to us. Do they think they will learn it from the grower? What grower would self-report that it is no longer complying with the Code?**

Further, in the fine print of its 10/21 announcement, Trader Joe's does *not* say it will terminate growers who don't comply with the Fair Food Code of Conduct. Instead, it says it will terminate growers who don't abide by *its own* vendor agreement. And what does its vendor agreement require? Only that the grower follow the law, not that it abide by the far greater protections contained in the Fair Food Code of Conduct. **This is the same vendor agreement under which Trader Joe's kept buying tomatoes from Florida growers through all the worst abuses of the past. In other words, Trader Joe's wants to continue with business as usual, no questions asked.**

Further still, Trader Joe's also says it has required its growers to allow the CIW to audit their practices. But, as we mentioned above, how would the CIW, or anyone else, know which growers Trader Joe's is really buying from? Is Trader Joe's going to report its purchases to us, like the other retailers who have signed Fair Food agreements? If so, then why not just join the Fair Food Program so those claims can be verified? Otherwise, the CIW might well be auditing only a few of the growers from which Joe is buying tomatoes. We can see why that system might be good for Trader Joe's public image, but it wouldn't be real.

**Finally, Trader Joe's proudly proclaims that it is paying 3 cents a pound for the tomatoes it buys from Florida. But the buyers in the Fair Food Program are paying a premium of *more than 4 cents per pound* for the grape tomatoes Trader Joe's buys (the premium for the grape tomato is greater than the penny-per-pound for the round tomato because the grapes are so much smaller and take so much longer to pick) – and doing so for all of their Florida tomato purchases, not just a select and secretive percentage.**

**Perhaps Trader Joe's really does know the current premium for the type of tomato it buys and is trying to confuse its customers by appearing to go beyond the Campaign for Fair Food's demands and pay more than the better known penny-per-pound premium for round tomatoes. Or perhaps it truly doesn't know that the smaller tomatoes carry a higher premium in the Fair Food program. Only Trader Joe's management knows the answer to that question.**

But one thing's for sure. Trader Joe's would know the correct amount, and have to pay it, if it weren't trying to circumvent the Fair Food Program and would sit down, respectfully, with the farmworkers who pick its tomatoes -- like nine other corporations have done before it -- and reach a verifiable, binding agreement.

Is that really too much to ask of the "ethical grocer"?