

October 7, 2009

Auraria Campus Catering By Sodexo
Attn: Bill Lepper
900 Auraria Pkwy. Suite 125
Denver, CO 80217



As concerned students and consumers, we are writing to ask for the support of Auraria Campus Catering by Sodexo in urging Sodexo foodservice provider to take a leadership role in ending sub-poverty wages, forced labor, and other human rights violations endured by Florida tomato pickers.

We, United Mexican American Students / Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán of Auraria campus, consisting of students from Metropolitan State College of Denver, University of Colorado at Denver and Community College of Denver (UMAS / MEChA de Auraria), an ally of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and a collaborator with the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA), a national network of students and youth organizing to advance justice and human rights together with the men and women that harvest the tomatoes that end up in our dining halls and on our plates. UMAS MEChA de Auraria works in close partnership with SFA and the CIW, an internationally-recognized farmworker organization based in Southwest Florida.

According to U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, for farmworkers in and around Immokalee, the heart of Florida's tomato industry, "the norm is a disaster, and the extreme is slavery." Florida tomato pickers have received the same wage (about 45 cents per 32-pound bucket of tomatoes) for 30 years. They receive no overtime pay despite 10-14-hour workdays, receive no health benefits of any kind, and are denied the right to organize to change these conditions. In the most extreme cases, workers are forced to work against their will through the threat or use of physical violence. In the past 11 years, seven federally-prosecuted cases of modern-day slavery have been uncovered in the fields of Florida, involving a total of well over one thousand workers.

In recent years, however, a new hope for labor reform has emerged in Florida's fields. In 2001, the CIW – with the support of student, faith and human rights allies – launched the Campaign for Fair Food to call on major purchasers of tomatoes to take responsibility to address the dehumanizing working conditions created by these corporations' high-volume, low cost purchasing practices. In the eight years since, Yum Brands, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods, and food service providers Bon Appetit and Compass have all entered into agreements with the CIW, committing to pay at least a penny more per pound to workers harvesting their tomatoes, to implement a code of conduct in their supply chain to guarantee workers fair and humane treatment, and to work together with farmworkers in the development and implementation of these reforms.

During a four-year national boycott of Taco Bell, students at over 300 high schools, colleges and universities engaged in coordinated national actions, hunger strikes and innumerable educational events, leading to the successful removal or prevention of 25 Taco Bell restaurants or sponsorships. These actions ultimately helped to bring about the CIW-Yum Brands agreement. Students and youth have continued to play an integral role in the subsequent campaigns and agreements.

Now we turn to Sodexo. Sodexo claims to promote sustainability and support communities "because it makes good business sense and because it's the right thing to do." These claims make Sodexo's unwillingness thus far to work in partnership with the CIW all the more baffling. We request that Auraria Campus Catering by Sodexo pass on the message of its student consumers to Sodexo corporate. It is time for Sodexo to put its values into action and truly be a "positive force for social change" by agreeing to work with the CIW. Until it does, we will be both vigilant and persistent, prepared to take appropriate action on campus in solidarity with the Student/Farmworker Alliance and the Coalition of Immokalee workers.

Sincerely,

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