



March 26, 2009

George Chavel
Group Chief Operating Officer
Chief Executive Officer, North America, Food and Facilities Management Services
Sodexo
9801 Washingtonian Boulevard
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20878

Dear Mr. Chavel:

We write you today on behalf of the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA) to urge Sodexo to take a leadership role in ending forced labor, poverty wages and other human rights abuses faced by farmworkers harvesting tomatoes for the U.S. corporate food industry.

The SFA, working in coalition with several other national youth and student labor, human rights, and sustainable food organizations, has just launched a major campaign on campuses across the U.S. to call attention to the role played by food service provider corporations such as Sodexo in perpetuating farmworker poverty and to facilitate student organizing and action around this issue.

We are writing to urge Sodexo to schedule a meeting with representatives of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) as soon as possible to determine how to best move toward more humane labor conditions in the Florida fields where Sodexo buys its tomatoes.

The SFA is a national network of students and youth organizing closely with the CIW. We are comprised of thousands of young people on campuses across the U.S. who are committed to the principle of basic human rights for the workers who harvest our produce. Our work has been commended by the Business Ethics Network, American Rights at Work, and the National Latino/a Law Students Association. The SFA is also a founding member of the Alliance for Fair Food, a broad network of human rights, religious, student, sustainable food, labor, and other organizations working in partnership with the CIW to promote principles and practices of socially responsible purchasing in the corporate food industry. The CIW is an internationally recognized, award-winning farmworker organization based in southern Florida. It has assisted the U.S. Department of Justice and FBI in successfully investigating and prosecuting cases of modern-day slavery and it has been recognized with the 2007 Anti-Slavery International Award and the 2003 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award.

Today, there is a well-documented human rights crisis in Florida. Farmworkers who pick tomatoes for the corporate food industry are among the country's worst-paid, least protected workers. They earn about 45 cents for every 32-lb. bucket of tomatoes they pick – a rate that has not changed significantly in 30 years – working from dusk to dawn without the right to overtime pay. They receive no benefits and are excluded from the right to organize. In the most extreme cases, captive workers are held against their will by their employers through threats or violence – including beatings and shootings. There have been seven federal prosecutions by the Department of Justice for forced labor in the Florida agricultural industry in the past eleven years, involving well over one thousand farmworkers.

It is vitally important that Sodexo take an active role in advancing human rights and fair wages for farm-

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workers given that your company's low-cost, high-volume tomato purchasing practices help to create conditions in the fields where poverty wages and other human rights abuses flourish. Sodexo, however, also has the power and opportunity to be a leader in the food service provider industry by working with the CIW to implement socially responsible purchasing practices.

Since 2001, the CIW, working closely with the SFA and leaders from the faith and human rights communities, has successfully persuaded food industry leaders Yum Brands, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway and Whole Foods to work with the CIW to improve farm labor conditions in their supply chains. Those agreements guarantee at least a penny more per pound to workers harvesting tomatoes for these companies, a human rights-based code of conduct, a collaborative effort to develop a third party mechanism for monitoring conditions in the fields, and farmworker participation in the development and implementation of these reforms.

This letter is not our first communication with Sodexo. Your company, furthermore, can no longer claim ignorance of the crisis in Florida's fields or say that the solution to this crisis is not possible, given the past eight years of our campaign, seven high-profile farmworker slavery cases, and the existence of a proven model for change. Despite all this, we and the CIW still await a response from Sodexo.

The changes we urge Sodexo to implement today only compliment Sodexo's work toward responsible corporate citizenship, work that remains incomplete in the eyes of many consumers. Indeed, the unconscionable reality in Florida's fields flies in the face of your company's own recognition that "it is responsible for promoting and guaranteeing the human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," your adherence to the UN Global Compact, your extensive supplier codes of conduct, and your goal of using your substantial purchasing power to promote more sustainable procurement practices.

During the course of the four-year Taco Bell Boycott, which ended successfully in the CIW-Yum Brands agreement, SFA members organized to remove Taco Bell restaurants and contracts from 25 separate high schools, colleges and universities in the U.S. We have been likewise centrally involved in the campaigns that brought about the CIW's subsequent agreements with major food corporations. Increasingly, students are demanding true sustainability – including workers' rights – and corporate responsibility in their campus dining. The SFA will continue to educate students across the U.S. about the role Sodexo is currently playing and help students to make their voice heard around this issue. We hope to soon have a different story to tell, one of partnership, responsibility and fairness, one that we know students want to hear and one that is not only the most ethical thing for Sodexo to do, but also a good business decision.

The vision of a food system that ensures human rights for farmworkers is one that is finally beginning to bear fruit, but additional major tomato purchasers such as Sodexo must come to the table. Until then, the SFA will be closely watching your actions and waiting for your response. Students understand that if Sodexo is not part of the solution, it is part of the problem. Again, we urge you to soon meet with the CIW. Please contact us with any questions or concerns.

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CC:
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