

August 8, 2008

Mr. Steve Ells, CEO
Chipotle Mexican Grill
1543 Wazee St., Suite 200
Denver, CO 80202

Mr. Ells:

We are growing increasingly impatient with your inaction and we are here today to declare, on behalf of the national student and youth organizations and the thousands of young consumers we represent, that we are escalating our campaign in solidarity with Florida farmworkers.

It has been over two years since the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) first reached out to you, calling on your company to take responsibility for the extreme poverty and degradation faced by tomato harvesters whose labor has subsidized the profits of the fast food industry for decades. Your response, consisting of silence and hollow excuses, has revealed what can only be described as a deep hypocrisy.

Recently, Burger King committed to work with the CIW to improve the wages and protect the human rights of workers in its tomato supply chain. With Yum! Brands, McDonald's and now Burger King—three of the leading fast food companies in the world—having agreed to use their influence to transform Florida agriculture for the better, Chipotle's refusal to even communicate with the CIW is simply intolerable.

In the face of this historic progress within the food industry, your silence articulates a clear message that Chipotle is sided against justice. It is the silence of a backward, isolated holdout wedded to maintaining a system of food production that depends on an oppressed and marginalized workforce.

Amplifying the message that Chipotle is sided against justice and human rights is your company's claim that it has suspended Florida tomato purchases while it unilaterally "investigates" farmworker wages and working conditions. The suspension of Florida tomatoes is an action that shows more interest in maintaining the status quo than in protecting human rights. It exemplifies the lack of transparent purchasing practices and disregard for the conditions under which ingredients are produced that has allowed sweatshop conditions and modern-day slavery in the fields to flourish. While you have failed to verify from where you are currently sourcing your tomatoes, how the workers in those fields fare, or that Chipotle has indeed stopped purchases from Florida, the one thing you can assure is that Chipotle has delayed the hopes of thousands of workers in Florida to enjoy more dignified working conditions. Put simply, when faced with mounting public pressure that it work with the CIW, Chipotle acted to intentionally avoid improving farmworker wages and working conditions.

As for your purported investigation, we will not once again cite to you the innumerable

studies, government statistics, and court documents that illustrate the horrid state of affairs in the fields of Florida. You are no doubt already aware of these. Today, there is no need for further investigation—there is a dire need for reform. It only fuels our outrage that you assume we would be satisfied to wait idly while you decide whether the rights of farmworkers are worthy of your consideration.

Today we are forced to draw the following conclusion: Your much-hyped “Food With Integrity” mantra is little more than a marketing ploy that fails to hide your contempt for farmworkers. With you as its lead spokesperson, Mr. Ells, Chipotle has aggressively marketed itself as a different kind of fast food company, one deeply concerned with the social and environmental impacts of its business practices and committed to, in your words, “using [y]our size and purchasing power not just to make better food in [y]our restaurants, but to help create a better food supply system.” And while you tout your advancements in demanding and securing more humane treatment for farm *animals*, you sit on your palms while the rights of *human beings* are being trampled.

In a 2006 article in *Nation’s Restaurant News*, Chipotle spokesperson Chris Arnold stated that 18 to 34-year olds are Chipotle’s target market and “college students are certainly in the sweet spot of that [demographic].” Let it be known that we will not be lulled into passivity by noble-sounding but ultimately hollow marketing slogans. We intend to continue our work in partnership with farmworkers to construct a more just agricultural industry and more just society and we will not allow you to define for us what “integrity” means. No amount of free burrito giveaways, YouTube contests or witty billboards can weaken our determined and proven alliance with farmworkers and we will, together with them, assert our humanity.

Your company now stands on the wrong side of a potentially protracted conflict, and the only way to realign yourself is to work directly with the CIW to ensure fairer wages and real rights for farmworkers. Change in the agricultural industry is inevitable. The choice as to when the inevitable becomes reality is in your hands. Until then, we will not rest.

Sincerely,

United Students Against Sweatshops
Student/Farmworker Alliance
Student Action with Farmworkers
Student Labor Action Project

MEChA de Coloraztlan
MEChA de Auraria (Denver)
Indigenous Youth Sovereignty Project (Denver)
Coalition Against Sweatshop Abuses (Boulder)
Student Worker (Boulder)
180'11 (Boulder)