**Kroger, Walmart/Sam**’**s Club, Schnucks**

After decades of struggling for dignified working conditions and their human rights, farmworkers with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) developed the Fair Food Program (FFP) to address systemic abuses on the farms where they worked, farms at the end of long supply chains of large corporate buyers of produce. For the dozen years of the FFP’s existence, it has proven to be singularly effective in eliminating the conditions that have [plagued](https://www.seattletimes.com/business/slavery-forced-labor-a-florida-man-did-it-to-seasonal-foreign-workers/#:~:text=Moreno%252C%252056%252C%2520violated%2520federal%2520RICO,conspiracy%2520to%2520commit%2520forced%2520labor.) the agricultural industry for generations – conditions including sexual harassment and assault, wage theft, violence, and forced labor. And it has done so thanks to those participating buyers that have made legally binding commitments to the Program.

The simple truth is that silence and inaction are unacceptable responses in the face of forced labor. In the most recent forced labor prosecution, *US v. Moreno, et al.*, workers were held against their will in Pahokee, Florida, their passports taken, their families threatened if they spoke up. Those workers broke through the silence and inaction of the powerful buyer companies named by the [DOL](https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/whd/whd20230202-2) in that investigation — Kroger, Walmart/Sam’s Club, and Schnucks — by escaping from a labor camp in the trunk of a car and calling the CIW for help. The multi-state forced labor conspiracy that produced watermelons sold in the stores of companies was entirely preventable but for the silence and inaction of those with the power to prevent it.

Indeed, of the companies named by the DOL, Kroger stands out as a particularly concerning example of a corporation repeatedly failing to protect farmworkers from the most egregious worker and human rights violations. This failure is all the more disturbing because of Kroger’s own supposed zero tolerance [policies](https://www.thekrogerco.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Kroger-Statement-on-Human-Rights.pdf) against forced labor and the apparent failure of their auditing and certification requirements to detect, let alone address or prevent, a trafficking ring within their own supply chain. And as if one case of forced labor weren’t enough to move the company to comment — much less join the Program recognized by law [enforcement](https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Aug/CBP%2525202021%252520VTW%252520FAQs%252520%252528Forced%252520Labor%252529.pdf) [agencies](https://blog.dol.gov/2022/01/13/exposing-the-brutality-of-human-trafficking) across the US government today as the best program for fighting modern-day slavery — what are consumers to think about Kroger when they realize that the Pahokee case was not the first instance in which Kroger was connected to a law enforcement action against forced labor, but the [second since December 2021](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-12-31/u-s-blocks-tomato-shipments-from-mexican-farms-accused-of-abusing-workers)?

Instead of silence, we offer an alternative: join the Fair Food Program, and expand it to all your produce suppliers’ operations.

Become a part of the Presidential Medal-winning, gold standard for human rights protections in supply chains to ensure that wherever workers are planting, staking, and harvesting your produce, they will have access to the protections they need and deserve. The Fair Food Program has stood above the rest of the social responsibility field for years. If the watermelon fields involved in *US v Moreno* were part of the FFP, the workers in Pahokee would have had access to the best protections in American agriculture, and wouldn’t have had to suffer unimaginable abuse at the hands of their employers, or hide in the trunk of a car to escape. Corporations who have signed on to the Fair Food Program have the option to expand their commitment to watermelons and other high-risk crops in order to end forced labor once and for all. Companies like Compass and Whole Foods, have already done so, and they are reaping the benefits of never needing to choose between carefully worded statements responding to slavery cases in their supply chains or opting for no comment at all.

Failing to join the Fair Food Program will sadly and inevitably doom yet more workers in these companies’ supply chains to face the kind of exploitation that leads to modern-day slavery. Instead of silence, choose justice. Choose the Fair Food Program.