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Professional Activists Continue To Misdlead Public and Farm Workers About 'Penny-Per-Pound' Deals That Don't Exist

MAITLAND, Fla. (Nov. 30, 2007) -- The Florida Tomato Growers Exchange issued the following statement today about the scheduled protest in Miami organized by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW):

"CIW is using today's march in Miami to mislead the public about Florida's tomato industry in a desperate attempt to pressure Burger King into adopting a "penny-per-pound" deal that does not exist. There is no such arrangement in effect between producers and fast-food companies, which continue to buy Florida tomatoes.

The Florida Tomato Growers Exchange is concerned that the penny-per-pound scheme may violate federal and state laws related to antitrust, labor and racketeering, so our members have chosen not to participate in any pact in which a third party sets wages for their employees.

Growers who sold tomatoes to Taco Bell under the penny-per-pound deal last season are not participating in the deal this year. The now moot arrangement netted workers a small weekly amount so insignificant that many chose not to even cash the checks. The McDonald's deal never went into effect.

This season's payroll records show that Florida tomato harvesters' hourly pay ranged from \$10.50 to \$14.86, with an average of \$12.46 per hour. The harvesters earn more than double the current federal minimum wage of \$5.85 per hour and nearly double Florida's minimum wage of \$6.67 per hour.

The farmworkers harvest tomatoes an average of 25 to 30 hours per week in addition to other tasks on the farm. For most workers, the tomato harvest in Florida is only part of the work they do during the year. Many move on to other regions to harvest other crops throughout the growing season.

There are more impactful ways to make a difference for tomato harvesters. Florida's tomato producers demonstrate social accountability by participating in comprehensive programs that certify employment, health, housing and safety practices. They undergo audits by third-party companies to ensure they provide a work environment for their employees that is free of hazard, intimidation, violence and harassment."

The Florida Tomato Growers Exchange is a private, voluntary and member-driven agricultural cooperative of Florida tomato growers. For more information, go to [www.floridatomatogrowers.org](http://www.floridatomatogrowers.org) and [www.safeemployer.org](http://www.safeemployer.org).

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