



FOOD CHAINS

For nearly 10 years, the San Antonio community has shown their solidarity with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), who recently received the 2015 Presidential Award for Extraordinary Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Their Anti-slavery Campaign works hand-in-hand with their Campaign for Fair Food, which has included many successful corporate campaigns.

The Boot the Bell Campaign, launched by the CIW's student ally network -the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA)- called on high school and college campuses to cut their contracts with Taco Bell starting in 2001. While the University of Texas @ San Antonio did not have a Taco Bell on campus at the time, the growing national support—with over 300 schools working on the campaign—led the UTSA administration to an agreement that would prevent Taco Bell from doing business with the university. A victory was announced in 2005 when the first Fair Food Agreement was signed between the CIW and Taco Bell.

In 2014, the Boot the Brains Campaign kicked off with a new call to young people to use similar tactics to put pressure on Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program. We are thrilled to be bringing leaders from the CIW and SFA in April for the San Antonio premiere of Food Chains and look forward to the many intercambios and pláticas to come!

The following is an excerpt from an interview, part of the CNN Freedom Project, a series about ending modern-day slavery, featuring Food Chains director Sanjay Rawal. — by Marina Saenz Luna

November 19th, 2014: *Q&A with Sanjay Rawal, director of Food Chains, a documentary that examines the plight of farm laborers in the U.S. CNN asked its director, Sanjay Rawal, about the movie and how it came to be made.*

CNN: What was the most surprising thing you found while making this movie?

Rawal: We look at supermarkets as benign, neighborly institutions when they're anything but. The supermarket industry is as large as tech. And the companies within the grocery sector are bigger. Walmart's grocery division alone made almost twice as much gross revenue than Apple.

CNN: Does anything you see offer hope that conditions are improving?

Rawal: Modern-day slavery, sexual harassment, wage theft—these are realities within farm labor, but no longer in the Florida tomato industry. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, together with Florida tomato farmers, has transformed what was known as ground zero for modern-day slavery in the U.S., into the most progressive sector of American agriculture.

CNN: Did you encounter any resistance as you made this film?

Rawal: We have encountered stiff resistance from the supermarket industry. Farmers have been very appreciative because they suffer daily under the massive pressure supermarkets place on them. Grocery is an industry that's frankly out of control.

CNN: How has the film been received?

Rawal: We've had a stellar reaction from chefs, foodies and farmworkers. I think it's clear from the film how we're all connected to one another through the food system.

CNN: What do you hope this film will accomplish?

Rawal: We need major corporations like supermarkets and fast food chains to adopt the few farmworker rights programs out there. The CIW's Fair Food Program is one.

CNN: How do you expect people to react to this documentary?

Rawal: I think people will be shocked by the footage we have (shot by the amazing Forest Woodward), but they'll also feel hopeful—that there is a solution to the exploitation of workers.

CNN: You weren't scared to go after some very large corporations and industry associations. Why did you think it was important to name names and direct some of the tension in the documentary towards particular organizations?

Rawal: We've seen the horrendous mushrooming of corporate influence in this country, effectively neutering legislators who are beholden to these sources of campaign dollars. If legislators won't fight for our food system, we have to—by attacking the companies atop the food chain.

CNN: What can people do to make a difference to the conditions of farm laborers?

Rawal: We need to support worker-driven movements. No one can guarantee the true sourcing of a product more than a worker. We need to support worker organizations and programs like the Fair Food Program that can guarantee the rights and wages of those who pick our food. ♦

NOTE: SEE BACK AD FOR INFO ON THE UPCOMING FILM SCREENING + ACTION

