

Tomato on the Seder Plate

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STANDING WITH FARMWORKERS

Supporting Those Working to End Modern-Day Slavery

PART 1 *Please read this towards the beginning of the seder.*

The seder begins: “Let all who are in need, come and share in the Passover meal.” In this year of struggle for workers’ rights, we want to symbolically welcome members of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a human rights organization made up of Florida farmworkers, primarily tomato harvesters, to share in our seder. Before we begin to tell our story of the journey to freedom, we take a moment to hear a voice from this current fight for freedom, symbolizing their presence by placing a tomato on the seder plate. Until we know that the food that we eat isn’t tainted by forced labor and exploitation, none of us is truly free.

“When you’re there, [enslaved,] you feel like the world is ending. You feel absolutely horrible... Once you’re back here on the outside, it’s hard to explain. Everything’s different now. It was like coming out of the darkness into the light. Just imagine if you were reborn. That’s what it’s like.” — Adan Garcia Orozco, farmworker

PART 2 *This can be read during the Rabban Gamliel section of the seder, when you hold up and explain each of the traditional items on the seder plate.*

Why is there a tomato on the seder plate? This tomato brings our attention to the oppression and liberation of farmworkers who harvest fruits and vegetables here in the United States. And it reminds of us of our power to help create justice.

A tomato purchased in the United States between November and May was most likely picked by a worker in Florida. On this night when we remember the Jewish journey from slavery to freedom, we remember numerous cases of modern slavery that have been found in the Florida tomato industry. The tomato on our seder plate might have been picked by someone who has been enslaved.

Slavery is just the extreme end of a continuum of abuse; perhaps this tomato was picked by someone facing other abusive working conditions, such as wage theft, violence, sexual harassment, exposure to dangerous pesticides, or poverty level wages—just fifty cents for every 32-lb bucket of tomatoes picked and hauled—that have not changed for more than 30 years.

But a transformation is underway. Since 1993, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a farmworker organization, has been organizing for justice in the fields. Together with student groups, secular human rights organizations, and religious groups like T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, they have convinced 11 major corporations, such as McDonald’s and Trader Joe’s, to join the Fair Food Program, a historic partnership between workers, growers and corporations. Not only does the Fair Food program raise the wages of tomato workers, it also requires companies to source tomatoes from growers that agree to a code of conduct in the fields which includes a zero tolerance policy for forced labor and sexual harassment. Since 2011, when more than 90% of Florida’s tomato growers began to implement the agreement, over \$8 million has been distributed from participating retailers to workers.

But the resistance of holdout retailers, such as major supermarkets and Wendy’s, threatens to undermine these fragile gains, as they provide a market to farms to continue abusive practices.

PART 3: NEXT YEAR, JUSTICE AND FREEDOM

This can be read at any point towards the end of the Seder, after the meal.

This Pesach, while commemorating our own freedom from bondage, we remind ourselves of our responsibility to end slavery as it exists today and our power to create justice when we join together. We commit ourselves to standing with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, so that next Passover, the tomato on our seder plate might represent workers who have a liberation story to tell of their own.

Ways to take action:

- Learn more about the Campaign for Fair Food through online educational materials.
- Speak up at your local Wendy's, Stop & Shop, Giant, Publix or Kroger's! You can download a letter to give to your store manager or send a letter to the corporation who owns your neighborhood store.
- Organize an action! Work with the CIW to plan a demonstration calling on your grocery store or Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program and commit to buying from farms that comply with the Fair Food Code of Conduct.
- Educate your community! Use educational materials—articles, fliers, and videos—to bring this campaign to your synagogue or school

For more information and materials for taking action, visit:

www.ciw-online.org and www.truah.org