

Washington Apple Pickers on Strike

Hundreds of apple pickers walked off their jobs when growers on August 14th changed their wage system cut their wages from piece rate to hourly wages, dramatically reducing their wages.

Several hundred apple pickers are currently on strike in Pasco, WA!

Apple pickers suffer from unfair wage changes...

- Workers estimate that by changing compensation per hour, they will be losing on average \$3 to \$4 an hour less than what they would earn under the piece rate system.
- The hourly system places more stress on workers who routinely work 6 or 7 days a week during harvest time. Apple workers have to pick more apples for lower wages.
- The wage cuts have already had a detrimental impact on apple workers due to the high cost of living and the lack of affordable housing.

Growers claim that they do not have funds for fair salaries....

- Workers who labor in the apple industry help generate \$4 billion dollars a year to the Washington economy, yet earn an average yearly income of \$8,000.
- Over the last two years, the apple industry has had increased success in exporting apples. Mexico, for example, consumes almost 30% of Washington's total apple production, with an estimated value of \$100 million dollars a year.

Apple pickers are not the only ones speaking out against the apple industry...

- In 1998, Mexican trade unions filed a complaint under NAFTA labor side accords regarding the apple industry alleging violations of minimum wage laws, health and safety and right to organize laws. The United States and Mexican governments have accepted the complaint and are setting a date for a public hearing in Washington, DC.
- Last month, Human Rights Watch issued a report regarding the Washington apple industry of routinely denying workers their basic rights to organize, to bargain collectively and to strike. (The full report is available at the following web address [Http://xmail.hrw.org/us-labor/](http://xmail.hrw.org/us-labor/)).

For more information, please contact
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Washington Apple Pickers Demand Justice!

Over one thousand apple pickers in central Washington State walked off their jobs this past summer when the apple industry rolled back harvest time wages causing apple workers to lost an average of \$3-\$4 per hour.. The massive wage protests that affected over 20 apple companies were successful in eliminating the wage rollbacks. Now the over 40,000 apple harvesters and 15000 apple packing house workers are attempting to unionize to end their long term exploitation by the one billion dollar a year apple industry. They face many obstacles:

Washington apple pickers are denied the basic right to bargain collectively

Washington state has the third largest agricultural industry in the United States. Its over 100,000 farm workers represent one of the largest sectors of the work force in the state. Washington's agricultural industry produces crops and products worth \$6 billion dollars annually. Democratic governor Gary Locke has stated that farm workers are "the backbone of the agricultural industry". **Despite the importance of farm workers to the State of Washington, they are denied the fundamental right to bargain collectively.** Hundreds of workers are routinely fired each year when they complain about low wages, bad conditions or when they try to organize.

Apple Picker's Labor Rights are Routinely Violated

The overwhelming majority of apple workers are recent immigrants from Mexico. The big apple companies take advantage of these workers by paying them sub-minimum wages, subjecting them to dangerous working conditions and discriminating against women and older workers. It is not uncommon to see workers camping in apple orchards and along river banks in makeshift shacks made out of cardboard or blue plastic tarp.

Growers claim they do not have funds for fair salaries

Workers who labor in the apple industry and in agriculture help generate \$6 billion dollars a year to the Washington economy, yet earn average yearly incomes of only \$8000.

With the help of the NAFTA agreement the Washington apple industry has had increased success in exporting apples to Mexico and Canada. In 1999 Mexico and Canada imported over 10 million boxes of Washington apples which represents 43% of Washington's total apple exports. These apple exports have an estimated value of \$150 million dollars a year.

Apple pickers are not the only ones speaking out against the apple industry...

In 1998 reform Mexican trade unions filed a complaint under NAFTA's labor side accords against the apple industry alleging violations of minimum wage laws, health and safety and right to organize laws. The United States and Mexican governments have accepted the complaint and are setting a date for a public hearing in Washington state this coming summer.

Last summer, Human Rights Watch issued a report charging the Washington apple industry of routinely denying workers their basic rights to organize, to bargain collectively and to strike. (The full report is available at the following web address <http://xmail.hrw.org/us-labor/>).

Apple pickers are currently organizing to end these abuses

The campaign for fair treatment for apple pickers is continuing in Washington state. Since Canada is a major market for Washington apples we ask Canadian labor to help in this campaign.

For more information, please contact
United Farm workers of America, P.O. Box 1056, Sunnyside, Wa 98944/509-839-4903