

# Union seeks 'Fair Trade' apples

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**AGRICULTURE:** Union seeks more money for farmers, workers.

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SEATTLE — The farm workers union, taking a cue from a popular movement that helps small coffee growers, is calling for a "Fair Trade" campaign for apple workers.

The United Farm Workers of America on Thursday

called on stores to pay farmers more for apples in hopes of improving wages and benefits for the workers who pick them.

"It's not fair to have whole industries depend on immigrant workers ... yet we deny them basic rights," said Guadalupe Gamboa, regional director for the union.

According to a recent Washington State University study, a worker gets 4 percent of the apple dollar. The grower receives 7 percent

while the store pockets 68 percent. The remaining money goes to packaging and transportation costs.

Coffee earns a Fair Trade label when more of the profits make their way back to growers in developing countries. Consumers who buy the coffee from merchants like Starbucks pay more with the assurance that a portion of the profit goes to workers.

Jeff Johnson, a spokesman for the Washington

State Labor Council, said under an apple Fair Trade agreement, retailers would pay more for apples, allowing growers and workers to negotiate better wages and benefits. The workers' rights would be protected under the contract.

"The incentive for the grower is that we're finding a market where they get more income," Johnson said. "The grower is assured they'll have the quantity and quality of workers they need

to get their crop in."

Growers and farm workers have been at the mercy of a system that pockets most of the agricultural profits, said Rick Bender, president of the Washington State Labor Council, a division of the AFL-CIO.

"The Fair Trade campaign is taking a bold leap into the 21st century by tapping into a vast consumer market that increasingly cares about what it eats and how that food is produced," Bender

said.

Washington's apple industry — the state's No. 1 crop — has been in decline since 1996, with growers getting less for their apples than it costs to grow them.

Farmers blame a number of factors for the mushy fruit market — huge crops; increased competition from Southern Hemisphere imports; consolidation of retail grocers who wield greater control over the price paid for fruit.