

Labor agreement ends boycott of Taco Bell: Fast-food giant to increase payments to tomato pickers

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Churches that endorsed a boycott against Taco Bell have declared victory after the fast-food giant agreed to increase payments to migrant tomato pickers in Florida. Taco Bell agreed to a penny-per-pound increase in wages.

The agreement announced March 8 between Taco Bell's parent company, Yum Brands, and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers ends the boycott.

"The success of this struggle illustrates that when committed, faithful people come together to work for justice, even in the face of powerful opposition, there may be nothing we cannot achieve," said Edith Russell of the United Church of Christ, the first church to endorse the boycott.

Other church bodies that joined the boycott were the United Methodist Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the National Council of Churches.

"We recognize that Florida tomato workers do not enjoy the same rights and conditions as employees in other industries, and there is a need for reform," said Emil Brolick, president of Taco Bell. Tomato pickers earn about 40 cents for each 32-pound bucket of tomatoes they pick, according to the Washington Post, and must pick 2 tons of tomatoes to earn \$50.

Yum Brands also owns Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, A&W and Long John Silver's. Labor leader Lucas Benitez said the agreement issues a "clear challenge" to other restaurants to improve worker conditions. "This is an important victory for farmworkers, one that establishes a new standard of social responsibility for the fast-food industry and makes an immediate material change in the lives of workers," Benitez said.

Last year, several churches agreed to end a similar boycott of the North Carolina-based Mt. Olive Pickle Co. after it agreed to push for higher wages and better conditions for cucumber pickers. *-Religion News Service*