SAKUMA BERRY FARMS: THE FACTS

\*Recreated, in part, from [www.boycottsakumaberries.com](http://www.boycottsakumaberries.com)

**What is Sakuma?**

Sakuma Brothers Farms is a large company whose farms grow strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, and apples. They also have a farmers market, a sales department, a processing facility, and a plant nursery. Although they pride themselves in being a “family business” and “family farm,” they are in fact a powerful corporation containing multiple layers of management that brings in 6.4 million dollars a year. The original Sakuma family suffered the conditions of internment at labor camps during World War II, and now their children have passed on the same conditions to their migrant farmworkers.

**What is the boycott on Sakuma Berry Farms?**

For a decade Familias Unidas por la Justicia (United Families for Justice), a labor union made up of farm workers from Sakuma, has been protesting Sakuma for inadequate wages and mistreatment. The boycott has sought a legally binding contract that will set things right. Sadly, the majority of Sakuma’s migrant farm workers live in overcrowded, poorly ventilated, poorly equipped, and un-weathered shacks in company-owned labor camps—a situation that borders on modern day slavery.

For years the ongoing struggle through labor disputes led only to firing, evictions, and minor temporary concessions. In 2013 farm workers waged six strikes during the berry harvest season, thus securing a temporary wage increase of $12 per hour as well as new bedding and mattresses to replace others infested with bed bugs, $6000 in payback for 30 farm worker youth, a temporary change in the way piece rates were determined, a signed agreement against retaliation, and a restraining order against security guards in the labor camps. Despite this small victory, it did not produce a much-needed, valid labor contract.

In June 2014, Sakuma finally entered into a settlement with its workers in response to a class action lawsuit alleging wage theft and the denial of necessary rest breaks from hard labor. The agreement dictates that 1,200 eligible Sakuma farm workers employed between 2010 and 2013 will be given $500,000 to divvy up. It also stipulates that farm employers must accurately track all hours worked by berry pickers, accurately round the amount of hours worked, provide unambiguous pay statements that delineate piece rates and amounts of berries picked, ensure that workers are given half hour breaks where they can leave the fields, provide per request from any piece-rate berry picker documentation of his/her clock-in and clock-out time as well as quantity of berries picked, and guarantee that they will not retaliate against any worker involved in a lawsuit.

The settlement has yet to be approved by a federal judge but should be later this month. The victory will be an important step forward toward justice in spite of Sakuma’s past attempts to defend itself as a “family business.”