



Food Certification Programs

Video: <https://vimeo.com/589654672>

You're probably heard about fair-trade products: coffee, tea, chocolate, and more. But what about food grown here in the U.S. How can we, as consumers, make sure that the food we buy isn't exploiting farm workers?

From The Fairworld Project's "Justice in the Fields" report: voluntary certification programs can play a role in farm worker justice. While voluntary certification programs cannot and should not replace other mechanisms such as government policy, law enforcement, and democratic worker organizations or unions, they potentially can complement these tools and set a high bar for labor practices on farms.

To be effective, voluntary certification programs must have strong enforcement mechanisms and include workers in all levels of decision-making, governance, and enforcement. This includes independent auditing programs, worker control of claims made regarding labor practices, and complaint mechanisms that result in correction of violations. To make a market claim, programs must include rigorous standards that go far beyond legal requirements, along with meaningful economic leverage, both to encourage proactive compliance with those standards and to enforce them when necessary.¹

NFWM currently partners with 4 food certification programs. Each organization is independent of NFWM and of each other, but all serve a similar purpose: to bring together growers, farm workers, packers, distributors, retailers, and consumers to transform agriculture at various levels and improve the lives and working conditions of farm workers.

Three have food label programs*. Look for the following labels, and print out the food certification shopping cards for reference. If you don't see them, ask your store manager.

1. The Agricultural Justice Program (AJP)
<https://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/>



¹ <https://fairworldproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Justice-In-The-Fields-Report.pdf>

AJP works primarily in the U.S. and Canada:

Providing Certification and Technical Assistance Tools to Transform the Food System.

They provide farms and food businesses with technical tools to improve work and trade practices from farm to retail, including extensive toolkits and templates, one-on-one technical assistance, and a stakeholder-driven certification program for high bar social justice standards -- Food Justice Certification (FJC), the gold standard for labor and trade practices in North America. They support and partner with third-party certifiers and worker organizations that carry out the certification and inspection process for the FJC program. Food Justice Certified products can be found on grocery store shelves, farmers markets, CSAs and roadside stands. They maintain a Social Justice Fund, through which five percent of all grants received are set aside, and a portion is used to subsidize certification fees through their cost share program for small family farms and independent retailers and cooperatives that have excellent labor practices, but are experiencing economic hardship.

Raising Awareness of the Need for Transforming the Food System and Models that Can Accomplish Change.

They engage in outreach and education to raise awareness of the disparities and injustice in the food system and the types of approaches needed to realize real change for those marginalized by the current system. Their awareness-raising work is done through social and public media, events and presentations, networking and partnering, contributing comments on other fair market claim programs and associations, providing tools for improving working and trade practices, and promoting the Food Justice Certified (FJC) label in the marketplace. The FJC label helps launch conversations about why such a label is needed and what it means, the existence of inequities and injustice in the food system, the need to address them, and actions that can be taken.

2. The Equitable Food Initiative (EFI)

<https://equitablefood.org>

EFI is a non-profit social enterprise to transform agriculture through farm worker engagement. They believe that if the workforce is properly trained and incentivized to collaborate with management in developing a safe, stable and dignified working environment, then new value is created for growers and buyers.

EFI provides workers with updated training on health and food safety regulations, including hygiene, proper hand-washing and sanitation. Workers are also trained on how to identify sexual harassment in the workplace and on health and safety issues, including injury prevention, with instructions on warm-up exercises and proper use of equipment.



An elected leadership team of farm workers and managers is trained in communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills, and then applies those skills to help the farming operation meet [EFI standards](#), which focus on working conditions, food safety, and pest management.

Currently, 37 farms have been certified (22 in Mexico, 12 in the U.S., two in Canada and one in Guatemala) and more are pending certification with leadership training. This means some 36,000 workers are on farms with trained EFI teams. Retailers pay a premium on certified produce, which appears on the workers' checks as an EFI bonus.

3. The Fair Food Program

<https://www.fairfoodprogram.org>

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program (FFP) is a unique partnership among farmers, farm workers, and retail food companies that ensures humane wages and working conditions for the workers who pick fruits and vegetables on participating farms. It harnesses the power of consumer demand to give farm workers a voice in the decisions that affect their lives, and to eliminate the longstanding abuses that have plagued agriculture for generations.



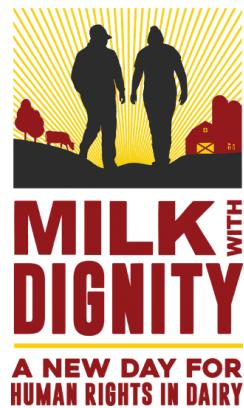
Under the Fair Food Program, Participating Growers have agreed to:

- A wage increase supported by the “penny per pound” price premium Participating Buyers pay for their tomatoes;
- Compliance with the human rights-based [Code of Conduct](#), including zero tolerance for forced labor, child labor, and sexual assault;
- Worker-to-worker education sessions conducted by the CIW on the farms and on company time to insure workers understand their new rights and responsibilities;
- A worker-triggered complaint resolution mechanism leading to complaint investigation, corrective action plans, and, if necessary, suspension of a farm's Participating Grower status, and thereby its ability to sell to Participating Buyers,
- Health and safety committees on every farm to give workers a structured voice in the shape of their work environment;
- Specific and concrete changes in harvesting operations to improve workers' wages and working conditions, including an end to the age-old practice of forced overfilling of picking buckets (a practice which effectively denied workers pay for up to 10% of the tomatoes harvested), the provision of shade in the fields, and the use of time clocks to record and count all compensable hours accurately; and
- Ongoing auditing of the farms by the Fair Food Standards Council to insure compliance with each element of the program.

4. Milk With Dignity

<https://migrantjustice.net/milk-with-dignity-campaign>

The Milk with Dignity Standards Council is an independent non-profit organization based in Burlington, Vermont, dedicated to implementation, monitoring, and enforcement in the Milk with Dignity Program. The Milk with Dignity Program brings together farm workers, farmers, buyers, and consumers to secure dignified working conditions in dairy supply chains. The Program enlists the resources of food industry leaders, such as Ben & Jerry's, that have made legally-binding commitments to protect workers' human rights. Those participating buyers provide a premium to participating farms that agree to work towards compliance with the labor standards in the Milk with Dignity (MD) [Code of Conduct](#). The premium supports farms' compliance with the Code and rewards farms that comply.



In the MwD Program, compliance on the farm is achieved through a unique partnership and problem-solving approach among farmers, farm workers, and the Milk with Dignity Standards Council (MDSC). The MDSC works with farmers and farm workers to understand, participate in, and achieve compliance with the labor standards in the Code.

The Milk with Dignity approach to domestic fair trade seeks to implement a worker-authored contract while leveraging certification, supply chain negotiation, coalition building, and supply chain policy. *In contrast to the labeling-centered approaches of existing fair trade certification schemes, Milk with Dignity pursues a vision of fairness put forward by the farm workers themselves.²

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Participating Farms in the Milk with Dignity Program are paid a premium to support and reward compliance with the Code. Participating Farms agree to:

- Work with MDSC and workers to comply with the [Milk with Dignity Code of Conduct](#) labor standards
- Permit access to program education to ensure workers understand their rights and responsibilities
- Allow workers to access MDSC's support line and work with MDSC to resolve any complaints that come up
- Collaborate with MDSC's Code compliance audits, complaint investigations, and implementation of corrective action plans to make steady progress to come into compliance

Reflection Questions:

1. What kinds of labels do you pay attention to on food products?
2. Would you be willing to look for food certification labels which you know benefit farm workers?

² <https://cias.wisc.edu/2019/07/24/milk-with-dignity/>

3. Are there ways you can use your status as a consumer to make things better for farm workers through Social media, personal sharing with friends/family, or asking a store manager to carry certain products or food with labels that do not exploit farm workers?

Action Ideas:

1. Talking to or drafting a letter to a store manager about food certification labels:
 - Address why food certification is important.
 - Name two facts about farm worker labor conditions
 - Start here to find some facts that speak to you:
 - [NFWM: Heat Stress](#)
 - [NFWM: Low Wages](#)
 - [NFWM: Children in the Fields](#)
 - Explain why these facts matter to you.
 - Share how this would affect your behavior as a consumer.
 - Tell them if you would buy less.
 - Tell them if you would shop somewhere else that carried certified products.
 - 2. Spread the word to your friends and within your faith community, in person and online.

Learn More:

Video channels:

- Agricultural Justice Project: <https://vimeo.com/user67948868>
- Equitable Food Initiative: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLq9yJU63rkuz0wqe_EW6gg
- Fair Food Program: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CIWvideo>
- Milk With Dignity:
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0pDS7JGnQfdvum4IiT_mjgPh3GWvHGb5

Prayer:

God of wind and fire, ice and lightning, ocean and sky, plain and mountain, forest and shore,

We praise you for cloud and sun, for rain and wave, for flower and leaf, for rock and sand, for flame and ash. Your creation surrounds us with beauty and bounty in season. We are fed by the fruits and vegetables, nuts and grains that grow in field and orchard, in row and trellis, in tree and plant. Healthy food is a gift and we are grateful to those whose hands pick and gather, pull and cut, sort and pack these gifts for us.

Guide us to choose those gifts that come to us without exploitation. Help us to support products that farm workers help to certify. Give us courage to use our status as consumers to ask for more.

Amen.