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Fair Trade for a Better World

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Renewed Concern Over Labor Dispute at Washington Farm

Thousands of Consumers Ask Sakuma Brothers Farm to Negotiate a Fair Contract While Over 30 Organizations Ask Driscoll's to Uphold Commitment to Freedom of Association

PORTLAND, OR – Leading fair trade advocacy organization, Fair World Project, joined over thirty other organizations in signing a letter asking Driscoll's, the largest distributor of berries in the world, to make good on its commitment to enforcing the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. As part of its worker welfare standard, Driscoll's affirms the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively and states that standards apply even when laws do not exist. Driscoll's also affirmed its commitment to this right in a 2015 meeting with Fair World Project, Community to Community Development, Domestic Fair Trade Association, and the independent union Familias Unidas por la Justicia.

Yet at Sakuma Brothers Farm, a Washington farm that grows blueberries and blackberries for Driscoll's, management has refused to negotiate a contract with Familias Unidas por la Justicia. Rather than enforcing its own standards, Driscoll's has stated it cannot insist that Sakuma Brothers Farm sit down with the independent union.

"Sakuma claims to care about and respect the farmworkers that harvest berries year after year. If this is the case, Danny Weeden, CEO of Sakuma Brothers, should negotiate a fair contract with farmworkers who have repeatedly asked for one. Decency and respect require that much, even if the law does not," says Kerstin Lindgren, Campaign Director of Fair World Project.

Fair World Project has also sent a petition signed by nearly 10,000 consumers directly to Sakuma Brothers asking CEO Danny Weeden to sit down with farmworkers.

"Driscoll's is a successful company that has figured out how to bring fresh berries to consumers around the world. Certainly they can figure out how to enforce their own code of conduct and protect the rights of workers," says Dana Geffner, Executive Director of Fair World Project. "Consumers are very concerned about this issue and it is imperative for Driscoll's to ensure Sakuma remedies this problem immediately," continues Geffner.

In the absence of a contract and union recognition, Familias Unidas por la Justicia have improved their own pay and conditions through a series of walkouts and lawsuits over the past three years. A landmark lawsuit in 2015 won paid breaks for farmworkers not only at Sakuma Brothers Farm, but throughout the state of Washington.

"Sakuma management has proven to us that they cannot be trusted without a signed legal document like a contract. And Driscoll's knows that Sakuma has not lived up to its principles regarding farmworker justice," says Ramon Torres, President, Familias Unidas por la Justicia.

Walkouts have helped workers win temporary gains in pay and conditions. But advocates and consumers alike insist that a contract is needed for workers. This will be a longer-term solution that will benefit farmworkers as well as farm owners and managers.

“Driscoll's should live up to their PR to consumers about open dialogue and fairness and insist that Sakuma negotiate a union contract with the workers,” says Rosalinda Guillen, Executive Director of Community to Community Development.

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***Fair World Project (FWP)** is a non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the use of the term “fair trade” in the marketplace, expand markets for authentic fair trade, educate consumers about key issues in trade and agriculture, advocate for policies leading to a just economy, and facilitate collaborative relationships to create true system change. FWP publishes a bi-annual publication entitled *For a Better World*. For more information, visit: <http://www.fairworldproject.org>.*