FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 11, 2019

CONTACT:
Gabby Rosazza, 240-750-4671
gabby@ilrf.org
Anna Canning, 626 429-0229
anna@fairworldproject.org

Costco Ceases Orders Following Union-Busting on Fyffes’ Honduran Plantations
Labor Rights Groups Urge Other Supermarkets to Make their Business with Fyffes
Contingent on Remediation of Labor Violations

PORTLAND, OREGON – Following letters to Costco Wholesale from Fair World Project and the International Labor Rights Forum urging the retailer to make future purchase orders with fruit company Fyffes contingent on the cessation of labor rights violations, Costco has confirmed that it has not placed future orders for melons from the Fyffes operations where ongoing violations occur. Fyffes is an Irish multinational company owned by the Japanese conglomerate Sumitomo, and is one of the largest fruit brands in the world.

“This is a victory for the Honduran farmworkers who have been organizing for three years to have their union rights respected,” said Gabriela Rosazza, a campaigner at the International Labor Rights Forum. “We now urge other supermarkets to make their future orders with Fyffes – for any produce and from any country – contingent on the rehiring of the STAS union members who have faced retaliation, and the negotiation of a collective bargaining agreement in good faith with STAS.”

These ongoing labor rights violations, as well as public scrutiny and pressure from advocacy groups, led Fair Trade USA to revoke the fair trade certification of Fyffes’ Suragroh plantation in December 2018, although Fyffes continues to use fair trade certification labeling on fruit sourced from other countries. In March 2019, the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) terminated Fyffes membership. Labor violations on the farms have also been cited in complaints under the U.S.-Central America Free Trade Agreement and the International Labor Organization.

“Despite the actions of Fair Trade USA and the Ethical Trading Initiative, Fyffes continues to sidestep their workers’ rights responsibilities. Supermarkets have a lot of economic power in their purchases, and it’s time for them to step up,” said Anna Canning, campaign manager at Fair World Project. “Cutting all orders with Fyffes would send a strong message that human rights are non-negotiable.”

Background
Following a three-year global campaign urging Fyffes to remediate two decades of human and labor rights abuses on its Honduran melon plantations, including wage theft and exposure to toxic agrochemicals, on January 11, 2019, Fyffes signed an agreement recognizing el Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Agroindustria y Similares (STAS) as the legitimate union representative of workers employed at Fyffes' melon subsidiaries in Honduras. The agreement states that collective bargaining negotiations with STAS would begin on February 5 and that the company would rehire union members who have not been rehired this harvest season due to their union affiliation. Fyffes, however, has reneged on both fronts and union members report ongoing harassment and intimidation, bringing back memories of when the workers originally tried to form the STAS union in 2016 and Fyffes responded with a violent anti-union campaign, locking union members in offices and forcing them to resign, illegally firing workers, and psychologically and verbally harassing STAS-affiliated workers.

Since the signing of the January 11 agreement, workers have reported that Fyffes' local management has systematically intensified and escalated the anti-union harassment and violence in the following ways:

- Fyffes’ management has halted work on the plantations to coerce workers to affiliate to the employer-controlled unions, SITRASURAGROH and SITRA MELEXA. Workers have reported that they are being promised bonuses and family baskets at the end of the harvest if they affiliate to the employer-controlled unions. If they don’t affiliate, management is threatening that the company will close its operations and that they won’t be rehired the next season.
- A STAS-affiliated worker was taken in a vehicle to a solitary plantation lot and told that they would not be rehired if they didn’t affiliate to the employer-controlled unions.
- A STAS-affiliated worker was physically hit by a manager and fired. The worker was rehired after STAS filed complaints with the Labor Ministry, CONADEH and the police.
- A STAS-affiliated worker was told by management that they would only be reinstated if they join the employer-controlled unions and disaffiliate from STAS.
- Some STAS affiliates have been reinstated on the condition that they not be involved with STAS.
- Workers have reported that they have received visits from immediate supervisors to their homes in order to affiliate to the employer-controlled unions.
- Various workers have reported that protests against STAS were promoted by the company and that management was integrated in these protests.

At the executive level, Fyffes is now giving credence to SITRASURAGROH and SITRAMELEXA, two organizations that were created by Fyffes’ management to undermine worker organizing, a blatant violation of Honduran labor law.

###

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’s recent report, *Fairness for Farmers: A Report Assessing the Fair Trade Movement and the Role of Certification*, details the role that fair trade certification and verification programs can play within the larger fair trade movement of ensuring fairness to farmers. FWP also publishes a bi-annual publication, *For A Better World*. For further information, visit: [http://www.fairworldproject.org](http://www.fairworldproject.org).

**International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF)** is dedicated to advancing dignity and justice for workers in the global economy and works with trade unions, faith-based organizations, and community groups to support workers and their families. ILRF works for a world where workers have the power to speak out and organize to defend and advance their rights and interests; a world where workers have the right to form unions and bargain collectively to secure a safe and dignified life for themselves and their families; and a world where everyone is free from discrimination, forced labor and child labor. For further information, visit: [https://laborrights.org](https://laborrights.org).