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New Report Exposes Toxic Chemicals, Human Rights Abuses on Fyffes Melon Farms

Labor rights groups, unions call on Fyffes to take responsibility for working conditions and commit to binding, enforceable agreement with the STAS union to uphold worker rights

PORTLAND, OREGON – A joint report by the International Labor Rights Forum, Fair World Project, and the International Union of Food Workers (IUF) Latin America Regional Secretariat, with support from 3F International, today reveals long-term, ongoing human and labor rights violations on Fyffes’ melon plantations in Honduras. The report, *Fyffes Farms Exposed: The Fight for Justice in the Honduran Melon Fields*, calls on the company to take responsibility to remedy injustices at their farms and commit to a legally-binding, enforceable agreement to uphold workers’ rights.

To view the report online, please visit: <https://fairworldproject.org/choose-fair/certifier-analysis/fyffes-farms-exposed>.

Fyffes, the top importer of melons to the United States, is owned by the multinational Sumitomo Corporation. They produce cantaloupes and honeydews on two subsidiary plantations in Honduras, Suragroh and Melon Export. These melons, branded with either Fyffes or Sol labels, are sold from January to May in the United States by major supermarket chains such as Giant, Kroger, Publix, Albertsons, Walmart, and Safeway, as well as smaller grocery stores. Fyffes has a workforce of at least 6,500 employees. Those workers have long faced toxic chemical exposure and wage theft, and, after organizing to combat those abuses, have faced aggressive union-busting by Fyffes’ management.

“Fyffes evident anti-unionism contributes to the extreme poverty that thousands of workers live though on its melon farms,” said Gerardo Iglesias, General Secretary of Rel-

UITA, “and the creation of management-controlled unions is further evidence that Fyffes looks to bulldoze the voice of independent unions like STAS.”

“Fyffes must stop putting people above profits and respect the rights of its Honduran workforce – 80% of whom are women,” said Judy Gearhart, Executive Director of the International Labor Rights Forum. “Given Fyffes’ complicity with coercion and violence in some of the poorest regions in Central America, anything short of negotiating in good faith with STAS for a legally binding and enforceable agreement is a continuation of the company’s legacy as a union-buster.”

The report tracks the timeline of Fyffes’ abuses as well as their corporate social responsibility initiatives and the responses of buyers, certifiers, governments, and international institutions. In the years since the workers organized with the union - *El Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Agroindustria y Similares* (STAS) - organizers have been attacked with a machete, beaten, threatened with death, and forced to join a management-controlled union. In the midst of this, Fyffes’ Honduran plantations have been certified and subsequently decertified by Fair Trade USA in December 2018 and expelled from the Ethical Trading Initiative in March 2019, after these organizations conducted their own investigations into the violations. In fall of 2019, after Costco and Whole Foods Market ceased their orders of Fyffes’ Honduran melons, and after Salling Group (formerly Dansk Supermarked) and Tesco reduced other Fyffes fruit orders due to the violations, Fyffes finally rehired dozens of union members who had been blacklisted for three years. Yet the abuses continue and worker interviews during the 2019-2020 growing season continue to document misuse of toxic chemicals, denial of workers’ right to social security, and conditions that grow still more unsafe as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads.

“Organized workers are the best defenders of their own rights,” said Dana Geffner, Executive Director of the Fair World Project. “Fyffes needs to negotiate a binding agreement with STAS based on that principle. Supermarkets in the U.S. need to hold their suppliers to a higher standard, otherwise, they, too, are complicit in an inhumane model that treats workers as if they are disposable.”

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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’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>.

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>.