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CONTACT: Lauren Berlekamp, 202-657-7754
laurenb@wearemovementmedia.com
Anna Canning, 971-208-5414
anna@fairworldproject.org

Labor Rights and Farmworker Groups call on Fair Trade USA to Halt Development of Fair-Washed, Deceptive Dairy Standard

Fair Trade USA's Proposed Dairy Standard Faces Scrutiny for Undermining Worker Rights

PORTLAND, OR – A coalition of 35+ labor rights, farmer and farmworker groups, including Migrant Justice, Worker-driven Social Responsibility Network, and the fair trade advocacy organization, Fair World Project, are calling on Fair Trade USA (FTUSA) to stop the development of a “fair trade” certification standard for the dairy industry. FTUSA is in the process of completing a public comment period on their pilot of the standard, which is seen as an insincere effort given that FTUSA and the proposed program do not present adequate solutions to address the current challenges facing the dairy industry and the people who work within it.

In an open letter to FTUSA, a certifier known for ineffective enforcement and corporate-friendly standards within the fair trade movement, the coalition points out that the proposed dairy program is designed with no intention that the standards actually be met and with no way for its designated monitors to determine what actual working conditions are. Such a program could not truthfully certify dairy farms' compliance with any standards, because the enforcement systems lack ways for workers to understand their rights, report violations of those rights, be protected from retaliation for attempting to enforce standards, or participate in any meaningful way in monitoring their employers' compliance.

“The lack of worker-driven mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement within the dairy standard make it impossible for the program to make real change on the ground and further damages the credibility of the fair trade movement,” says Sarah Newell, of the Worker-driven Social Responsibility Network. “The only way to ensure social fairness and protections for the communities that work on agricultural operations is for businesses to commit to legally-binding, enforceable agreements to uphold workers' rights. FTUSA's proposed dairy standard does not even come close to creating a pathway for this essential component of a truly fair trade operation.”

In the past, FTUSA has created programs that actively undermine organizing by farmworker communities, including the certification of agricultural operations known for labor rights violations. The most recent and notable example of this is FTUSA's certification in 2018 of a Honduran melon operation owned by Fyffes, one of the largest fruit companies in the world, after at least a decade of documented human rights abuses against its workers. FTUSA withdrew the certification later that year after pressure from labor rights and farmworker groups who condemned the certifier for its complicity in the abuses and its egregious misrepresentation of the principles of fair trade by allowing the operation to even become certified.

“Fair Trade USA has a track record of putting corporate public relations before meaningful change,” says Anna Canning, Campaign Manager of Fair World Project. “We have seen them engage in disingenuous standard development processes in other industries before, from produce operations to the apparel industry. Not only is the standard that they are piloting weak and unenforceable, it is opposed by the very workers it is supposed to benefit. This standard is pure “fair-washing.” It borrows from the language of the fair trade movement but lacks the mechanisms to ensure anything like fairness.”

The program also fails to address major structural issues within the dairy industry, including the economic pressures squeezing small-scale dairy farm owners and farmworkers, along with environmental challenges exacerbated by industrial agriculture and climate change.

“As workers, we have fought hard to change the terrible conditions we face on farms,” says Vermont dairy worker and Migrant Justice leader Rossy Alfaro. “We have created a program that is actually making a difference and enforcing our

rights. Now Fair Trade USA is coming along, dressed up like a program that helps workers, but it's really only propaganda for the companies that are getting rich while we suffer."

To read the full version of the coalition letter and its signatories online, please visit: <https://fairworldproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/letter-to-FTUSA-9-17-2020.pdf>

To read Fair World Project's piece, "There's Nothing Fair About Fair Trade USA's 'Fair Trade Dairy'", which further outlines the inadequacies of FTUSA's approach to the development of its dairy standard, please visit: <https://fairworldproject.org/theres-nothing-fair-about-fair-trade-usas-fair-trade-dairy/>

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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. For further information, visit: <https://www.fairworldproject.org/>.

Migrant Justice is a Vermont-based human rights organization founded and led by immigrant dairy workers. The organization is the founder of Milk with Dignity, a supply chain program currently operating on dozens of farms in Vermont and New York. Milk with Dignity monitors and enforces human rights standards in labor and housing conditions for hundreds of dairy workers. For further information, visit: <https://www.migrantjustice.net> and <https://www.milkwithdignity.org>

Worker-driven Social Responsibility Network is a network of worker organizations, allies, and technical advisors created to develop and implement a strategy to expand the Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) model into other sectors and regions. The Network's goal is to provide support and resources for worker-led efforts to replicate the model, and shift the paradigm to establish the WSR model as the baseline for workers' rights programs within global supply chains. For further information, visit <https://www.wsr-network.org>.