

TRANSCRIPT

"THE PROBLEM WITH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES"

A Conversation With Greg Asbed and Jennifer Gordon

Moderator: Stephen Hubbell

ANNOUNCER:

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STEVE HUBBELL:

I'm Steve Hubbell from the Open Society Fellowship program. Welcome all of you to the Open Society Foundations. Many of you will know Jennifer Gordon as the celebrated author of *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights* which was published in 2005 and which Barbara Ehrenreich called a case study in what happens when courage and solidarity runs into greed and indifference.

Others of you may know her-- as the founder and executive director of the Workplace project on Long Island-- whose pioneering model of labor organizing is emulated by immigrant's rights groups around the country. Still others of you may have encountered her work for the first time when she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship which she held from 1999 to 2004 (COUGHING) or through her work at-- at Fordham University Law School where she teaches.

The remainder of you, though, I'm sure-- know her as an Open Society fellow whose fellowship project looks at strategies to hold-- global labor recruiters and the employers they contract with accountable for abuses against workers-- that are committed on their watch. A side of Jennifer you may not have encountered before is-- i-- is her-- status as a trenchant and eloquent critic of something called multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Now, when Jennifer and I first began to-- to-- to conceive of this event-- we faced a

conundrum which is how to convey to an audience, a potential audience, the urgency, the broad applicability, the excitement that I know I felt when I first heard her ideas about multi-stakeholder (SNIFFING) initiatives. But ideally without using the term multi-stakeholder initiatives--

GREG ASBED:

Yes.

STEVE HUBBELL:

--in the title.

(OVERTALK)

STEVE HUBBELL:

'Cause there is something about multi-stakeholder initiative that just causes-- eyes to-- to glaze over. (LAUGHTER) Those efforts quickly came to naught. We then s-- tried to-- we toyed with-- multi-stakeholder initiatives, exposed a multi-stakeholder initiative. (LAUGHTER) The pr-- the--

JENNIFER GORDON:

The rally r-- against--

STEVE HUBBELL:

--against multi-stakeholder initiatives. (LAUGHTER) But the-- among the shortcomings of these were they didn't do justice to the scope of Jennifer's critique, nor did they do justice to the presence on our panel of-- of our-- our other guest, Greg Asbed of The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, who will present a-- a bracing and energizing alternative (SLURS) to multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Ultimately we settled on the problem with multi-stakeholder initiatives. (THROAT CLEARING) And here you are. (LAUGHTER) So there's only so much in a name. But-- we're delighted to welcome both panelists here today. So without further ado, I'll turn it over to you, Jennifer.

JENNIFER GORDON:

Great. Thank you so much. So-- speaking of multi-stakeholder initiatives, the first

one got off the ground in the early 1990s without an awful lot of fanfare. But over the past decade, they have grown dramatically in number all over the world and are now frequently held up as the pinnacle of the practice of (NOISE) corporate social responsibility. (THROAT CLEARING)

Even with that, there's no agreed upon definition of what a multi-stakeholder initiative, which to avoid taking up a good deal of this talk. By saying multi-stakeholder initiative, I'm just gonna call it MSI-- there's no agreed upon definition of what an MSI is. But most of them bring together businesses-- and here I'm largely talking about the global brands with names that most people recognize-- and combine them with non-profit and religious organizations and sometimes with governments.

MSIs are voluntary and they seek to bring people together to come to some consensus on what standards should be in some problem area that has stymied governments. Governments just haven't been able to figure out what to do. Different MSIs have different purposes. But many of them product codes of conduct that participating companies agree to apply to all of their subcontractors down the supply chain.

And in many cases, they also offer some kind of certification after they've inspected you and found you in compliance with their code. When MSIs began to proliferate about a decade ago, they were hailed as an improvement, as they probably were, to the prior trend which was corporate self-regulation.

For example-- some of you remember when Nike was targeted in the 1990s for paying pennies an hour to Vietnamese workers for sewing their sneakers. It responded by creating its own Nike code code of conduct and hiring its own accountants to verify its compliance with its code. And few people were persuaded that Nike and the many companies that followed a similar path had changed much of anything other than its publicity materials.

Increasingly MSIs have come to replace such internal corporate codes as the solution of choice to problems that governments are unwilling or unable to tackle. Dangerous conditions and low pay in global garment factories, management of competing-- claims to forest resources, how to deal with so-called conflict minerals, the gold and diamonds and other natural resources that are mined in countries that are known for their human rights violations and then whose proceeds are used to fill the violating government's coffers.

Threats to indigenous company-- indigenous communities from companies that wanna mine their land for oil and gas all have given rise to MSIs. Multiple and competing MSIs in each case as a matter of fact. And it's not hard to understand their appeal. In theory, MSIs are about bringing all stakeholders to the table in contexts where the voice of some stakeholders are rarely heard.

And they're about negotiating solutions that take the interests of all these participants into account, creating standards that protect vulnerable people and resources. Words like transparency and accountability are frequently part of the

description of MSI work. And these things are sorely lacking. So being critical of MSIs feel a little like being critical of universal pre-K. Both of them seem like such a good idea. Who would be the crotchety person who would oppose them.

So yes, but, on the other hand, while the rhetoric of MSIs is strong and while there are some newer initiatives that I'll-- that seem quite good that I'll talk about a little later, overall studies have found repeatedly that the standards that MSIs have been s-- have set are not reflected in meaningful changes on the ground.

Just to cite a couple very recent examples. A paper published this year by three academics in the U.K. studied-- or reported their results of the s-- their study of the long-standing, one of the first MSIs, the Forest Stewardship Council. And they concluded that after 20 years and I quote, "While the Forest Stewardship Council has successfully facilitated the determination of new standards for forestry, it has nevertheless failed to transform commercial forestry practices or stem the tide of tropical deforestation." that is pri-- precisely the purposes for which it was established.

Similarly in a book published last year by Brown professor of political science and management, Richard Locke-- he summarizes his extensive study of standard-setting initiatives in global production this way, quote, "Private compliance programs--" meaning things like MSIs-- "appear largely unable to deliver on their promise of sustained improvements (PAPER RUSTLING) in labor standards."

And emblematic-- tragically emblematic of this fact is that factories involved in the horrific garment fires in Pakistan-- that killed over 200 garment workers in 2012 and in Rana Plaza in Bangladesh that killed over 1,100 garment workers in 2013, a number of those factories had recently been inspected and certified-- certified not only as compliant with other aspects of the code, but as fire safe by monitors for MSIs including in the Pakistan case by monitors for Social Accountability International, you may see-- SAI, they go by their initials. Which is one of the most prominent-- MSIs in the field.

How can that be? Well, that's what I'm here to talk about. I wanna focus on the arena I know best which is the labor rights arena to illustrate these points. But similar problems arise in other contexts. So let me set out before I focus on the issues of democracy and worker representation that are my primary concern, let me set out the most common overarching critiques of MSIs.

First, the codes that MSIs create are not generally binding and they're not generally legally enforceable. They're voluntary. Companies can shop for the most favorable code or they can go without certification at all. There's no requirement that a company be certified. The only penalty for non-compliance in most cases is the loss of the certification of that particular MSI.

Which isn't much of a punishment given that the firm can seek certification then from another MSI and still keep consumers happy given how confused even conscious consumers are by all of the different seals of approval out there. In my 30 of experience working as an organizer with low-wage immigrant workers and a

lawyer and as a (THUMPING) professor of labor law, I have rarely seen a firm make truly voluntary efforts to improve the conditions of so-called unskilled (PAPER RUSTLING) workers.

And I would assert that the whole trajectory of labor history backs me up. Instead, working conditions improve when there is sustained pressure that threatens a company's bottom line. And even those improvements will be short term unless they're preserved in a form that institutionalizes them like an enforceable contract that has meaningful and applied sanctions for violations and backed up by the credible threat of more pressure if the company reneges on its promises.

A second overarching issue. Codes of conduct are almost always enforced when they're enforced at all through private monitoring. This has given rise to a burgeoning business. Thousands and thousands of monitoring firms. And prominent MSIs, like the Fair Labor Association or SAI, contract out their auditing to a large number of monitors. And those monitors compete with each other for work.

Most often, it's the brand name companies being monitored who pay the monitors. If a company isn't happy with a monitor, it can switch to another one. And this symbiotic relationship and the active market for monitoring services makes monitors very reluctant to come down hard on the firms that are their lifeblood. (THROAT CLEARING)

Finally, third overarching thing, codes of conduct are generic. They apply to an entire industry or issue all around the world. They craft standards in broad strokes. Ideally, this would be the source of adaptability when the codes hit the ground. But instead, it most often permits the fudge room (COUGHING) that keeps a code from having a meaningful impact on conditions in particular locations.

Now, these are important and some people would say they are devastating (COUGHING) problems. But as I mentioned, I wanna focus today on an issue that's less often articulated. And that's the m-- the frequent lack of any representation of one party in MSIs. (COUGH) Excuse me. And that party is the (COUGHING) people whose lives are affected by the standards that the MSIs negotiate and apply. (COUGHING)

In labor MSIs, these are the people who actually do the manufacturing or the farm work or the mining. They are rarely represented in a real way. And this raises-- a set of concerns that I wanna group in three categories. Participation, purpose, and power. (COUGHING) With regard to participants, although MSIs are supposed to be an alternative to corporate self-regulation, employers and their representatives, for example industry associations, sit on most (NOISE) MSI boards and provide most of the funding (NOISE) overall for MSI work.

And even when they don't control a majority of the vote, which is usually the retort of an MSI. "We are not under the domination of corporations. They are one among many stakeholders." Everybody at the table knows that if the MSI wants to claim that it has influence over an industry, it has to keep the corporations on the board and participating. So the dynamic, whatever the formal structure, the dy-- the dynamic

becomes very deferential toward the demands of the corporation.

The remaining seats on the board are usually held by concerned outsiders including religious organizations and large human rights non-governmental organizations. In more complex MSIs, governments may also hold seats. Meanwhile, unions have a presence in a few, but by no means, most labor MSIs. And seats for representatives, the actual representatives of the actual workers whose working conditions are at issue are almost non-existent.

Which brings me to purpose. What's the impulse that brings these different actors to the table to create the MSI? From the perspective of global brands, the purpose is pretty clear. To build a reputation for social responsibility that's going to bring customers to them and diffuse protest over issues in their supply chain which might equally be summarized as cover.

From the perspective of non-profit organizations that focus on human rights, MSIs offer an opportunity to increase the acceptance of human rights norms through engagement with business. In the cases where unions are MSI participants, things are a little more complicated. The unions who participate in MSIs are most often from the wealthier countries that have lost manufacturing, farming, mining work, not those where it's currently taking place.

And those unions may care about all workers' rights everywhere. But the interests of those they represent and those they're paid to represent, lie in raising the cost of production abroad to keep jobs in their country or to bring them back. Not in finding out what it is that workers outside their membership want to see happen.

These are the participants, these are the goals, and that's what drives the discussions and the outcome. And none of them represent again the unique perspectives of workers on the ground. In turn, issues of participation and power-- I'm sorry-- participation and purpose reflect and are compounded by the extreme imbalances of power in the situations in which MSIs arise.

MSIs are ostensibly collaborative enterprises. But absent processes and forces that shift the balance of power, these collaborations are (CLICK) going to reflect the distribution of power in the outside world in which they're located which leans definitively toward trans-national corporations. (RUSTLING) So for example, MSIs on labor issues dominated by go-- global brands focus not on their role in the supply chain, but on the problems occurring at their suppliers, lower down the chain.

They don't analyze the way that their own buying practices and demands drive long hours and low wages at the bottom of the chain. If they did, they would need to acknowledge that the codes they create put their supply-- their suppliers in an impossible position. As Professor Locke, who I mentioned earlier, and Professor Mark Barenberg at Columbia, and a mention of others have argued, suppliers have to compete with each other and with their counterparts in other countries to get contracts from brands on the basis of price, quality and speed.

So they have two choices. They can either cut wages and safety costs and increase worker hours in order to win the bids on which they depend for survival, thus

ignoring code requirements. Or they can comply with the codes and see themselves outbid in the next round. The only way around this dynamic is to require that the big firms put more money into their supply chains to fund the changes that they demand. Something that most brands have no intention of putting on the table at an MSI or doing.

If suppliers are shunted to one side, the workers at the very bottom of the power ladder in global production have almost no capacity to influence MSI outcomes. Workers are rarely consulted about the standards in a code or the launching of a campaign. (RUSTLING) Indeed, workers are likely unaware that there is a campaign targeting the employer where they work or the brand it sells to up the chain. Or even that there's a code of conduct that's supposed to give-- supposed to give them rights.

Somebody who saw the announcement from-- of this event from Belfast and emailed me with her regrets that she couldn't come-- said that-- the organization that she works with presented to a group of people in a poor community in Belfast a code of conduct that was supposed to govern their rights to participate in community-- I-- sort of-- community politics. And just-- the-- described them as inalienable rights.

And her response was, "Inalienable rights? That's the best kept secret I've ever heard." And I think from the perspective of many people at the bottom, where it-- you know, they are the ones that codes dictate the working conditions of, and yet the codes aren't translated-- pr-- or presented to them, and were created without consultation with them. The lack of power and participation that I've described has serious consequences.

In the most direct sense, the contents of most codes of conduct don't reflect the nuanced understanding of how work works that is common knowledge only among the workers in any given workplace. And thus, codes do little to address what workers themselves would identify as the real problems that they face. And furthermore, the initiation of a campaign against a brand because of how its suppliers treat workers, may well cause the brand to end or at least not renew the contracts with those suppliers.

The workers lose their job not because they made the decision to choose to fight for better conditions, but because somebody else made that decision for their own reasons without consulting or involving them. Now, things are beginning to change. And I wanna talk about a few efforts that I think have moved forward in addressing some of the concerns I've raised. One that deserves mention-- especially for being an early adopter of these critiques and for transforming them into action, is the Workers' Rights Consortium (SIC) which focuses on respect for workers' rights in the manufacturer of college branded clothing.

Rather than issue certifications that then could be played against other certifications, the consortium works with universities, student groups, workers in clothing factories and their unions to conduct extensive investigations and issue reports about whether a company complies with a university's code of conduct.

A key aspect of their approach involves confidential and long-lasting interviews with workers rather than the brief and public interviews on the job that are standard practice at most monitoring firms. And the consortium supports efforts-- after the consortium leaves-- efforts by the workers themselves to defend their rights by remaining engaged with the workers and their unions over time.

Another good example-- and a more recent-- one of a more recent vintage-- is the recent Bangladesh Fire Safety Accord, the one that emerged at the impulse of European union-- unions and businesses after the Rana Plaza fires. The one I would also note that most U.S. companies including the Gap and Walmart refused to sign.

Its positive features include the active involvement of Bangladeshi unions as well as global unions. The fact that it holds brands co-responsible for the safety violations in the factories and requires them to commit to fully fund the cost of all the changes in those factories that it demands. And its creation of a fully enforceable contract that binds signatory firms. And this for whatever reason was what the-- U.S. companies chose to hang their hat on for not signing it-- the fact that it was binding and enforceable. (THROAT CLEARING)

A final example located in the U.S. tomato industry is the Fair Food Program that was designed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a membership based farm-workers organization in Immokalee, Florida, where 90% of the tomatoes we eat in the winter are grown. And today I have the great pleasure of sharing the stage with Greg Asbed who's one of the co-founders of the coalition.

In 2010, after 17 years of organizing the farm workers, students, people of faith, and consumers all around the United States, the coalition won and began implementing its Fair Food Program which raises wages and improves working conditions for the workers in Florida who pick tomatoes to supply our fast food restaurants, supermarkets, and cafeterias all around the country.

The Fair Food Program as Greg will talk about in a moment requires that participating brands like McDonald's and just this year Walmart pay a penny a pound more for tomatoes to growers in their supply chain who are required to pass the money through to their workers. And more than \$14 million has gone into farm worker pockets over the past three years through this program.

Participating brand names, the McDonalds', the Walmarts, can only buy tomatoes from growers who have signed the Fair Food Code, also designed by the coalition, which mandates a range of improvements in working conditions. The coalition calls its new model worker-led social responsibility. Ta-da. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Worker-led social responsibility-- which is-- a play-- and a comment on corporate social responsibility, the field-- with which we're all much more familiar. So I was hoping, Greg, you could begin by talking to us about what some of the hallmarks of worker social responsibility are.

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, and if you ignore the-- the hyphen, it's WSR which is-- which is perfect.

JENNIFER GORDON:

I was ignoring--
(OVERTALK)

JENNIFER GORDON:

--not only the hyphen but word after the hyphen (BACKGROUND VOICE) that proved to be a problem.

GREG ASBED:

Anyway, first of all, thank you for-- having us, having me. It's always fun to get out of Florida. (SLAPS) (BACKGROUND VOICE) I've been Florida for 23 years. And I still am not from Florida. (LAUGHTER) And-- and so to get up to New York is fun. You know, last night I took-- the first thing I did was take a picture of the David Letterman marquee outside (LAUGH) the hotel, send it to my wife and my kid and my-- and he writes back, (THUMP) he says-- "Mom says that's cool, but I said there's too many people in the street." (LAUGHTER)

Because he grew up in Florida. But-- and then I saw Rod Stewart in the street this morning. So I'm (LAUGHTER) done, I'm good. I can grab up my chip and go home. So-- yeah, worker driven social responsibility is-- is a term that-- that-- that we're using to describe the work that we're doing in Florida-- today. And-- and as you mentioned, it doesn't just describe the work in Florida, (NOISE) it describes the work in-- in several places. Actually here in the country and-- (NOISE) and overseas.

And what it is is a fundamentally different and new form of-- or a new approach to protecting human rights and corporate supply chains. That's-- that's what it is. It's-- it's a-- it's corporate social responsibility because the idea of corporate social responsibly is to protect human rights in the supply chains, but that works.

And the WSR as compared to-- to CSR is-- is-- is distinct in structure and function. And-- (SLAPS) and-- and though in Immokalee we are known for our colorful protests and the-- and plays and (MUSIC) music theatre and-- and use of popular education. We love our science too. (MUSIC) And in science-- a rigorous taxonomy is necessary to start any kind of analysis of-- of things that seem similar, right?

And so you-- you-- you analyze things along-- along certain dimensions to determine if they're the same or if they're different. And so if you-- if you do that with CSR, and we're just gonna-- I'm just gonna do CSR because as you just did-- I mean, CSR-- MSIs

are essentially-- C-- a traditional CSR with a bunch of little bells and whistles taped on, right? And you can-- you can (SLAPS) make that a little less broad, more subtle. But that's what it is. And you stripped off all those bells and whistles and left it being a CSR.

So I'm gonna start from CSR. And the difference between the two really begins with-- with I think what you mentioned was purpose, right? And it's how they define the problem they're going to-- to set about trying to fix, right? And that fundamentally goes to the question of who is defining the problem? And that is probably the most underlying difference between the two, between CSR and WSR.

And it's fairly self-explanatory given the names. You know, CSR is the c-- the word corporate is a modifier not so much of the social responsibility that's taking place in their supply chains, but of who's driving the process. That's-- it's corporate-driven for and by corporations.

WSR is essentially the opposite. And as you said-- you know, if-- if-- if something is designed to protect human rights, the human beings whose rights are in question should be at the head of the table, not just at the table, but at the head of the table. And that's really the principle behind-- one of the prin-- the key principles behind WSR is-- is the idea that-- that workers are there from the beginning. They're not invited in to be consult-- to be consulted, to create codes. They're there from the beginning. It derives from worker organizing and then it builds from there, right?

And if that's the case, if you-- if you start from that-- that-- that distinction, then the two-- the two approaches take logically different paths toward different solutions, right? And so-- at that point, the-- the taxonomy begins by looking at certain dimensions that-- that you already started to talk about-- that help you analyze what those paths are and how they diverge, you know. (SLAPS)

So start with the problem. How do they define the problem? How does CSR define the problem that it sets out to-- to-- to fix. And essentially CSR is comported (SIC) by public relations crises. That's what drives it. If there are no public relations crises, there's no CSR. Because companies don't-- you take-- you take a typical supermarket. (THUMP) Supermarkets sell 10,000 items.

If they were to actually effectively monitor and enforce workers' rights in the supply chains of all those items, they'd do nothing else. They'd have no budget because that's where all their money would go. So they don't do that. They-- if they do anything, it's directed by cr-- and by crisis, sort of by the public spotlight. So (SLAPS) if there's a public spotlight on a part of their supply chain, they do something then.

Apple's the same way. (SLAPS) You know, Apple didn't care about Foxconn (COUGHING) until it became a problem. And then they started to care about Foxconn. So public relations crises drive CSR. But human rights crises drive WSR. You know, and-- and it's-- it's the fires in Bangladesh, the slavery in Florida, sexual harassment across this country in the fields (SLAPS) that moves workers to organize.

And once those workers begin to organize, in some cases that organization takes the pla-- takes the form of-- of connecting with consumers to be able to-- to-- to harness

consumer demand to be able to move corporations. And that's the birth of-- of-- of WSR. So it's-- it's human rights crises-- human beings, workers, whose rights are being violated who are searching for a way to create a new workplace where that doesn't happen. It's that simple.

But the distinction between CSR and WSR couldn't be more stark. Because that's not what corporations are looking to do. They're looking to control their brand. They're looking to-- to either project a more humane brand or protect the brand that they have from-- from human right-- from public relations crises.

JENNIFER GORDON:

In-- in the context of Immokalee, I have a feeling that many people here don't have a sort of fundamental understanding of what--

GREG ASBED:

What Immokalee was.

JENNIFER GORDON:

--tomato-- that-- what Immokalee was before you started and what the coalition is and where you've taken it. I just wonder if you could--

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, till now?

JENNIFER GORDON:

--sort of give people some background so they can then place what you're talking about--

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, and-- and--

JENNIFER GORDON:

--in context.

GREG ASBED:

--and the code and everything else that derive from that. So-- you know-- we started organizing back in '93. Our first strike was in '95. We did a general strike in town. It was a community-wide general strike, sort of, think IWW. (SLAPS) You know, that was the-- (SLAPS) the approach that we took.

And it was aimed at the-- at the idea that-- that-- the slogan was, "Dignity, Dialogue, and a Fair Wage." (SLAPS) "Dignity, Dialogue, and a Fair Wage." And-- and those were the-- that was the-- the rallying cry because dignity was first in that. And-- and dignity was-- was being stolen from people.

You know, modern-day slavery in Florida was not uncommon before we started organizing. (BACKGROUND VOICE) In fact, we participated in the prosecution of seven major cases in-- resulting in 15 farm bosses going to prison and-- more than 1,000 workers being liberated from cases-- situations where they were being held against their will.

Violence against workers was more common-- just everyday (NOISE) violence against workers. Workers being beaten in fields for asking for the right to drink water. And one of the major actions we did back in '96 was a march from our office to the-- to the house of-- of a crew leader with 500 people at night because a worker had been beaten in the field in the morning. A young man-- and had come in to the off-- walked from the field to the office in his bloody shirt.

And we in-- invited the crew leader to the office to come and help make amends. And he chose not to. So we-- we (LAUGH) organized a march to his house with 500 people at night which sent a very strong message. And we had the-- the bloody shirt with us. And then we (NOISE) said, "When you beat one of us, you beat us all." And-- and that was a new message. Not-- not enough to change the world, but enough to send a new message that things were-- things were changing.

But those are the problems we are fighting. Modern day slavery, violence, sexual harassment. I don't know if people have (SLAPS) seen a PBS documentary that came out-- a *Frontline* documentary that came out about s-- four or five months ago-- called nicely-- *Rape in the Fields*. And th-- the whole documentary was about the epidemic of-- of sexual violence in the fields against women.

That's today. You know, and we were starting 20 years ago when there were-- there was no oversight. There was no-- it was just-- you know-- the wild west. So and-- and wage theft was the least of things, but it happened all the time. (NOISE) You know-- so that was the world that we started with. And that was the world that people in Immokalee wanted to (NOISE) change. The world that people in Immokalee wanted to modernize and make more humane, right?

And-- and so, you know, returning to this CSR, WSR comparison-- the code of conduct. You mentioned that-- that-- that CSR codes are generic. You know, that they're called vendor standards, right? Well, think about the supermarket that has 10,000 vendors. How will a single set of standards work for 10,000 vendors in

different countries, in different industries?

It's-- it's-- it-- it's designed not to work. But it's designed not to work-- it's designed to be there when you need to protect yourself when-- when there's a problem. So you can say we have a robust-- which is in fact the word they like to use. We have a robust set of vendor standards that we monitor. And so we're confident that there aren't problems in the supply (SLAPS) chain, or if there are we'll-- we'll take care of them. So it's corporate-drafted, generic.

Worker social responsibility is-- is the opposite. It's specific and worker crafted. And so in our case, the code that we came up with-- actually with-- you know, it started with the help of an (THROAT CLEARING) old member years ago-- who came down to Immokalee before this was-- when it was aspirational, before it was anything that was actually happening.

And the-- the code that we came up with we called the Real Rights Code, at first. And it was real rights because it was workers determining the rights that they wanted to have in the future. And in workers so-- social responsibility, workers themselves will bring their knowledge to the creation of the code. Which means there will be things in the code that only workers who have been working in the industry who have been facing the-- the unique forms of exploitation of humiliation, of-- of abuse that that industry has to offer.

That they will identify and they will address in the code. A corporation with-- with a generic vendor s-- set of standards won't do that. It simply won't happen. So the codes in workers' so-- social responsibility-- worker-driven social responsibility (SQUEAK) are specific. They're-- they're real and they have-- they are-- they are-- they're based on-- on exploitation that workers know first-hand.

JENNIFER GORDON:

And you got an example of it--

GREG ASBED:

On--

JENNIFER GORDON:

--right behind you, (UNINTEL).

GREG ASBED:

Right behind us (LAUGHTER) you can see-- that's-- that's an example from the Fair Food Program. And we can get into that next. But that's-- that's a concrete example

of how-- workers of a chain have-- have made-- they have gained b-- about a 10% pay increase and-- removed a spark of regular violence in the fields by re-- by eliminating in the code of conduct that we created the forced over-cupping-- over-filling of tomato buckets by-- when you-- when you're picking by the piece.

Monitoring. *The Third Dimension*-- it's-- it's a book at-- at these two approaches-- through-- as you mentioned the monitoring and-- and corporate social responsibility is-- is first of all rare, if it happens at all. When it happens, it's usually in response to-- a crisis of some kind. And it's invariably audit based. And so you have these-- this industry of auditors that's come up.

The SAIs of the world that essentially serve the interests of the corporations to be the-- be that-- that second piece of defense, that second shield to-- against public-- public criticism where we have a robust code and we have a highly respected auditor (NOISE) who's out there doing our work for us to make sure that we're good, right?

And so-- and that's what we hear all the time. (THUMPING) You know, we hear it from Kroger, for example, who hasn't signed the Fair Food Program. We hear it from Ahold which is-- Stop & Shop and Giant. They say the same thing. Robust code, auditor. And that's all you gotta say. (NOISE) They-- they think it's like a magic, you know, (SIGH) incantation that makes things go away.

Monitoring and worker soc-- mo- worker-driven social responsibility is an entirely different university. It begin-- it-- the idea is that workers themselves are the monitors. That's the fundamental difference. That workers are the monitors. Not-- not an auditing group that comes in, but workers who are on the job are the monitors. For that to happen, there has to be education. (SLAPS) There has to be some form of worker-- of worker education so they know their rights. They know their rights under the code that they're-- that they're working on-- (SLAPS) under.

But that education would be pointless if there weren't an effective and efficient complaint mechanism. And so monitoring under-- under WSR is worker driven and complaint based. And so there's-- there's education for workers to be effective monitors using the-- the 24-hour complaint line. And there's auditing. But it's auditing that is established through-- a combination of partnership wi-- between workers and the rest of this-- of the supply chain. That is real, aggressive, deep and there to make sure that the code is being, in fact, enforced. (SLAPS)

Finally, enforcement-- that's where essentially-- CSR is defined as the lack of-- enforcement. I mean, that's probably the definitional characteristic of a CSR is there is no enforcement. (SLAPS) You know, if they-- if they find problems because of some crisis, they are loathe to cut a trusted supplier.

Supply-- for-- for-- for CSR, it's market first, right? Getting goods to market is the objective. It's not protecting human rights, it's getting goods to market. I mean, just look at the structure of corporations. And if you look at the-- if you saw a sort of schema of the-- of-- of how that-- there's a huge branch of the work which is supply chain, right? The numbers of people and the importance of that work is-- is ph-- is phenomenal inside corporations.

And there's a tiny little office in the basement called supp-- it's called-- social responsibility or vendor standards or whatever (UNINTEL). If there's a debate between the two-- if somebody from the basement office comes up to the table and says, "You know, they-- th-- th-- there's slavery in Florida." And this person up here from supply says, "What farm is it on?" And they mention the farm that they really like, left to their own devices, they (SIC) will be no change. There will be no-- no suspension of purchases. It will not happen. (SLAPS)

And we don't have to just kinda guess that's the case, we know it's the case because there were a lotta slavery cases in Florida before the Fair Food Program started to work. And there were no suspensions despite the robust codes of conduct and the self-auditing. WSR is m-- market (NOISE) based. Not market first, but market based.

And then the difference (NOISE) between the two-- what that means is that (SLAPS) workers have negotiated binding agreements with buyers that require the buyers to buy only from suppliers who are in good standing with the program. And the workers have a voice in determining who is a supplier in good standing with the program. That is so fundamentally different from anything that is corporate social responsibility.

And it's real. You know, it-- it-- and for it to work, it has to be real. But if-- if a-- if a supplier is suspended from the prog-- from the program, the buyer has to stop buying from that supplier. And once that happens-- once that happens, even if it-- even if it's not understood or believed by the suppliers at first. Once that happens, it becomes an entirely different culture at the level of-- of suppliers.

And-- and there's a lot more self-policing because they can't afford to lose three months of business. For example, on our case is-- is what happens. So tho-- that-- that's sort of the breakdown of-- of how social-- worker-driven social responsibility differs from corporate social responsibility (SLAPS) in theory. You know-- the-- the Fair Food Program's an-- an example of that. (SLAPS) But--

JENNIFER GORDON:

Do you wanna sort of in-- as concrete a way as you can (RUSTLING PAGES) maybe talk us through-- a situation, you know, that before would have gone unaddressed and how the Fair Food Program deals with it?

GREG ASBED:

Yeah.

JENNIFER GORDON:

Is there an example that comes to mind?

GREG ASBED:

Yeah. Let me just take sexual harassment which is something that-- that happens-- that happened. Well, it happens across the country daily. It happened in Florida daily. And it doesn't now. It's not entirely eliminated in the Fair Food Program. But it's-- it's diminished significantly.

JENNIFER GORDON:

Well, let me just-- sorry, I realize I never asked t-- you to sort of say what the scope of this is, right? How many of the brands do you have? How many growers? How many workers are affected by it? Sorry to interrupt, but I just thought-- if you didn't have that information, (THROAT CLEARING) it'd be hard to see.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

GREG ASBED:

We have 12 major brands. We have-- and you can see them, the beginning of this-- there's some hidden underneath that-- that-- that image there. But 12 of the largest buyers of tomatoes in the-- in the world (SWALLOWS) today. And the program started in-- in the Florida tomato industry. So it has-- it covers more than 90% of the Florida tomato industry. So it's essentially industry-wide. There are some outliers, but-- it's essentially industry-wide.

So the changes that are happening in the industry thanks to the-- to the program are industry-wide as well (THUMP) including sexual harassment. So in the past, if there were-- if there were an incident of-- of sexual harassment or sexual violence in the fields-- more likely than not, the victim wouldn't have done anything. Because there wasn't anything to do. You know, there were no trusted-- you couldn't talk to your-- to-- to your-- to the company. It was very difficult to know-- for workers to know that there was a system out there where could, which is legal services, but it was very-- the-- the-- the communication between workers and legal services was very-- very thin. (THUMP) There was not-- it was not very deep.

And most workers didn't know their rights, right? So most people figured it was part of the-- the world, and that if you-- if you refused you'd lose your job. And so they didn't refuse. So that was the past. And then in the very best outcome of the past with-- (COUGHING) any sui (?) case which is very difficult especially for people who don't-- who aren't-- who don't have papers (SLAPS) in the country.

But it takes a long time. And it requires people to be in contact with the authorities over a long time. And that's difficult for-- for workers who are-- who are mobile. So they-- there were very few effective EEOC-- cases against sexual harassment. We've had (SLAPS) more than a dozen-- complaints about sexual harassment-- about-- about gross sexual harassment and the-- in the Fair Food Program.

And what happens in that case is someone who has-- who-- when-- when she was hired at her-- at the-- the-- the farm where she's working, received-- at the point of hire, she received a booklet created by the Fair Food Program (COUGHING) with her rights under the program, saw a video that was written by-- and acted by workers, and then received a training at some point along the line-- a worker-to-worker training on the field, on the clock, (SLAPS) about rights under the code.

So the person who might be the victim of sexual harassment knows from the beginning of working at this job that she has different rights than she had in the past. And she has a real system to-- to enforce those rights. And so if something happens, she'll call. And on the-- her receipt is the number-- the 24-hour complaint line.

The complaint line in the Fair Food Program is answered by a human being, which is a remarkable revolution in complaint lines. And it's not just answered by a human, it's answered by an investigator. One of the investigators who's going to pick up the case at-- the next day and continue investigating him-- him or herself. And those investigators have databases that they've created over the years in the program now. They have everything from crew, there's nicknames to-- you know, just the-- the thing-- if someone doesn't know who they're working for, but they have a nickname, that database will help the investigator know exactly where they're at, right?

And people often don't know the farm they're working for. They don't know the-- the-- the-- location. But so the person will call that number on the-- either in the booklet or on the paystub, get an investigator, and the investigation will start the next day. And at that point, fairly quickly within-- within a few days, the investigation will reach a finding. And the finding will result in what-- in either. And if it's-- if it's found to be-- to be valid, the removal of the supervisor who did it-- if it was a supervisor, the removal and the firing of the supervisor.

And if the company re-- refuses to s-- to fire the supervisor, the company is out of the program. Because that's that corrective action plan. The company has to implement the corrective action plan. If they prefer the supervisor over selling tomatoes to 12 of the most-- the most im-- important tomato buyers in the world, then that's their choice. But that choice is never made. The choice is made to get rid of the supervisor and stay in the program.

And so-- and then there'll be education afterwards on the farm. There will be an entire process built around the future so that it doesn't happen again. Not just removing the person who did it. But the-- the-- and reinforcing the education behind it-- what caused-- what-- what allowed us to get rid of that person in the first place. (SLAPS)

So over the-- the past several years, we've removed a large number of people who had

been committing sexual harassment for years with impunity. And it's to the point now, where people understand that even jokes, even the things (NOISE) that used to be considered just simply everyday life in the fields can no longer be made. You know, that it has to be an actual modern workplace.

JENNIFER GORDON:

And this is-- if-- if-- you see, you got 12 brands. And the code you're talking about covers how many growers?

GREG ASBED:

Thirty.

JENNIFER GORDON:

And how many workers? When you--

GREG ASBED:

30,000-ish. And then-- but that's-- that's 30,000 jobs. So actually the workers that filter through those jobs over th-- over a year, it'd be near 50,000/60,000. (SLAPS)

JENNIFER GORDON:

Because there's a fair amount of turnover.

GREG ASBED:

Because of turnaround. And that's reducing thanks to the program.

JENNIFER GORDON:

And-- and as a final kind of descriptive question I have. I know that you have set up an entire separate organization to do the monitoring that is in charge only of the monitoring in the Fair Food Program. The Fair Food Standard Council. Just tell us little-- about that and how it's structured and why you made the decisions you did.

GREG ASBED:

Well, in-- in our agreements with the fires, we actually had the right to do the monitoring ourselves.

JENNIFER GORDON:

As the coalition?

GREG ASBED:

As the CRW. But it didn't-- it didn't make sense, you know, for-- sort of-- we didn't have the resources in the first place. But in-- in terms of dynamics with the growers, you know, in terms of-- of the-- the perceived legitimacy of the findings-- it didn't make sense. So we needed-- we needed to have a sort of arm's length organization that was (THUMP) doing this stuff.

So we-- we created the Fair Food Standards Council. And the agreements say that we or a group that we designate. (SLAPS) So-- so we created the Fair Food Standards Council which is now-- I think it's ten investigators (SLAPS) and executive director and accountants. And its job is to investigate complaints, to audit and-- to audit farms for the-- for compliance with the code, and to audit the-- the financials of the-- of the Fair Food Program, the penny per pound that-- that flows through the program.

And it has been remarkably effective. You know, the-- the-- the executive director is a former judge from New York-- who is this diminutive-- person. And she's from New York. And yet for some reason, she's able to absolutely just win every single conversation that she has with these Florida growers-- who are very different. And-- and yet, you know-- so that's-- that's a remarkable thing.

She has-- she has-- her own being. She has a remarkable authority. And that-- that's-- that's added to the character of the organization. But even absent that-- you know, it's received-- FFSC's received almost 600 complaints in-- in the-- the three plus seasons that it's been working. Most of those complaints have been resolved. Some of them have been founded to be not valid and that sort of thing.

But the changes are just-- are-- are-- are remarkable. And-- and but behind the FFSC-- behind every single move that the FFSC makes, every finding that it makes, every corrective action that it-- that it puts out after a complaint or-- or an audit, are the binding agreements with the-- with the buyers. Because every time that-- you know, we-- we see it as sort of a three-sided table, right? That-- that the workers are here, and growers are there, and the buyers are there.

And we're working through the developments (SLAPS) in this new more humane industry together, right? And not everyone's happy to be working through the development of a more humane industry. It's just the nature of things. People were

happy doin' what they did without havin' to worry about this stuff. (CLEARS THROAT)

Both sides, really. But we have binding agreements with the grower-- with the buyers. And we have agreements with the growers. And the growers-- every time the growers would-- would-- would like to step away from the process and just-- you know, take their bone and go home. Behind them essentially are the buyers saying, "No, no, no. Sit back down. Because if you wanna be part of our supply chain, you have to be at this table." And that's-- that's the-- that's the heart of it. I mean, that's it, you know.

And if you don't (SLAPS) have that-- what that means is that farm workers Immokalee who 20 years ago said that-- you know, they were burning dumpsters in the street. And they-- (SLAPS) general strike. The way things are, we do a general strike in communities. Poor communities that have-- that live on the absolute edge of survival. It went from that to now being institutionally at the table thanks to these agreements with these buyers. And having the power of-- of-- of sales to enforce their human rights.

And I say that and you hear it, but I don't think you really actually get it. Because no one has ever had that experience before. You know, workers don't control the sales of their employers. Doesn't happen. Workers can't cut off sales of their employers unless the employers (NOISE) respect their rights. So that's-- that's-- that's ground shaking, you know. And-- and it's what drives this whole process. If that weren't there-- if that weren't the backdrop to the Fair Food Program, it wouldn't work.

JENNIFER GORDON:

So I could ask-- more questions and make more observations and probably I will. (PAPER RUSTLING) But-- for the moment, I'm wondering-- what you who've been listening for so long are thinking-- and what kind of questions you would like to hear answered. Yeah.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

Why are the buyers going along with it? What's the pressure on them?

GREG ASBED:

That-- I mean, to get to their next (UNINTEL). You see the top consumer power? There-- there are three elements you need for this to work, right? Exploitation at the bottom of a global-- or a supply chain, right? It doesn't have to be global. But, exploitation. So you have exploited workers at the bottom of a supply chain.

And some kind of-- of-- of actor at the top of the supply chain who is concerned

about its brand, right? And that could be McDonald's, in our case. Or it could be-- in Austin, for example, where-- where the Workers Defense Project works. It could be the Austin city government which because of the nature of Austin has a sort of brand that it needs to be concerned about as well, right? (SLAPS)

You've been to Austin. But-- so those are the two elements that you can find in a lot of places. Unfortunately you can find exploited workers at the bottom of supply chains (SLAPS) pretty much everywhere. And you can find these-- these-- these vulnerable brands and it's-- it's a rough word to use, but vulnerable in a sense that they do have to be concerned about their public image.

But the third is a worker organization that has the means to harness that consumer demand. That that consumer demand then creates a new incentive for that brand at the top to change its behavior. So it's really-- it is a chain. But it starts with consumers. The ultimate link in this chain is consumers.

So if the workers at the bottom can create that link with consumer which we spent a long time doing. We spent from 2001 until-- we spent ten years building a national consumer campaign before we were able to implement this-- this program. But if you-- if-- if workers can build that connection with consumers and consumers can make the demand through protests, through-- and through now (NOISE) today electronic actions, whatever.

But there's any number of-- of potential men-- of a menu of actions (SLURS) you can do. But if consumers can make a convincing demand on the brand, at some point or another, the brand will do something to red-- to reduce that pressure. (SLAPS) And-- and that something in our case is sign a Fair Food Agreement. So, you know, we started in 2001 in Immokalee. Nobody knew who we were either. (NOISE) (LAUGH) Very few people did.

And-- and we went out in the street in-- in Fort Myers, Florida, with a big paper mache tomato, right? And we had a-- we had-- a press conference. And we were gonna just change the world. And we declared that we were boycotting Taco Bell. And we had this tomato on this-- on this litter, you know, kind of like Cleopatra, or whatever, you know. And we were-- and workers went around sayin'-- we're sayin', "This tomato-- this queen tomato is-- is exploiting workers in-- in Immokalee."

And-- and we-- and we-- we started and went across the country. And we told people that Taco Bell makes farm workers poor. And you sort of mentioned that idea in your-- in your presentation. We came up with this idea, this formulation, right, that Taco Bell makes farm workers poor. That's why we're boycotting Taco Bell.

Because through volume purchasing, Taco Bell's able to-- to demand lower and lower prices from its suppliers. And if you're a grower and you have this demand coming down from the top, for lower and lower prices, you have to find some way to reduce costs. But growers negotiate or don't negotiate with a number of suppliers themselves. Monsanto, John Deere, the bank, and farm workers.

So using your rapier-like lens, you can probably figure out which dynamic in there (LAUGH) is the easiest one for the grower to dominate. Where does the grower have

the power to dictate a lower price so that the grower can take the lower price-- the-- the loss in revenue out of the saved cost. The only place the grower can go is the workers.

And that was-- that dynamic was working for 20 years before we started-- or 30 years before we started organizing. And so that there was the constant and-- and-- and-- and escalating impoverishment of workers and-- (SLAPS) and-- and worsening of conditions at the bottom of the supply chain.

In Immokalee in-- in Florida, that drove the human rights crisis which drove us to organize which drove us eventually once we realized that we weren't able to organize directly against the growers ourselves, to find this connection with the consumers, which allowed us to start this chain reaction. (SLAPS) So that's-- that-- that's what does it, is the consumer connection.

FEMALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

Actually, my question was very similar. But I just wanted to ask you to (RUSTLING) scroll down-- a little bit more because-- as somebody who has been watching this fabulous coalition for so long, I-- (NOISE) I-- I'd like to get to understand a little bit more about what happens in your relationship with a company when-- with a brand when the brand is, you know, from-- from-- from this end, as-- as somebody watching it.

We're-- we're seeing lots and lots of campaigns. And it seems like the company is just not gonna give in because it goes on for so long, right? And then all of a sudden, you will announce it happened. And I'd just like to know a little bit more about the behind-the-scenes of what happened in between. What were the dialogues like?

What-- and then-- and then w-- how did that transition happen where they're actually the ones saying, I think you said, "No, no, sit down. If you wanna be a part of this-- you need to be sitting at this table"? So that's a real turnaround from an outsider's perspective (RUSTLING) (INAUDIBLE). Give us a little more insight into what--

GREG ASBED:

Well, I mean, they're saying it because of a binding agreement with us.

FEMALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

Of course.

GREG ASBED:

So that's-- that's really the-- and, I mean-- and the binding agreement was created to stop the-- the public campaign. So-- and the public campaigns did-- the-- the-- the-- the Taco Bell campaign took four years, you know. And then the McDonald's came next and it took two. And then Burger King came next and it took one. So you can see a pattern there. And Subway took about a month. (LAUGHTER)

And-- and then the-- the-- the Food Service Initiatives, Excel and Aramark and-- and those-- Compass went quite quickly. And the supermarkets are the most difficult because they have the most to be concerned about in terms of whether this continues to happen in other parts of our business, right? Because they-- they sell so much produce, right?

I mean, if you were a fast food industry or you were a restaurant or a food service company, then we maybe have ten things of produce that you deal-- that you buy, right? And you may have ten times 100 things you buy if you're-- a supermarket. So the supermarkets have been more difficult. But we do have three on board. We have Whole Foods, Trader Joes, and a little company known as Walmart now.

And every one of them has been different. And the experience with each one of them has been different. Taco Bell was very difficult because it was the first time. We had no consumer-- we had no consumer network, right? We didn't have-- nobody knew us. And we're crazy enough and persistent enough to go out and to declare this boycott with zero awareness of who the hell we were.

And it had to be a national boycott to work because they're a national brand. But what we had in their case was the advantage of having-- their target market was-- was and is-- this sort of 18-to-24 demographic, you know. And at that point, around 2000, that demographic was also awakening to a number of things happening in-- in the world and-- in globalization and-- and sweatshops. And USAS was-- was-- was--

FEMALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

That's what USAS is?

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, USAS's existence. And they had--

JENNIFER GORDON:

USAS is the-- United--

GREG ASBED:

Oh, oh, okay. I'm sorry.

JENNIFER GORDON:

United Students Against--

GREG ASBED:

Students Against Sweatshops.

JENNIFER GORDON:

--Sweatshops.

GREG ASBED:

Right. And so there was this-- you know, when we looked up and we tried to find people who might be allies, we realized that-- and we shooting, not to use a violent term, but we were shooting toward Taco Bell from over here. And we looked finally over our little berm and we saw that were was people over here shooting too.
(LAUGH)

So we said, "Hey, do you wanna get together and shoot together?" Because z-- we didn't have much force ourselves. We didn't have much strength. And so we did-- we-- we were able to hook up with students at that point, very-- very effectively. And they-- they did a campaign called-- Boot the Bell which was to get Taco Bells off of campus.

And so we had, you know-- for four years, we had very little conversation with-- or three years, we had very little conversation with Taco Bell. And then-- a gradual process started taking place behind the scenes where we would meet and they would say no. (RUSTLING) And-- and we'd meet again and-- and they'd say a little bit less no. And-- and it was just-- it was a process-- it was mediated by the-- the-- the-- the Carter Center, actually-- in-- in Atlanta.

And there's always a need for that sort of thing it seems. Some sort of-- some sort of elevating face-saving context in which to do the negotiations so that there's-- a feeling of pride once it's done instead of feeling like you've been-- you getting in-- but you know, it's been variations on that theme through the whole process.

And, you know, in the end, we have a whole different campaign now because we have the Fair Food Program which is so effective and so undeniably effective, so verifiably and concretely effective. And a partnership with the growers that we didn't have

forever. You know, when we were doing this thing, we-- that-- for the ten years that we were doin' the campaign, we were telling people, "We have an idea. Would you like to support the idea?"

You know, which is also kinda difficult. "You don't know us, but we have an idea. And would you like to support it?" And now we have a program that is kind of unprecedentedly successful. And so we're able to-- it-- it creates a different dynamic for the campaign. And really that's what was behind that thing-- Walmart coming on board. Even though we never protested Walmart.

FEMALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

So it was very clear.

GREG ASBED:

No, it was couple years of talks. But-- but still, it was-- it was essentially due to the program and the succe-- the success of the program and the increasing recognition of the program.

JENNIFER GORDON:

So you have no campaign against Walmart?

GREG ASBED:

We never lifted a single sign.

JENNIFER GORDON:

So how did that--

GREG ASBED:

We nev-- never fasted a single day.

(OVERTALK)

JENNIFER GORDON:

Just to follow up on your questions-- how did that happen?

GREG ASBED:

You know, we-- what-- there's-- there's a talk in Dallas at-- SMU that-- their head of global purchasing-- spoke and we were there. And Eva Longoria was there. And (NOISE) we spoke and we-- we had a dinner afterwards and we talked. And-- and that sort of kicked off a conversation with them.

And that conversation continued and-- and it really didn't get too far over time. But over the past year, year and a half, because we've been sharing the results of the program-- and because we've been inviting people, human rights observers to come to Immokalee and see how it works. Word of the program started to get out. Then, you know, the United Nations said it was the most effective thing. And then the White House said it was the most effective thing against slavery and--

JENNIFER GORDON:

Jimmy Carter's fond of it too.

GREG ASBED:

Jimmy Carter loves it. (LAUGHTER) But-- and PBS said it was the most effective thing in the country against sexual harassment. And so all of these-- these intractable problems (COUGHING) in the history of farm labor in the country were suddenly becoming undone under this program. And so to its credit, you know, I mean, Walmart-- we talked about how-- how public relations crises drive-- the-- the CSR approach. (THROAT CLEARING)

At this same time, there were things happening that, you know, and-- there was the slavery case in-- in Louisiana-- there was in-- in-- shrimp. There was Bangladesh. And I think, you know, up to the-- up until recently, the CSR approach has said that, you know, if we-- if we have enough to say that we're doing enough to try to help change things, then we can weather these explosions and public relations problems, these fires that pop up every now and then, little fig-- figura-- figurative fires.

But I think they realized that that wasn't working. You know, that in the information age, you couldn't control the fires with just a robust code of conduct and self-auditing. It wasn't enough. People knew what was going on. And people communicated that-- all that was going on. And so the-- the-- the old approach to tamping out the public relations fires wasn't working. And so they looked for instead-- you know, some of this-- this-- this confluence of interests between workers who-- who only wanted to get rid of human rights violations and Walmart who wanted to get rid of the human rights violations because it would help 'em get rid of the-- the public relations problems.

And so I think in that case, they realized-- they did their research. They realized this program was unique in-- in how effective it is. And-- and that over time, we reached

an agreement. And they joined the program, you know, as it is. So.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

What's it built on? Can you help me understand ha little bit for the-- the big companies that are not participants, like Costco or the big supermarket chains. Does non-participation mean that they're-- they're-- they're accepting a price for not participating 'cause they have to get their winter tomatoes somewhere else? Or are they benefiting for-- by not participating? What-- what's--

GREG ASBED:

That's an interesting (INAUDIBLE). There essentially free riders in a sense, right? You know, like, jumping the turn-style on the (LAUGHTER) subway. Because I don't come to New York often, but I know that happens. (LAUGHTER)

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

But yeah. But they-- they--

GREG ASBED:

One of their favorite things to say in defense is that, "Well, we buy it from all the growers who are part of the program already," right? "So we don't really need to do this," right? But that's not the case. I mean, the-- the-- the two things that-- that-- that buyers who are participating do is 1) agree to pay the penny and a half per pound. But-- in order to raise wages. And they're not doing that.

They're actually now profiting from farm worker poverty much more directly because their competitors in many cases are-- Wendy's for example, is not participating. And every other major fast food company is. And so Wendy's is driving a competitive advantage from the fact that they're profiting from farm worker poverty in an absolutely directly traceable way. 'Cause they buy the same tomatoes from the same companies, but they don't pay the premium.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

Good for Wendy's.

GREG ASBED:

But that's-- that's-- that's one thing they have to do that they don't do, (COUGHING)

right? And they have to agree to, you know, in a binding way, to stop purchases from company-- from growers that have been found to be no longer in compliance with the code. And also they need to-- they have to allow us to s-- you know, there's a transparency requirement. You have to share your-- your-- your supply chain, you know, your purchases with-- with-- with the-- The Fair Food Standards Council. That's the only way you can trace the-- the pennies, right?

So there's no transparency. So their claims to the fact that-- that they're buying from-- from buyers who are in the program are unverifiable. They're not paying the penny per pound, so they're-- they're profiting from poverty. And they're not agreeing to-- if there's slavery found in a supplier who's part of the s-- of the Fair Food Standards-- or the Fair Food Program, to cut off that-- that supplier. They're not agreeing to do that.

Whereas there's zero tolerance that all the others have agreed to. So they're not-- they-- that claim that, "But, we're already doing it by buying from the participating growers," is just empty, you know. And so they are benefiting from it, you know. They're benefiting in terms of-- of the lower cost for the same product that their competitors pay. And they're benefiting by saying that they're-- that they're-- well, they're benefiting because the program has-- has eliminated a lot of human rights violations.

And so they can go to bed at night the same way as Walmart and others can knowing that there won't be slavery in the supply chain in Florida. Five years ago, it might have blown up any given day. So they are benefiting. But they're not doing their part to help.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

How are you fixing that?

GREG ASBED:

Protesting. (LAUGH) I mean, that's how we got the other ones on. And that's how we have to get these on. So, you know, we're protesting Wendy's. We're protesting Kroger. We're protesting (SLAPS) Stop & Shop. And-- and-- and oddly enough, you know, I mean, in a culture where-- where protest seems like it doesn't always bring change, it always brings change in our case.

We-- (LAUGHTER) we-- (LAUGH) we win these agreements, you know. So we will. I mean, we'll get th-- the-- these companies to sign on. It'll happen. And there's other forms, you know. The more-- the more success we have, there's other forms of-- of-- of pressure. There's a film that-- that debuted at-- Tribeca here about a month ago-- called *Food Chains*. And it's gonna come out in November.

And that film-- is about-- largely about the program and-- and about the campaign for Fair Food and the Fair Food Program. And that's gonna drive a lot of awareness. And it's produced by Eva Longoria. And-- and she's gonna get behind the pr-- the--

the promotion of it. So she'll be on Jon Stewart, you know, talking about Wendy's and Kroger. And so those are the kinds of things we're gonna do in order to continue pushing them to do the right thing.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FEMALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

So I was just wondering what teenagers-- or even just the average consumer can do to further support FFP. (COUGHING) Like, is it just knowledge-- and knowing which corporations to support? Or is there further steps that can be taken to show your support?

GREG ASBED:

Maybe your fellow teenager could help you with that answer actually. (LAUGHTER) Since she came to Immokalee and spent some time with it. Yeah, the-- the-- there's a group called the Student Farmerworker Alliance, right, which is really easy to get up with and-- on the internet. And there are things-- for example, you know, the Boot the Bell campaign was very-- very powerful in-- in the Taco Bell-- victory.

And Wendy's, there's a similar campaign being done-- being launched now with Wendy's and it's student based. So-- to the degree that a school-- a university for example, has-- has a Wendy's on campus, that's-- that's very effective. Well, even a high school. You know, if there's a Wendy's nearby, it could adopt that Wendy's and just sort of protest at that Wendy's.

Bring, you know, just move-- keep the movement happening in the place that-- where you are. You know, and that's-- that's really what it is. And-- and there are times where it can feel like, you know, this is taking a long time. But just know that you win. You know, I mean, it happens. We do get these agreements. So every time-- I mean, and-- and-- every time it seems like it's not. "Damn, this is takin' a long time."

But every time, we do get there. So it just takes that-- every single person who-- who invests some time in it to get us there. And the most important thing is-- is-- is to learn. You know, be aware of-- of conditions where food-- how it's grown and how it's picked and all that. And-- and if it's ever possible, you know-- come to Immokalee because you've done a lot down there. it's-- I'm-- I'm serious. We-- we host people all the time.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

I have a question. What-- what are your enemies saying? So, I mean, it's very effective from your perspective. And-- and it is very effective. But y-- it's hard to believe the corporate PR machine isn't out there somehow saying that it isn't effective

or that-- that-- that-- you know, 'cause it's-- they were never in favor of it. So what-- what's the other side? What-- what are people doing to undermine--

GREG ASBED:

Well, we have lot--

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

--this?

GREG ASBED:

--fewer enemies than we did in the past which is interesting. We have partners now which is not just a word. You know, we have-- I just was on a three-hour call this morning with a working group which is the-- representatives of the growers and the CIW on-- that every month we get together and we work through the implementation of the program.

And that has just been a wonder-- how well that works and how well-- how bought in the growers are. And there's a reason for that. Because this program has essentially made over an industry that was known as ground zero for modern-day slavery. You know-- up until four years ago, that was what-- a federal prosecutor called the industry.

There was no worse industry really in agriculture. People in California would laugh about Florida tomatoes. They were going, "Ah, that's Florida tomatoes." You know, and so we have-- we've taken it from being one of the worst work places in the country to being one of the best in terms of agriculture, or the best-- the most progressive in (SLAPS) agriculture.

So they've actually-- they're starting to get that, (SLAPS) you know. And, you know, there are some who the culture-- is deeper and harder to pull up than others. But-- but the ones who see this as a business understand that now we have given them something they didn't have before which is a competitive advantage against really their most important competitor which is Mexico, right?

Mexico is the other major producer in the wintertime of tomatoes. And Mexico's mired in-- in a, what will take another ten years at least if they start now-- seriously, to-- you-- you know, plug that of corruption and drugs and violence. (SLAPS) And that has worked its way into every place that money moves in Mexico. And money moves in agriculture. (SLAPS) So it's in agriculture.

So at this point, you have Mexico falling into anarchy. And you have Florida becoming the most progressive sector in all of the U.S. agriculture. And now they-- they can-- they can now market around that, yeah. (SLAPS) They just got placement

in the front page of *New York Times* (SLAPS) which would cost-- I don't know-- how many hundreds of thousands of dollars if they had to pay for it. So that-- we have fewer enemies in the world of the growers. (SLAPS)

JENNIFER GORDON:

Can I just say one concrete thing about that? That I-- I found very interesting-- when I was last down in Immokalee which was in January. Which is-- it-- I-- I think that one of the reasons is just a market reason which is that you now, if you're a grower in the program, get paid more for your tomatoes than if you're a grower out of the program.

(GREG ASBED: UNINTEL)

JENNIFER GORDON:

Because there are fewer growers in the program, so they can charge a premium, right? It doesn't just help them competitively. It helps them make a larger profit, marketwise.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

Yes, but--

JENNIFER GORDON:

Right? But then there's the question-- I understand-- of the people who aren't in the program.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

No, I was thinkin' of the buyers who--
(OVERTALK)

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

--are now paying more for product, right?

GREG ASBED:

Right. That-- we do have-- we do have--

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

I think they were the enemies. Walmart's PR machine might not love you as much as Walmart says they do.

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, they do. But the-- no, but the-- what our enemies in that world do is go to our protests, for example, a Wendy's protest in D.C. And b-- it was-- so there was a Student Farmworker Alliance protest. And they put someone there with a big sickle and hammer flag and tried to photo-bomb the protest with a sickle and hammer flag so that they can feed the website called Worker Center Watch which is attacking us. And now the Worker Center (LAUGHTER) is known as being communist and being friends.

Fortunately, we're pretty good at actually catching people doing shit like that. And so we (LAUGH) actually did catch them and exposed it. And kind of completely dented the-- any kind of credibility that (COUGHING) that-- that that outfit has in terms of us at this point.

So they're-- they're out there trying. But increasingly, when-- when you actually are-- when you do become part of the fabric of-- of-- of the market itself, and people are benefiting from these things. (COUGHING) Walmart no longer has to worry about slavery in Florida. It really doesn't have to worry about slavery in Florida.

And the growers have an industry that now has an advantage they never had before. Slowly but surely, people start to buy into it. And it becomes the norm. And so those sorts of, "You all are a bunch of communists" attacks just don't ring with as much vibrance as they did in the past.

JENNIFER GORDON:

But so I wanna-- but I wanna pick up on that and-- and repeat and ask you to answer a criticism that I've heard. Which I don't think necessarily is coming from the buyers or coming from the growers. But it is-- I-- I guess I would call it the boutique criticism that, you know, you guys are special, the Florida tomato--

(GREG ASBED: UNINTEL)

JENNIFER GORDON:

--you are special. But the Florida (LAUGHTER) tomato industry is special. This can't be done by anyone else or anywhere else, right? And I will preface that by saying as you alluded to. I was in Immokalee 22 years ago with you before you started the program, before I started the Workplace Project. And I saw what Immokalee looked

like then.

GREG ASBED:

Right, right.

JENNIFER GORDON:

And I was there in January and I saw what Immokalee looks like now. And they are two different worlds, right? And then all those years ago, people were saying you could never do anything like this in Immokalee tomatoes. Maybe in mushrooms in Pennsylvania, right, there was some other-- (LAUGHTER) but you could never do-- so now that you've done it, right? I-- I have often heard people say, "Well, that's special for there. You couldn't do it globally. You couldn't do it in other industries." Talk to us about replicability.

GREG ASBED:

Well, first of all, you're right. There-- there are-- there are things like that. Some of them are coming from a place (NOISE) of-- of-- yeah, any-- or-- or a place of genuine sort of loving to see the (SIC) expand, but again might not be able to. And some of them are coming from a place of-- of hater-dom which is where they-- (LAUGH) where they s-- and-- and when we first got Taco Bell, they said, "That's just Taco Bell. You know, there's a thousand other places."

Well, we weren't planning on stopping at Taco Bell. You know, we were planning on going further. But when you're doing a campaign like this, you don't say, "We're planning on going further." You say, "Taco Bell makes farm workers poor," because otherwise it becomes a message that's confusing to consumers, right?

So we focused our message. We got Taco Bell. We weren't planning on stopping there and we didn't stop there. When we got everybody in fast food, who else has fast food? Supermarkets are much more important. Then we got the food service industry. And now we're getting supermarkets. And now we just got 30% of the supermarket industry in one fell swoop with-- with Walmart. So there's been these sort of things like saying, "You know, it's a boutique victory, a boutique change," or whatever all the way around.

In terms of replicability, I sort of-- I think I-- sorta mentioned it. But, you know, you have to have these three elements, right? You have-- you have to have-- the exploitation, the brand, and then a worker organization that's able to-- to-- to (THROAT CLEARING) driving consumer demand to a place it hasn't been before. And that's probably the limiting factor, you know.

And so if you're saying, "Can workers in New Mexico go ahead and do the same thing

in-- in less than 20 years?" I don't know because they might have to organization first, become a worker organization first. And then, you know, work through a campaign that gets them the-- credibility and-- and recognition that allows them to actually marshal that consumer demand in the direction that they wanna-- to marshal it, right?

So that might be the-- one of the things. But can it be replicated, for example, in-- you know, from where we are outside of Florida. It is going to. It's-- we're in the process of expanding outside of Florida and outside of tomatoes.

JENNIFER GORDON:

But-- but taking seriously for a moment the idea that one of the factors that makes this possible is that the tomato industry is geographically concentrated and that--

GREG ASBED:

It's not.

JENNIFER GORDON:

Well, I-- I understand there's competition, right? But--

GREG ASBED:

No, no but--

JENNIFER GORDON:

But-- you have a Florida tomato industry and that at least historically is where most of U.S. winter tomatoes have come from.

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, winter tomatoes.

JENNIFER GORDON:

Right? So in garment, you have garment factories in different countries competing with each other and you don't have the geographic center that Immokalee is to farm workers as an organizing base. And you can't have, you know, the-- there's-- a

situation of a lot of hopping around by buyers between suppliers. How--

GREG ASBED:

I'm sorry, I--

JENNIFER GORDON:

How might it apply in that kind of--

GREG ASBED:

I agree.

JENNIFER GORDON:

--context?

GREG ASBED:

In-- in the abstract, that's definitely-- a difference, right? Because agriculture is-- is rooted into-- to-- (LAUGHTER) (UNINTEL). But-- but-- and-- and-- and something like-- like-- the sweatshops and-- and are-- are not-- and apparel. But, why do you think the Bangladesh Accord happened this time? And my sense is, it's because the-- the public relations crisis was so deep that (THUMP) it wasn't even so much worker organizing that moved it-- that moved the-- the brands to have to do something.

It was the consume-- it was still the same mechanism. Consumers demanded it. And consumers kind of demanded it through media attention. The media bit into the story so hard. The *New York Times* bit into this story so hard, you know, that-- that it wouldn't go away. And-- and the-- the the horrible images coming from there were so deeply moving that it actually created in a moment what we took years to create.

Which was a overwhelming need for the companies to do something serious now. In the past, it might have happened and if-- and if there was some pressure (SNIFFING) and there weren't that much exposure, then the companies would have moved. But I think moving wasn't an option this time. Moving, it kinda took that off the table for the companies this time. They were--

JENNIFER GORDON:

Because there was a spotlight at that point. Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

GREG ASBED:

Yes, the spotlight was so intense that it actually changed the-- the-- the equation. And so the companies-- the-- the-- the factories weren't gonna change. And the companies realized they had to do something, right? And so there was-- and it wasn't all of them. You know, obviously some European, U.S. breakdown. But-- but that's what changed it. And so it-- it kind of-- it-- I do think that in the proper-- I think the mechanisms are still the same.

You know, we spent ten years of our lives doin' the stuff that we did to create a consumer movement that was strong enough to get these companies to sign binding agreements. Slavery wasn't like the fire. There were seven slavery cases during those ten years. That should have been-- in our opinion, that should have-- we wrote-- I wrote a piece called, "Where is the Kathie Lee Gifford of the-- for-- for, you know, tomato pickers in Florida?" years ago.

Because we had this slavery case, and it was like, "Yeah, who cares?" you know. So slavery, the abuses happening in Florida, we got hundreds of people being held against their will. People being raped, people being killed. That didn't move people, right? So we didn't have that trigger. We just have to go out and work day after day and-- to get-- to build the consumer movement. The consumer movement moved the top of the-- of the industry.

In this case, it was such a flash, you know, of horrible stuff. That that moved the top of the industry. And it wasn't even so much the consumers or the workers, it was the media that-- that really did it. But it was based on the fact that workers had been workin' a long time to-- to make sure that people understood what was happening.

What-- the dynamics that was behind it. But situation was so bad that it had the same effect. The companies could not move. And they had to do something about it. And if they had to do something about it, it could actually work. Yes.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

I gather that your organization is-- if-- is distinctive, if not unique, in that people like yourselves actually work in the fields. And-- apart from the-- the obvious street fair that provides, I wonder if you'd talk a bit about the philosophy behind that.

GREG ASBED:

It started when we-- when we--

JENNIFER GORDON:

You're gonna say what it's-- the it is.

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, the work in the fields. The staff working the fields, yeah. Exactly. And-- and-- and most of our staff members are in fact, you know, immigrant workers who came from the membership, from the fields-- and worked their way into the staff because of their commitment to the-- to the movement. But, you know, we started without any kind of-- of-- of office, any kind of place.

You know, we-- we borrowed-- a remnant church back in '93 to start meeting. If the room was too small, we met under the trees outside the church. You know-- when we organized the strike in '95, it was all in the trees 'cause it was a lot of, you know, hundreds of people at night getting together.

But when we had to actually-- that strike actually got us kicked out of the church because the church in the paper was called the strike central and that was difficult because they'd get their donations from Naples which is very rich and very conservative community where we are. And so they said, "Look, hey, why don't you guys go find some place to do your thing?"

And-- and so we ended up being-- becoming-- an actual 501(c3)-- and organization and doing more traditional U.S. organizing-- community organizing forum. Up to that point, w-- we were much more of a sort of traditional peasant movement from Haiti and Guatemala. (LAUGHTER) And so when we did that, we had to do a certain number-- we had to have a staff, right? We had to have-- a staff that was there durin' the day. And we had to have a place. We had to all these things and have a board.

And so we-- we had this group of about 50 people who were-- who were-- who had been sort of the core leadership of the strike. And we discussed all those things. How did we wanna do it? And-- and because we really did have the-- our roots in peasant organizing from Latin America and the Caribbean 'cause that's really where our roots came from. If you look there, people who are animators or organizers of a countryside are peasants themselves who continue to work in fields and do the same economic activities as everybody in the community and organize on that basis, right?

So that was what was decided, was that the staff wouldn't be professional organizers from the outside. They would be getting, you know, salaries three or four times the amount of-- of sa-- of a salary of a farm worker. The staff would be farm workers who would get farm worker compensation and would have to continue working the fields some way or another to not lose contact with the reality. To not separate themselves from the community. (SLAPS)

It's a rather-- extreme form of organizing the-- (SLAPS) the-- movement. But it has its advantages which is sort of what you mentioned which is that people never feel like the organization is organizing for its own interests. People who are workers

never feel like there's a difference between the-- the organizer and the worker.

And so that has always been effective for us. And so part of what people did in the staff in the summertime which is when Immokalee becomes sort of a dead community because that-- the summer is the off season (SLAPS) where we are. It would go up the stream, up the East Coast and take watermelons. We had a watermelon labor cooperative that started back in '96.

And-- and so that's always been part of our reality. And, you know, it's just-- it's just-- it's-- it's-- it is one of the secrets to our success. But-- but it's not unusual if you're looking at organizing overseas.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

Oh, if you-- fol-- following up then. How democratic and participatory is CIW? Has it changed over time? Are there officers who are elected? Are there many meetings? Are there few meeting?

GREG ASBED:

Yeah, we had-- we had-- since the very beginning we have-- a weekly open-- meeting every Wednesday since 1993, you know-- till now. We also have a women's group meeting on Sundays. We have-- we have a meeting on Saturdays. So every week we have about, you know, three open community meetings.

We have-- the staff comes from members. And in the past, they were elected through-- a group that was th-- this annual assembly. But-- you know, we've evolved. We're-- we're not just organizing in Immokalee any more. And so the demands on somebody who's a staff member have gone beyond just being able to organize other workers, right? (THUMP)

It's being able to talk to consumers across the country. It's being able to do an-- you know, to do education on the farms, all those such things. So it's more-- it's more a selection of staff that occurs through a process as workers kind of-- through self-selection, come closer and closer to the-- to the organization, be in the core of the-- of the-- of the work of the organization. We have a board-- its members also-- but, you know, the board is also somethin' that-- that is-- it's more of a traditional American, you know, form of organizing.

It's not so much-- a peasant form. And-- and so really, you know, Immokalee is a place that-- that-- what drives our organizing, what makes it participatory, is the approach we take to education which is called popular education. And it's necessary to do this constant process of education, building awareness in the town, because there's constant turnover of people in the town.

It's not-- you don't have workers that-- that are, you know, Pacific or Littman workers and they are there for their entire lives. That's not how it works. You have people

coming through town and-- and leaving-- (SLAPS) as quickly-- in the past, it was as quickly as they could get out. There's a little bit more settling in now than there was in the past. But so that had-- that forced us to do this education all the time.

And that education raised awareness which helped us organize. But it also-- it also motivated people to be part of the process. And so that's always been the way through the-- through the-- the staff and through the board that people would come in and be part of the-- of the decision-making process too.

JENNIFER GORDON:

One last question.

MALE VOICE OFF-MIC:

Does-- does this process-- and-- and your success sort of assume-- or-- or have to rely on just the-- the-- the total absence and ineffectiveness of the existing structures of state and federal wage and hour enforcement? You sorta have to succeed despite that? And is there any role for that in there? Or any way to pressure those agencies to do their jobs?

GREG ASBED:

I don't think it depends on it. You know, I mean, if-- if we had-- if we lived in a country-- well, not if we-- we lived in that country for a long time. But if we lived in a country where the government fully funded the enforcement of labor rights, as if they were, you know, funding police forces, you know, the drug war, right?

If we lived in a country where neighbor rights, the-- the-- the massive constant violation of labor rights was considered as important as the war on drugs, then, no, we probably wouldn't-- because there wouldn't be the human rights crisis driving our organizing. We probably wouldn't need the-- even it exists, you know.

Although a lot of what we do goes beyond the rights that are-- that are in the law which is great. You know, the-- the Fair Food Program exceeds the law in a lot of important ways. But we don't live in that country. And we're not going to live in that country for whenever-- ever. So we live in a country that essentially-- it has a department of labor. And we live in a state that doesn't have a department of labor. It was-- it was eliminated by Jeb Bush when he was governor.

So we have-- no department of labor in the state. And then we have, I guess, you know, a handful of d-- of department of labor investigators and of federal in-- in Florida. And then you have tens of thousands of workers who are in-- in difficult conditions. So there's-- there's-- it's just not going to-- to be effective in terms of-- of-- of (NOISE) creating compliance with federal labor law, you know. I mean, let's take

something less-- less extreme than the drug war. Take-- take taxes, right?

Taxes are essentially paid through voluntary compliance. But it's voluntary because most people recognize that they probably will get caught if they-- sooner or later, when they're caught, if they-- if they don't do it, right? That's-- that's the system. But they-- to get to that level of awareness among taxpayers, don't mess around 'cause you'll probably get caught. You have to have enough enforcement to make that real, right? (SLAPS)

That's n-- that's nowhere near that level in labor. So there's no sense before we started organizing-- there's no sense at all that you'll get caught if you were doing something like that. So it was necessary for us-- it made it necessary for us to organize. Now that we have, and now that we've actually created this world of compliance with human rights in-- in-- in the tomato industry, w-- we are developing a relationship with-- with the-- the federal (SLAPS)-- department of labor and-- and working on-- on how we can work together.

You know, that they can-- they can use the resources most effectively in the places we aren't, we can use-- we have a lot of people leave tomatoes and go to another farm-- other farms in different sectors like strawberries. And they give us all the complaints because they realize they do have rights in tomatoes. And they go to the-- the horrible world of strawberries, and they say, "Oh, my God." (SLAPS) And they call us.

So we're able to-- to-- to direct those to the department of labor and help in the investigation. So actually we're working probably more closely than we-- than we did even back when we were-- you know, we were hoping that that would be the solution, you know. So it does-- it does-- actually it-- it creates a situation where they can use their resources more-- more effectively in other places. And we can work together to-- to share the information that we're getting now.

JENNIFER GORDON:

All right, we're gonna have to wrap up. I wanna thank you all very much for coming. (APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *