

Southeast Working-Class Task Force February/March 2018 Newsletter

I Am Not a Tractor! How Florida Farmworkers Took On the Fast Food Giants and Won

Rarely do we pause to consider the origins of the produce that occupies our refrigerators, pantries, and plates. Out of sight and out of mind for most of us, at least 1 million farmworkers (estimates vary) in the US harvest tomatoes, strawberries, melons, oranges, and more. These workers endure strenuous working conditions, low pay, long hours, and all-too-frequent abuse, mistreatment, and exposure to chemical and other hazards.

In Florida's tomato fields, a group of farmworkers came together to improve their working conditions. They formed the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and won industry agreements to the Fair Food Program, a partnership of farmers, farmworkers, and retail food companies that ensure humane wages and working conditions at participating farms.

I Am Not a Tractor! celebrates the courage, vision, and creativity of the farmworkers and community leaders who have transformed one of the worst agricultural situations in the United States into one of the best. Susan L. Marquis highlights past abuses workers suffered in Florida's tomato fields: toxic pesticide exposure, beatings, sexual assault, rampant wage theft, and even, astonishingly, modern-day slavery. Marquis unveils how, even without new legislation, regulation, or government participation, these farmworkers have dramatically improved their work conditions.

Marquis credits this success to the immigrants from Mexico, Haiti, and Guatemala who formed the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a neuroscience major who takes great pride in the watermelon crew he runs, a leading farmer/grower who was once homeless, and a retired New York State judge who volunteered to stuff envelopes and ended up building a groundbreaking institution. Through the Fair Food Program that they have developed, fought for, and implemented, these people have changed the lives of more than thirty thousand field workers. *I Am Not a Tractor!* offers a range of solutions to a problem that is rooted in our nation's slave history and that is worsened by ongoing conflict over immigration.

See a video of a panel discussion <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVejve4Vtzs>

The Southeast Working-Class Task Force February/March 2018 Newsletter was a compilation of ideas and quotes from:

- <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/i-am-not-tractor-book-talk-discussion-worker-driven-social-responsibility/>
- <http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100598130>

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The task force meets the 3rd Wed. of the month at 6:30 on the 2nd floor at 901 Shelby St.