



MILK WITH DIGNITY

Adapting the Worker-driven Social Responsibility Model to the U.S. Northeast Dairy Industry

A NEW DAY FOR DAIRY

On October 3, 2017, farmworkers from the Vermont-based Migrant Justice and Ben & Jerry's CEO jointly signed the first-of-its-kind Milk with Dignity (MD) agreement. The legally binding contract commits the ice cream brand to implement a worker-driven human rights program in its Northeast dairy supply chain. This marks the beginning of a new day for dairy, one that ensures dignified working conditions and economic relief for farmworkers, while providing support to struggling farm owners.

The signing ceremony brought to a close two years of campaigning by dairy workers and their allies, as well as intensive negotiations between Migrant Justice and Ben & Jerry's. Now the focus pivots to implementation of the Milk with Dignity Program:

- **Farmworkers** will see concrete improvements in wages, scheduling, housing, and health and safety protections;
- **Farm owners** will receive a premium on their milk and support in improving working conditions;
- **Ben & Jerry's** can sell a product made with cream produced free from human rights abuses;
- **Consumers** will be able to see their alliance with farmworkers bear fruit in the form of a major company's concrete commitment to promoting human rights.

A Proven Model

Developed by Vermont dairy workers, MD is modeled after the Florida-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Program in the fresh-produce sector. The Fair Food Program has resulted in significant changes for tens of thousands of workers on participating farms and has been described by the *New York Times* as "the best workplace-monitoring program in the US." The Fair Food Program has also received acclaim for its effectiveness in preventing human trafficking and gender-based violence, both of which are longstanding problems in US agriculture.

The Milk with Dignity Program utilizes five essential elements of the Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) model that have borne fruit in the Fair Food Program:

- **Worker-drafted Code of Conduct:**

Farms in Ben & Jerry's supply chain must meet the standards defined by farmworkers, including much needed improvements in wages, scheduling, housing, and health and safety, as well as the right to complain free from retaliation;

- **Worker-to-Worker Education:**

Workers in the Program will be educated by Migrant Justice on their rights under the Code of Conduct and how to enforce them. Workers will therefore serve as frontline defenders of their own human rights;

- **Third Party Monitoring:** The newly-created Milk with Dignity Standards Council (MDSC) will enforce the agreement by auditing farms' compliance with the Code of Conduct; receiving, investigating and resolving worker complaints; and creating improvement plans to address violations. MDSC may suspend a farm from the Program if the farm is unwilling to meet the standards in the Code of Conduct, creating strong market incentives to improve workplace conditions;



- **Economic Relief:** Ben & Jerry's will pay a premium to all participating farms in their supply chain. The premium provides workers with a bonus in each paycheck and serves to help offset farms' costs of compliance with the Code of Conduct; and
- **Legally-binding Agreement:** Ben & Jerry's has signed a legally-binding agreement that defines the Program as a long-term contract enforceable under law.



WSR NETWORK TO EXPAND THE MODEL

In 2015, based on the success of the Fair Food Program in US agriculture and the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety in that country's garment sector, worker organizations, allies, and technical advisors launched the Worker-driven Social Responsibility Network. The Network aims to promote, expand, and adapt the WSR model in supply chains around the world.

Milk with Dignity has been a strategic focus of the WSR Network. The process has been comprised of four overlapping stages: Exploration; standards development and program design; campaign and negotiations; and implementation. Migrant Justice (MJ) spearheaded the adaptation with extensive partner support from Network members including the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), Fair Food Standards Council (FFSC), and National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI).