

glamour real stories

WHAT'S GOING ON? HEROES, CAUSES AND NEWS OF YOUR WORLD

Slave labor in, yes, America



Antislavery crusaders and colleagues Laura Germino, far right, and Francisca Cortes

Who picked the tomato on your burger? Laura Germino and her fellow activists are making sure it wasn't one of this country's thousands of forced-labor farm workers.

You may consider calories and carbs when ordering a burger—but odds are you *don't* worry that the tomato on it might have been picked by a woman or man held in forced labor. Turns out it's a real risk. Here's why: Every year thousands of workers (including U.S. citizens and undocumented immigrants) are hired by growers in the United States. Some of these laborers are paid tiny wages and told they must repay their bosses outlandish charges for transportation, food and housing; threatened with beatings and even death, these workers end up hopelessly mired in debt. "It's slavery," says activist Laura Germino, 45. "And for a long time it wasn't on the radar of law enforcement."

Germino first heard about America's hidden slaves in 1992, when she met teenager Julia Gabriel, who'd escaped from a South Carolina farm. The farm-worker's organization Germino had cofounded, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (named for a Florida

FAST FOOD CAN BE FAIR

You can rest a little easier if you're eating at one of these fast-food chains, which are working to improve conditions for farm laborers.
McDonald's • Taco Bell • KFC
Long John Silver's • Pizza Hut

farming region), and Gabriel got the Justice Department to prosecute that grower; since then CIW has helped liberate more than 1,000 farmhands.

Today slavery still occurs, says Germino, along with bad conditions such as subpoverty wages for dawn-to-dusk labor.

To combat these abuses, CIW is targeting the U.S. tomato crop and its biggest customers. Its boycotts persuaded McDonald's and Taco Bell to pay a penny more per pound (effectively doubling workers' pay), to monitor conditions and to maintain a no-slavery policy. Next up, Burger King: CIW is planning a November 30 protest at BK headquarters. (A BK rep told *Glamour*, "We want slavery out of the system," but questioned whether paying more for tomatoes would actually result in higher wages for pickers. CIW says better wages *have* been the result

of agreements with other chains.) Says Germino, "Once consumers find out their tomatoes come with a high human price, they don't want any part of that." —RUTH DAVIS KONIGSBERG