

# Stop Trafficking!

## Awareness Advocacy Action

Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter • April 2022 • Vol. 20 • No. 4

**FOCUS:** This issue looks at human trafficking, child and forced labor behind the food we consume.

*Mealtime is usually a social and enjoyable time, making it easy to forget how the food got to the table. By the time food gets to our plates, it has passed through many hands. Most of the food industry has been pushed to the limit to meet demand at low costs. Unfortunately, when there is a need for inexpensive, reliable labor, human trafficking is bound to occur. This is the first of two newsletters about food that may not necessarily be expensive for us as the consumer, but is extremely costly to those that provide it.*



*Jum's words tumble out over the phone, his voice growing ever more frantic. He says he's trapped on a Malaysian plantation run by one of the world's largest palm oil companies between sobs. His boss confiscated and then lost his Indonesian passport, he says, leaving him vulnerable to arrest. So night after night, he has been forced to hide from authorities, sleeping on the jungle floor, exposed to the wind and the rain—his biggest fear: the roaming tigers.*

*Jum says his supervisor demands he keeps working, tending the heavy reddish-orange palm oil fruit that has made its way into the supply chains of the world's largest food and cosmetics companies including Unilever, L'Oreal, Nestle, and Procter & Gamble.*

*"I am not a free man anymore," he says, his voice cracking. "I desperately want to see my mom and dad. I want to go home! So when Americans and Europeans see palm oil listed as an ingredient in their snacks," he said, "they should know it's the same as consuming our sweat and blood."*

Click [here](#) to learn more.

## You likely have palm oil in your home right now.

Often disguised on labels as an ingredient listed by more than 200 names, it is found in roughly half the products on supermarket shelves and in most cosmetic brands. It is found in confectionery, cleaning and bathroom products, paints, plywood, pesticides, and pills. It's also present in animal feed, biofuels, and even hand sanitizer.

It is often referred to as "vegetable oil" on product packaging. However, over 200 other names for palm oil include Palmitate, Stearic Acid, Glyceryl Stearate-Coco palm, Sodium Stearate, Sodium Laurel Sulphate, and Retinyl Palmitate. In addition, cosmetics containing palm oil often list the plant's botanical name, *Elaeis guineensis*, under their ingredients.

The palm oil in the products you use may also be tainted by forced and child labor. Workers tend to either be migrants from nearby countries searching for better opportunities or from poor rural villages surrounding palm plantations. Foreign migrants transported by labor brokers are placed in remote plantations in rural areas with virtually no transportation, preventing them from leaving. They must live in poor conditions without access to clean water, lighting, and other basic facilities. They are further isolated by a lack of social support, cultural barriers, and discrimination. Victims include Myanmar's long-persecuted Rohingya minority members, who fled ethnic cleansing in their homeland only to be sold into the palm oil industry. Fishers





# Awareness

who escaped years of slavery on boats also described coming ashore searching for help but instead ending up being trafficked onto plantations.

Palm oil is derived from palm trees, usually found in tropical regions, and the harvesting of palm oil has been widely criticized for its devastation of native rainforests. Palm oil is produced in 17 countries, with Indonesia and Malaysia supplying 85% of the world's \$65 billion supply. Trafficking cases have been identified in Malaysian and Indonesian palm plantations.

## Berries

Sagar picks berries for 16 hours a day in over 100°F heat for less than the legal minimum wage on a farm in Odemira, a rural region of southwest Portugal. He is one of over 10,000 migrant workers who risk exploitation and abuse in Portugal's \$270m soft fruit industry. [Please click here](#) to read more about how foreign berry pickers become trapped in exploitative jobs in Portugal.

## Pineapple

American-owned pineapple farms in Hawaii hire migrant workers from Thailand who are vulnerable to discrimination. These workers also give indicators of human trafficking for forced labor including withholding "passports, denying them pay, charging them hefty recruitment fees, and harassing and retaliating against those who complained." Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Tea

Forced labor, child labor, and inhumane work conditions have been found on tea plantations in India, Kenya, Rwanda, Bangladesh, and several other countries.

In the Indian state of Assam, more than 1 million workers live with their families on tea plantations. The workers live in crumbling homes with minimal electricity, limited access to clean water, and no working toilets. As a result, they are forced to defecate in the tea bushes, which results in health risks and the spread of disease. Moreover, many workers and their children are malnourished, making it impossible to fight these diseases. In addition, the women suffer from anemia which significantly increases the risk of maternal mortality.

The low wages do not allow workers to support their families. Families who can not keep all their children sell them to traffickers. Children who are not trafficked are forced to work alongside their parents in the fields to help meet daily quotas.

*In 2015, 2,000 men were rescued from the trawling boats where they were being held as enslaved people at sea. Forced to fish and in the middle of the ocean with nowhere to run, these men reported being whipped with the tails of the stingrays they were made to catch. The men did not receive pay. "When we asked [the bosses] for our money, they would say they did not have it ... but then they would go to nightclubs, brothels, and bars, drinking expensive alcohol," one man said. In addition, they were often deprived of food and water.*

*Of 400 men rescued, 12 percent said they had seen a person die on the boats.*

*Click [here](#) to learn more.*

## Who is Providing Your Fish?

*"A woman who was eight months pregnant suffered a miscarriage on the work floor and was made to keep on peeling shrimp for four days as she continued to hemorrhage."*

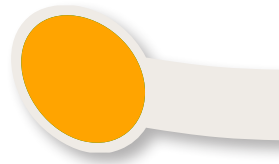
Recent reports indicate that human trafficking is rampant in the fishing industry. Away at sea for months at a time, victims, many of them migrants, report abuse, physical injury, and even the death of workers. Fishers are forced to work for long hours at meager pay.

Workers have reported that food is often in poor supply, expired or rotting, and water is rationed. The work is intense, hazardous, and demanding. Moreover, capture fisheries have one of the highest occupational fatality rates globally. The number of deaths on these ships is increasingly drawing attention from the international community.

### Shrimp

Thailand supplies most of the shrimp to Western countries. It keeps the cost of harvesting shrimp down by relying on child labor and forced labor. These laborers come from its neighboring countries — Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. They are lured to Thailand with promises of good jobs. Instead, most cross the border into the country without visas and, once in the country, are sold to seafood companies as enslaved people. As illegal immigrants, they have no rights or protection.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



## Trafficking within the H-2A Visa System

The 2017 [Typology of Modern Slavery](#) report from Polaris' Human Trafficking hotline data is based on the most extensive data set on U.S. human trafficking ever publicly compiled and analyzed. Polaris identified more than 400 human-trafficking cases and more than 1,500 labor-exploitation cases related to the agriculture and animal husbandry industries through the hotlines.

Data indicates that farmworkers under the H-2A visa program are often at risk for becoming forced labor or human-trafficking victims because their legal status in the United States is tied to their employment. That dependency prevents workers from escaping abusive employers withholding pay or providing dangerous living conditions.

According to the report, traffickers in agriculture generally isolate victims in rural parts of the country, leaving little to no access to support. Victims cited abuses in tobacco production most often during hotline calls. Exploitation in dairy, orange, tomato, and strawberry production was also frequently mentioned.

Polaris found that nine out of 10 victims of human trafficking or labor exploitation in agriculture were foreign nationals. In addition, the vast majority of victims were adult men, with women accounting for 17 percent of victims and minors accounting for 8 percent.

Moreover, a 2021 report by Amanda Perez Pintado, Investigate Midwest/Report for America, indicates that Americans rely on the H-2A program to provide many of the foods we consume.

It is a platform for the agricultural system, allowing farms to bring in enough labor to pick fruits and vegetables. But many workers have been trafficked by employers using the program.

Between 2012 and 2020, migrant workers from Mexico were recruited by companies in Illinois to construct hog and poultry enclosures under the H-2A temporary agricultural program. They came to the U.S. under the promise of well-paid jobs but were instead forced to work

across the country for hundreds of hours without pay. If they complained, they were threatened with deportation.

A lawsuit was filed in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois on August 10, 2021, by Legal Aid Chicago, Jordan & Zito LLC, and Gair Eberhard Nelson Dedinas Ltd. on behalf of 24 agricultural construction workers. The federal complaint accuses Mauricio Luna — who allegedly did business under the names ML Farm Systems, Alpha Agricultural Builders, and Spartan Agricultural Builders — of human trafficking and forced labor.

According to Polaris, the number of likely labor trafficking survivors who held H-2A visas increased by more than 70% during six months of the pandemic. In addition, Polaris's data indicates that the daily number of labor trafficking and exploitation incidents that had at least one victim with an H-2A visa doubled from April 1 to September 30, 2020.

The H-2A program allows U.S. employers who anticipate a shortage of domestic laborers to hire nonimmigrant foreign workers to perform temporary or seasonal agricultural work. H-2A visa holders must be given copies of their contract and be paid at least twice per month, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. In addition, employers must provide housing and provide or pay for inbound transportation and daily meals or reimburse workers.

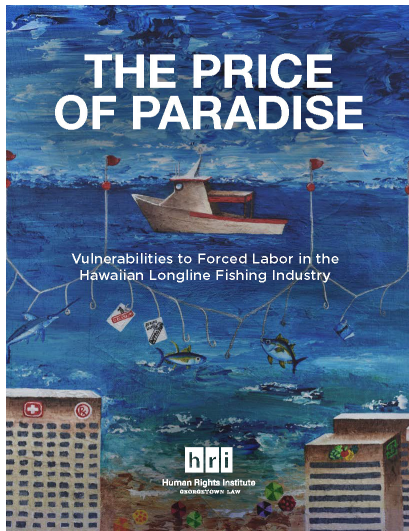
Red flags that could indicate a worker with an H-2A visa may be a victim of human trafficking include paying a recruitment fee, having their passports taken by their employers, and being made to work to pay a debt.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



## Onions

In December 2021, over 100 victims of labor trafficking were released in Operation Blooming Onion in Georgia. The investigation into the Patricio organization started in Nov. 2018. Still, the alleged crimes began long before that in 2015. At that time, they were accused of fraudulently using the H-2A work visa program to smuggle in people from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras to do agricultural work. The people named in the indictment are accused of requiring the workers to pay for transportation, food, and housing while illegally holding their travel and identification. They're also accused of exploiting the workers and threatening them with violence. The indictment says the workers had to dig for onions with their bare hands -- making 20 cents per bucket -- and were held in fenced work camps with minimal food, plumbing, or clean water. At least two workers died as a result of those conditions.



## The Price of Paradise: Vulnerabilities to Forced Labor in the Hawaiian Longline Fishing Industry

Approximately 700 foreign fishermen work on American longline fishing vessels in Hawaii, catching tens of millions of pounds of fish per year. However, in 2016, [reports surfaced](#) that the foreign fishers employed in the Hawaiian Industry faced extremely harsh working conditions, forced labor, and abuse. This report, published by The Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute, assesses systemic vulnerabilities to forced labor faced by foreign workers in the Hawaiian longline fishing fleet through the lens of both international and U.S. domestic law. It then examines how these vulnerabilities impact foreign fishers throughout their employment in Hawaii. Finally, this report concludes with recommendations for legislators, government agencies, and industry actors to address these vulnerabilities by:

1. resolving foreign fishers' lack of legal status;
2. clarifying agencies' regulatory jurisdiction and responsibilities; and
3. strengthening the industry's human rights-oriented policies and processes.

To read the report, please click [here](#).

## Exploitation in Your Coffee Cup

Billions of cups of coffee are consumed each day, yet how many of us even think about the child labor and human trafficking that goes into our brew? The number of people experiencing labor trafficking and exploitation in the coffee industry is unknown; however, it is estimated that 26 million men, women, and children work on coffee plantations each year.

More than 90% of coffee exports come from developing countries such as Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia, and Mexico, with Brazil being the largest exporter of coffee globally. It is believed that over 60 percent of the coffee workers are seasonal migrants from neighboring areas. For example, coffee plantations in Mexico rely on an estimated 30,000 migrants from Guatemala. In addition to migrant workers, indigenous people, women, and children are highly vulnerable to labor exploitation on coffee plantations.

Surprisingly, small family-run coffee farms produce 60% of the world's coffee. Yet, most of these families live in poverty. When coffee prices decrease, families are forced to put their children to work to avoid starvation. Because of a multi-layered supply chain, only a small fraction of the retail price, often 7% to 10%, but sometimes as low as 1% to 3%, reach the hands of coffee farmers.

Some popular coffee brands such as Starbucks and Nestle, and programs that advertise as slave-free, unknowingly, or knowingly, involve child or forced labor to make their coffee.

Programs like Fair Trade and the Rainforest Alliance follow the "square-root rule" to determine the number of properties inspected each year. However, because of the large market, very few farms are inspected.

Moreover, coffee beans change hands over 100 times along their supply chain, so brands stamped "ethically made" are, in fact, picked by trafficking victims. Fairtrade programs alone are not equipped to identify, let alone systemically change, trafficking and labor exploitation in the billions of pounds of coffee harvested every year.

Changes in individual consumption will not solve the problem of labor exploitation in the coffee industry. Instead, governments, businesses, and even Fairtrade certification programs must turn their attention to addressing poverty and



labor rights and standards that lie at the root of this systemic issue. Meanwhile, concerned citizens should support modern slavery and supply chain transparency bills and campaigns in their states.

Verité's Cooperation On Fair, Free, Equitable Employment (COFFEE) Project examines the impacts of COVID-19 on coffee farmers and farmworkers. They report an increase in child and forced labor risk due to the designation of agricultural workers as "essential workers" and travel restrictions on migrant labor.

To read more about human trafficking and your cup of brew, please click [here](#).

*A group of six Mexican veterinarians filed a federal lawsuit against Idaho-based dairy farm Funk Dairy, Inc. for human trafficking. The suit implicates the dairy farm, the owner, manager, and attorney in obtaining professional work visas for the immigrants—promising high-paying animal healthcare jobs—while forcing the plaintiffs to engage in general labor such as milking cows and cleaning manure for an entire year. The workers allege they were paid lower wages than promised, forced to live in substandard housing, threatened with deportation should they refuse to perform assigned work, and exploited for their inability to speak English and unfamiliarity with the United States labor laws. The lawsuit also lists other violations, including the denial of meal breaks, inadequate toilet facilities, unhygienic workstations, and lack of protective equipment—which resulted in the partial amputation of one worker's finger. Click [here](#) to learn more.*



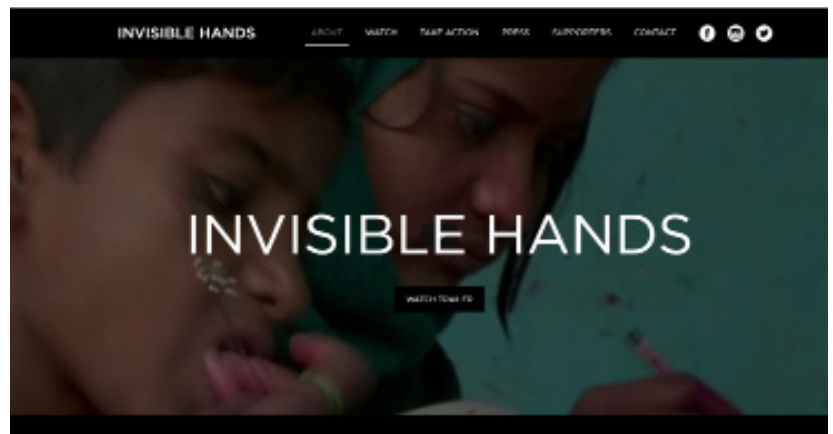
## Action



Working together, the farmworkers of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and conscientious consumers are transforming the way the food industry operates. Nine major retailers, including Taco Bell, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, Whole Foods, Compass Group, Aramark and Sodexo, have reached fair food agreements with the CIW. These agreements include a code of conduct that aims to eliminate the abuses that allow slavery to flourish and establishes a zero-tolerance policy for forced labor. As a result of the fair food agreements, more than 90 percent of Florida tomato growers are now working with the CIW and retailers to implement the fair food agreements. Click [here](#) to read more about the Fair Food program.

## Invisible Hands

Produced by Oscar-winning filmmaker Charles Ferguson, Invisible Hands is the first feature documentary to expose child labor and trafficking within the supply chains of the world's biggest companies. Filmed in six countries including India, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Ghana, it is a harrowing account of children as young as 6 years old making the products we use every day. Click [here](#) to learn more.





## Bitter Pineapple

Please click [here](#) to view a short documentary detailing cases of land grabs perpetrated by a giant pineapple company in Bukidnon, Mindanao, Philippines.



## What is being done to stop child labor in coffee production?

Colombia is making significant advancements in efforts to tackle child labor through its campaign Working is Not a Child's Task, the National Policy on Childhood and Adolescence, and the Center for the Crime of Trafficking in Persons.

The Brazilian government funded and participated in programs that target child labor, such as the #StopChildLabor (#ChegaDeTrabalhoInfantil) Campaign and the Living Together and Strengthening Links Program (Serviço de Convivência e Fortalecimento de Vínculo).



Be a conscientious and informed consumer. Find out more about who may have picked your tomatoes at [ResponsibleSourcingTool.org](#), or check out the [Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#). Encourage companies to take steps to prevent human trafficking in their supply chains and publish the information, including supplier or factory lists, for consumer awareness.



## Guilt-Free Ice Cream

In October 2017, dozens of farmworkers stood alongside the CEO of a major global dairy company, Ben and Jerry's. They announced that for the first time in history, the immigrant workers who milk cows and scrape stalls – those who work at the bottom of the supply chain – had partnered with a corporation and signed a contract making Ben & Jerry's the first company to join the Milk with Dignity Program.

Developed by immigrant farmworkers in Vermont, the Milk with Dignity Program brings together workers, farmers, and industry leaders to address persistent labor abuses in the dairy industry. The Program has adapted to dairy

the innovative “Worker-driven Social Responsibility” model created by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and their groundbreaking Fair Food Program. This model succeeds by calling on corporations to take responsibility for their supply chains' conditions and offering solutions via binding, worker-designed programs with clear enforcement mechanisms.

This program has demonstrated the power of clear, enforceable standards and rigorous monitoring processes. The movement towards accountability represents a marked departure from the past industry norms — and from top-down, corporate-led programs purporting to monitor working conditions.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Take Action

Of the five largest fast-food corporations in the country — McDonald's, Subway, Burger King, Taco Bell (Yum! Brands), and Wendy's — Wendy's stands alone as the only one who has refused to join the Fair Food Program and respect the rights and dignity of farmworkers in its supply chain.



As Wendy's positions itself to implement sustainable business practices and promote its sourcing of “honest ingredients,” it must realize that respect for human rights and worker participation are integral components of the genuine sustainability that today's consumers expect and demand.

Click [here](#) to download the Campaign Background One-Pager!

[Sign the petition](#) to tell Wendy's to sign the Fair Food Agreement and get on the right side of history!



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