

## **Summary of Melon Worker Interviews**

During November 23-25, 2019, the International Labor Rights Forum interviewed farmworkers in the melon industry in the Choluteca region of Honduras. These workers are currently employed by Melon Export, a subsidiary of Sol-Fyffes, which is part of the Japanese conglomerate Sumitomo. The following is a summary of the findings regarding their current working conditions:

- Each of the 17 workers we spoke with who had attended Melon Export's orientation meeting with over 100 workers present, reported that during this meeting, and in front of management, a representative of SITRAMELEXA told workers that the only way they would receive a bonus at the end of the harvest or support for funeral costs would be if they affiliate to SITRAMELEXA (a company-controlled union). Meanwhile, all of Melon Export's workers are denied their legal rights to the benefit of proportional payment of earned time, which amounts to an average of ten times the amount of the promised bonus for the workers who affiliate to SITRAMELEXA.
- Each of the three workers we spoke with who had worked in Melon Export's fields on November 24, reported that after the company had spread the pesticide Telone during the previous evening that their mouths became numb and they got headaches while in the fields in the morning of November 24. These workers also reported that they have not received any protective equipment.
- Workers report that the daily quota for teams totaling 70 people increased from 32 manzanas to 38 manzanas per day (1 manzana is approximately 1.7 acres or 7,000 m<sup>2</sup>), and that this additional work pressure has caused a higher number of people to faint in the fields during November 2019 compared to previous years.
- Several workers reported that a caporal (team leader) is coercing workers who are members of STAS to provide copies of their identification card to disaffiliate from STAS.
- A worker who came down with dengue fever was only given two days off by the company doctor and was denied treatment the second time he returned to the doctor because he did not have a signed slip from his supervisor and was therefore required to go back to work while still suffering from fever, vomiting, and weakness.
- In Honduras it is a legal requirement to enroll workers in social security; however, none of the current temporary workers have been enrolled.

In addition, the International Labor Rights Forum spoke with representatives of the independent farmworker union STAS. STAS reports that while some of their members have been hired by Melon Export this season, many of them have not. For the immediate future, STAS is seeking:

- The rehiring of 30 STAS members, who have all worked for Sol-Fyffes previously, most for more than 5 years and many for over 15 years.
- Official recognition of STAS' subsectional union's executive committee at Melon Export.
- An end to the anti-union intimidation, blacklisting, threats, and violence against STAS and its members, including an end to the defamation campaign against the president of STAS, Tomas Membreño.

- Provide all legally-required rights and benefits to the temporary workers who are 95% of Sol-Fyffes' production workers, such as inscribing temporary workers into the national healthcare system; paying, at minimum, the monthly minimum wage; and an end to putting workers at risk by exposing them to toxic chemicals (documented by ILRF in November 2019).

*Detailed documentation on the history of labor rights violations and current ongoing violations is available from the International Labor Rights Forum upon request.*