Breaking Chains at Walmart

Ending Forced Labor on the Walmart Supply Chain in Louisiana

Despite threats to their families, guestworkers in Louisiana have gone on strike to expose forced labor on the Walmart supply chain. In Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, Walmart supplier C.J.’s Seafood has subjected 40 Mexican guestworkers on H-2B visas to forced labor, stolen wages, unfair labor practices and discrimination—from which Walmart has profited.

Workers at C.J.’s Seafood report that the employer and supervisors have forced them to work up to 24-hour shifts with no overtime pay, locked them in the plant, threatened them with beatings to make them work faster, and threatened violence against their families back in Mexico after workers contacted law enforcement out of desperation.

Workers live in crowded trailers in a labor camp adjacent to their employers’ house. The employer has subjected workers to constant surveillance, unannounced house inspections, and threats of firing for leaving their housing later than 9 p.m. Guestworkers are forced to start work as early as 2 a.m. and to perform unpaid cleaning work as conditions of employment. C.J. Seafood’s U.S. workers are not.

While C.J.’s Seafood general manager Michael Leblanc has subjected guestworkers to forced labor, he has also helped drive an industry-wide effort to block new Department of Labor rules for the H-2B guestworker program that would protect guestworkers and U.S. workers alike. Leblanc is director of the Crawfish Processor’s Alliance, which sued the Department of Labor to block the new rules.

On June 4, an organizing committee of eight workers confronted their boss, who refused to sign an agreement of non-retaliation, end forced labor conditions, and obey the law. The workers are now on strike to protest the illegal and unfair actions of this Walmart supplier. Despite threats to their families, the workers are fighting to end forced labor for their fellow workers at C.J.’s Seafood—and across their industry.

Walmart: Profit through Forced Labor

C.J.’S Seafood is far from an isolated case. In a shelf survey of random food products in five Walmarts and Sam’s Clubs in Louisiana and Mississippi, researchers found 760 guestworkers on the Walmart supply chain. That’s a tiny fraction of the total number of Walmart guestworkers across the U.S. Given the rampant abuse of the H-2B guestworker visa program, many of Walmart’s guestworkers are likely to be facing exploitation as severe as the seafood workers in Louisiana are.

Because Walmart is profiting from their labor, the guestworkers at C.J.’S Seafood and other Walmart suppliers are Walmart’s guestworkers. Walmart itself takes responsibility for workers across its supply chain through its own Standards for Suppliers, which require fair wages, humane conditions, and the right to organize for all supplier employees.

guestworkeralliance.org
Walmart's response to forced labor at C.J.'s Seafood is a test: Are Walmart's supplier standards real, or are they empty corporate PR? Will Walmart will take quick and decisive action when confronted with clear violations of U.S. law and its own professed standards?

**What should Walmart do?**

1. Walmart should cancel its contract with C.J.'s Seafood to show that it won't profit from forced labor in Louisiana.

2. Walmart should reveal all the guestworkers on its Gulf Coast supply chain so the National Guestworker Alliance can ensure they are safe.

If Walmart won't take concrete and immediate steps to end forced labor for 40 guestworkers in the small town of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana—if it can't guarantee dignified conditions on its supply chain in one shop in a single industry located a two-hour plane ride away from Walmart's headquarters in Arkansas—then how can we believe Walmart's pledge to ensure basic dignity for millions of workers across its global supply chain, as it promises to in its Standards for Suppliers?

**Key Facts and Worker Quotes**

Breaux Bridge, Louisiana brands itself the “Crawfish Capital of the World.”

C.J.’s Seafood sells an estimated 85% of its crawfish, shelled and processed by guestworkers, to Walmart’s Sam’s Club stores.

C.J.’s Seafood is using the H-2B guestworker program to undercut local workers. Before 2005, all of C.J.’S Seafood’s employees were local workers. Today, 40 of C.J.'S Seafood’s 50 employees are H-2B guestworkers.

“Once when I was getting my pay check, the boss showed me that he had a gun in his desk. I think he wanted me to know that he was armed because I’m the kind of person that stands up for my rights.” – Guestworker Rosendo Castillo, 52

“I’ve worker as a guestworker now for over eight years. I decided to go on strike because we are human beings and we want dignity. We can’t let our bosses lock us inside the plant and threaten our families and stay silent about it.” – Guestworker Ana Rosa Diaz, 40

“My husband and I have been coming to work at this plant for five years. This year our oldest son came too. We've never spoken out because we were afraid, but I'm sick and tired of being humiliated year after year—even more now that our son is here—while Mike [Leblanc] threatens us and him.” – Guestworker Silvia Alfaro Walle, 42

For more information, visit: [http://goo.gl/Szmcf](http://goo.gl/Szmcf)

Watch the workers’ video on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVWos-FBLjQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVWos-FBLjQ)

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