

# MILK WITH DIGNITY



On October 3, 2017, farmworkers from the Vermont-based Migrant Justice and the CEO of Ben & Jerry's jointly signed the first-of-its-kind Milk with Dignity (MD) agreement.

The legally binding contract commits Ben & Jerry's 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 provides economic relief and support to struggling farm owners, in the form of a premium paid by Ben & Jerry's, while ensuring dignity and respect for farmworkers. These reforms are long overdue given the well-documented abuses confronted by these workers.

Before putting his signature on the document, Migrant Justice spokesperson Enrique "Kike" Balcazar spoke to those assembled:

**This is an historic moment for dairy workers. We have worked tirelessly to get here, and now we move forward towards a new day for the industry. We appreciate Ben & Jerry's leadership role and look forward to working together to implement a program that ensures dignified housing and fair working conditions on dairy farms across the region. And though this is the first, it won't be the last agreement of its kind.**

The signing ceremony brought to a close more than two years of public 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, which bring transformational changes to a troubled industry:

- 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 solidarity with farmworkers bear fruit in the form of a major company's concrete commitment to promoting human rights through Worker-driven Social Responsibility.

Developed by Vermont dairy workers, MD is modeled after the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Program in the fresh-produce sector. The Milk with Dignity Program will utilize five essential elements of Worker-driven Social Responsibility that have borne fruit in produce fields under the Fair Food Program:

- Farmworker-Authored Code of Conduct: Farms in Ben & Jerry's supply chain must meet the standards defined by farmworkers in wages,



scheduling, housing, health and safety, and the right to work free from retaliation;

- **Farmworker Education:** Workers in the Program will be educated 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 Body:** 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 grievances; and creating improvement plans to address violations. MDSC will work with farmers and farmworkers in order to problem-solve issues as they arise, seeking to improve communication and participation in the workplace. 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 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.

The Milk with Dignity Program has been a strategic focus of the Worker-driven Social Responsibility Network, which will now support Migrant Justice and the Milk with Dignity Standards Council in implementation of the Program.