

RESOLUTION 3-S.F.No. 1675

A resolution memorializing the strawberry industry to recognize and respect the rights of strawberry workers.

WHEREAS, farm workers are an essential part of our nation's food production system; and

WHEREAS, 75 percent of all strawberries shipped in the United States in 1995 came from California; and

WHEREAS, the typical California strawberry worker earns about \$8,500 per season for as many as 12 hours of labor a day, stooped over low berry plants; and

WHEREAS, despite record production levels and sales of \$650,000,000 per year in the strawberry industry, most strawberry workers have not had a significant raise in ten years, and the share of each dollar spent on strawberries that is received by workers fell from 17.5 cents in 1985 to 9.2 cents in 1995; and

WHEREAS, strawberry workers' wages are so low that research by the California Institute for Rural Studies found that raising the price of a pint of strawberries by only five cents, if the money went to the workers, would increase the average strawberry worker's pay by 50 percent; and

WHEREAS, strawberry workers report that forepersons sometimes demand sexual favors from workers in exchange for employment; and

WHEREAS, after years of loyalty, workers must line up each season to be rehired, and face firings on a whim; and

WHEREAS, sometimes there is no fresh drinking water in the fields and the bathrooms are often filthy; and

WHEREAS, strawberry workers labor amid pesticides and suffer chronic back injuries, but often have little or no health insurance; and

WHEREAS, through their union, the United Farm Workers, strawberry workers are fighting for justice and dignity, better wages, and such basic protections as clean drinking water, sanitary bathrooms, freedom from sexual harassment, health insurance, and job security; and

WHEREAS, employers have responded by firing and blacklisting workers who stand up for their rights, plowing under fields when workers vote for union representation, and selectively shutting down operations to discourage workers' organizing efforts; and

WHEREAS, strawberry workers are asking consumers, grocery store owners, and community and political leaders across the nation to sign a pledge and pass resolutions supporting strawberry workers' rights; and

WHEREAS, strawberry workers hope that these pledges and resolutions, combined with the United Farm Workers' organizing campaign, will convince the large corporations that control the strawberry industry to negotiate in good faith and treat workers fairly; and

WHEREAS, many consumer, environmental, human rights, labor, and religious organizations, including the Consumer Federation of America, the Sierra Club, the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, the Organization of Chinese Americans, the National Organization of Women, the AFL-CIO, the Jewish Labor Committee, and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States

have formed the National Strawberry Commission for Workers' Rights to support fairness for strawberry workers; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Legislature of the State of Minnesota that it supports the following rights for strawberry workers and encourages the strawberry industry to recognize and respect these rights: a living wage, clean drinking water and bathrooms in the fields, job security, health insurance, and freedom from sexual harassment and other abuses.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of State of the State of Minnesota is directed to prepare copies of this memorial and transmit them to the President of the United States and the Governor of the State of California.

Presented to the governor April 21, 1997

Filed with the Secretary of State April 23, 1997