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Hundreds of Activists Rally To Show TESCO Investors That Fresh & Easy Faces Powerful Resistance

Labor Desk

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Alliance Says Fresh & Easy's Refusal to Negotiate Community Benefits Agreement Could Lead to Failure Similar to That Experienced by Predecessors Like Carrefour. Groups That Stopped Wal-Mart in Inglewood Say TESCO's Track Record Suggests it Makes Promises it Doesn't Intend To Keep.

Los Angeles — Hundreds of community, environmental, faith and labor activists gathered outside a meeting of financial analysts and institutional investors Tuesday demanding that TESCO, the meeting's host, negotiate a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with the Alliance for Healthy and Responsible Grocery Stores. TESCO, the world's third largest food retailer, recently expanded into the United States by opening six "Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Markets" in the greater Los Angeles area. They have announced plans to develop hundreds of stores across California, Arizona and Nevada within the next calendar year.

According to Alliance leaders, the rally was meant to communicate to analysts and investors that significant resistance is building against Fresh & Easy due to its refusal to negotiate a Community Benefits Agreement. The Alliance contends that TESCO's track record abroad should cause concern for

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consumers, investors and communities - and that the British giant can only be held accountable for its promises through a legally-binding agreement. "TESCO's record and our city's history make it clear to all of us that we can't afford to simply 'trust' them without ensuring accountability - and then watch as their continued expansion becomes a foregone conclusion," said Kelley Willis, President of the West Los Angeles Democratic Club.

The Alliance, a citywide coalition of community, environmental, faith and labor organizations, includes many of the groups and leaders that led the successful 2004 campaign against a Wal-Mart ballot initiative in Inglewood and helped pass one of the nation's first living wage ordinances in Los Angeles. The group has repeatedly invited Fresh & Easy to negotiate, but the corporation has thus far refused to meet with the group.

Earlier this month, Democratic presidential candidates Barack Obama and John Edwards joined with the Alliance in calling on TESCO to create a partnership with the diverse community coalition. Senator Obama, in a letter sent to Fresh & Easy CEO Timothy Mason, addressed the community's concerns and urged Fresh & Easy to work with the Alliance:

"I understand and appreciate that TESCO's Fresh & Easy has countered these concerns with bold promises to create quality jobs, implement local hiring plans, provide environmental leadership and develop stores in neglected communities. I hope these promises will be fulfilled. However, those concerns would be better eased by working with a coalition like Los Angeles' Alliance for Healthy and Responsible Grocery Stores to establish firm commitments in writing to the communities where you intend to operate."

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TESCO's Fresh & Easy enters the Southern California food retail market having promised not only to be a good employer and environmental steward, but also to be a leader in developing stores in underserved



areas of Los Angeles. So far, however, Fresh & Easy has only committed to developing one store in South Los Angeles, an area with a longstanding need for quality grocery stores; and the corporation has acknowledged in community meetings that the South L A store may take years to build

At today's rally, speakers demanded that TESCO's Fresh & Easy be held accountable for this and other promises, noting that, in the past, grocery chains have made similar pledges to bring quality markets and job opportunities to underserved neighborhoods, but have failed to do so. After the civil unrest of 1992, for example, four major grocery chains promised to build 33 new grocery stores in the most impacted areas. Ten years later, the area saw a net increase of only one store.

Additionally, a report by Occidental College and numerous media exposés have raised serious questions about TESCO's labor, food quality and environmental practices. TESCO has sold goods produced by children as young as twelve and contracted with manufacturers in England that paid less than minimum wage. Further, an independent report released in Britain says that the company's "carbon footprint" in the UK could be as much as twelve times higher than what TESCO publicly acknowledges.

"Just as those analysts, those investors and TESCO itself... would laugh at the notion of going into a business arrangement under the premise of "trust us" we can't be expected to simply "trust" them. We need commitments," said Elliott Petty, Senior Retail Analyst for the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE).

Meanwhile, in Southern California, where TESCO has advertised itself as a "great place to work," paying a starting salary of \$10 per hour, news reports have said that the company only plans to employ most workers for up to 20 hours a week. According to the Alliance, this amounts to part-time employment that will diminish industry standards.

"Why, if they are truly committed to maintaining the job standards this city has fought so hard for in the grocery industry, do they refuse to stop ignoring this community's stated desire to have a voice in what being a "good employer" looks like?" said Maria Elena Durazo, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor.

In September, the Alliance for Healthy and Responsible Grocery Stores called on TESCO's Fresh & Easy to negotiate and sign a Community Benefits Agreement. Other Los Angeles developers, including those responsible for the Staples Center, NoHo Commons and Hollywood & Vine projects, have negotiated and signed such agreements. Developers and stakeholders in other cities, including Denver, Milwaukee and New York, are increasingly turning to Community Benefits Agreements as an effective tool to overcome protracted land use battles.

For more information and for the sources for this release, please visit www.goodgrocerystores.org.