

CULTURE

Festival raises awareness for low-income farm workers

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Walking by the ECM building Thursday, it would have been hard to resist the two large colorful signs hanging by its entrance, welcoming passersby inside.

Walking into the building would have made it that much harder to leave.

The Latin American Food Festival, hosted by KU Latin American Solidarity and Lawrence Fair Food, a local student group that is fighting for the rights of low-income farmworkers in Immokalee, Fla. was held in the ECM building Thursday, and featured Latin American foods from several local restaurants, live music by Kim Barely Legal and a clown on a unicycle named Circo Express.

People filled rows of tables in

support of Lawrence Fair Food. All proceeds of from the festival went to the group. The money raised will be used to send members of the organization to participate in a freedom march in April with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), an organization of farmworkers in the city of Immokalee, Fla. These workers, who are mostly Hispanic, Haitian or Mayan Indian, work in close-to-poverty conditions. Lawrence Fair Food, which is part of the Student/Farmworker Alliance, is working with the CIW to promote awareness and justice for the farmworkers in Florida.

Aaron Stables, president of KU Latin American Solidarity and member of Lawrence Fair Food, helped organize the festival.

"Our aim is not to be incredibly antagonistic," said Stables, a junior

from Derby. "We just want to let our presence be known as members of the community."

Gerardo Reyes, a member of the CIW, spoke at Thursday's event, encouraging the audience to join the work of the CIW. Reyes has been a farmworker since he was a child, and is now a major activist for the group.

Reyes will also speak at a rally this afternoon. Following the rally, attendees will march in the form of a moving tomato vine to Dillons, 1015 W. 23rd St.

The march is part of a nationwide campaign by the Student/Farmworker Alliance (SFA) against the Kroger company. The SFA is working with the CIW to petition Kroger to sign an agreement, which asks the company to fulfill a list of requests that ensure better working

conditions and wages for the farmworkers who pick its crops.

"The march will create the pressure that we need in order to demand that Dillons takes action," Reyes said. "Kroger needs to know that people here are not happy with their disregard for the conditions farmworkers face in Florida, and they continue to benefit from the poverty of thousands of farmworkers that make it possible for tomatoes to end up in their supply chain."

When contacted, Kroger representatives were unavailable for comment.

The rally will begin this afternoon at 3 p.m. in the Gridiron Room of the Burge Union.

— Edited by Kirsten Hudson



Spencer Walsh/KANSAN

Andrea Siteh, a sophomore from Atchison, enjoys the food at the festival. More than 100 people attended the charity event.

Watch a KUJH-TV video of the Latin American Food Festival at kansan.com/videos