

Union officials call off boycott of Fred Meyer after reaching deal

By RYAN HAAS
Oregon Public Broadcasting



Grocery workers have reached a tentative deal with Fred Meyer stores.

Union officials said they have reached a tentative deal with grocers that will benefit employees and end a week-long boycott of Fred Meyer stores.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 called for the boycott of Fred Meyer locations amid tense contract negotiations that began more than a year ago.

Union communications director Kelley McAllister did not release details of the contract, saying in a statement that those particulars would be “embargoed until our members have reviewed and voted on whether to ratify the tentative agreement.”

Representatives for grocery employers and the union worked through the night Friday and reached the deal around 9 a.m. on Saturday, according to McAllister. This week’s negotiations were the 13th time the sides had met since June 2018 and the first time a federal mediator had been involved.

McAllister said having a mediator involved helped change the tenor of the negotiations and likely led to the deal.

“The unity team is very pleased with how everything went. They got all of their concerns addressed,” she said.

The news no doubt came as a relief to shoppers in Oregon who had been abiding by the union’s request to boycott Fred Meyer.

“We are now asking all of our supporters to cease the boycott and resume their normal shopping habits,” McAllister said in a statement.

Speaking to Oregon Public Broadcasting on Saturday, McAllister said she found the customer support for the boycott overwhelming.

“We had customers request flyers that we sent out. We had people putting together their own lawn signs,” she said. “I think that had a huge impact to help employers recognize that workers are members of the community.”

While details of the contract remain unclear, the dispute centered in part on wages. The union also said it had discovered a gender pay gap at Portland-area Fred

Meyer stores that should be addressed.

In a statement, Jeffery Temple, Fred Meyer’s director of corporate affairs, said the business was glad to have a tentative agreement that “secures increased wages, continued premium health care coverage and pension stability.”

“We thank our hardworking associates for continuing to serve our customers and communities every day,” Temple wrote. “Our top priority is to do what is best — provide our customers with the freshest products and the friendliest associates.”

Union leaders plan to meet with their members to decide on when to ratify the tentative agreement.

“It’s really wonderful to know that even after the tensions rising, that we were able to get a contract that is workable for both sides,” McAllister said. “We are looking forward to the ratification meetings.”

Columbia River lock reopens to barge traffic

By ANNA KING and SCOTT LEADINGHAM
Northwest News Network



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

A boat lock on the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River connects Oregon and Washington state at Cascade Locks.

A critical navigation lock on the lower Columbia River reopened Friday night, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Army Corps previously said the river would reopen Monday, but crews were able to finish work a few days early.

That means barges full of grain and other materials waiting to get from the inland Northwest ports to Vancouver, Washington, and Portland and out to export markets can resume.

Boat traffic on the international trade route has been stopped since Sept. 5 to repair a lock at Bonneville Dam.

Crews with the Army Corps’ Portland division have been working around-the-clock the past three weeks to open the channel.

Eight million tons of cargo moves inland on the Columbia and Snake rivers each year, and 53% of U.S. wheat exports were transported on the Columbia River in 2017, the Associated Press reported.

About \$2 billion in commercial cargo travels the entire system annually, according to the Army Corps, and it’s the No. 1 export gate in the U.S. for wheat and barley and the No. 2 export gate for corn.”

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