

Trader Joe's Labor Union Bags a Victory in Trademark Dispute

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by Kaleb McNeely

Trader Joe's is a hugely popular grocery chain that has expanded from its Southern California origins to operate close to 600 stores across the United States. Although Trader Joe's has traditionally had a reputation as an ethical company, accusations of union-busting have tarnished the grocer's image as a good employer. Moreover, the company's latest tack in its labor disputes – suing its employees' union for trademark infringement – isn't going so well. Earlier this year, Judge Herman D. Vera of the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California tossed the case, finding there was no likelihood of confusion posed by the Trader Joe's union's products. In its decision, the Court made clear that it viewed Trader Joe's lawsuit as a bad-faith effort to pressure the union, and warned that it was dangerously close to sanctionable conduct.

Trader Joe's United (the "Union") is a labor union that represents certain Trader Joe's employees at multiple stores across the country. Trader Joe's has resisted efforts on the part of its employees to unionize, and the National Labor Relations Board has filed multiple complaints against Trader Joe's relating to union elections. In July 2023, the NLRB even filed a consolidated complaint against Trader Joe's, asserting claims for various unfair labor practices. In what is unlikely a coincidence, six days after the NLRB complaint was filed, Trader Joe's commenced a trademark infringement action against the Union.

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