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Cornell cuts licensing ties with Russell Athletic

ITHACA, N.Y.

Cornell University has joined a growing list of schools severing business relationships with Russell Athletic over questions about the clothing company's labor practices at a recently closed plant in Honduras.

The university said Friday it would end its licensing agreement with Russell on March 31. The company produces T-shirts, shorts and fleece apparel with Cornell logos that are sold in stores throughout the U.S. and overseas.

International labor groups have accused Russell, a subsidiary of Bowling Green, Ky.-based Fruit of the Loom, of closing its plant in Honduras after 750 of the factory's 1,800 workers organized a union. The union workers had been the targets of intimidation and threats during the months leading up to the closing of the factory, according to the labor groups.

Russell denies the anti-union allegations and said it has created of a Corporate Social Responsibility Improvement Process to review its stance on worker rights and community involvement.

"Cornell is committed to respecting the rights of workers around the world and we expect the companies that are licensed to produce Cornell apparel to share that commitment," said Mike Powers, director of operations for Cornell University Communications, which oversees Cornell's licensing program.

"Russell's actions in this case are a clear violation of the codes of conduct that Cornell licensees agree to follow when they become licensed," he said.

Gary Swisher, deputy director of Cornell's campus store, said Russell products account for approximately 15 percent of the store's annual apparel sales. Swisher said that he will stop ordering from Russell immediately.

Cornell spokesman Simeon Moss said campus store sales of Russell apparel total around \$500,000 annually. The university also earns revenue from royalties on Russell merchandise that's sold elsewhere, but that amounts to less than \$1,000 annually, he said.

Other schools ending their contracts with Russell include Georgetown, Wisconsin, Miami, Rutgers, Houston, Columbia and Purdue.