

Will Amazon's Acquisition Impact Labor Relations At Whole Foods?

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The grocery industry has a relatively high unionization rate – especially in this day and age where private sector union membership in general is below 7%. While Whole Foods has been a target of the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) union for years, the company nevertheless has been able to remain one of the only big supermarket players without a union presence. According to its CEO, it's been able to do so because [Whole Foods is "beyond unions"](#) in light of the fact it consistently is ranked as a top place to work (*i.e.*, employees have no need for a 3rd party like a union to come in and advocate on their behalf). The fact the company also [generally pays above-market wages](#) also likely helps. Will the blockbuster acquisition of Whole Foods by Amazon change the grocery giant's union-free status? We'll see. Spencer Soper and Alex Sherman of *Bloomberg* just [published an article](#) detailing how Amazon may seek to introduce some of its automated technology within Whole Foods – potentially resulting in job reductions. "Job security" and similar issues causing fear and/or uncertainty within a workforce often create the type of environment prone for union organizing. In fact, the UFCW seemingly already is honing in on the issue, as UFCW President Marc Perrone recently [issued a statement](#) condemning Amazon's acquisition of Whole Foods. Even if the UFCW is able to make some inroads on the organizing front at Whole Foods in the wake of the deal, successful union campaigns at Amazon and/or Whole Foods in the immediate future seem unlikely. Indeed, both organizations have an almost spotless record when it comes to [union organizing attempts](#). In my experience, employers keep unions out when they can prove to employees they deserve the workers' trust and respect. Thus, to the extent there are some culture changes at Whole Foods post-Amazon acquisition (and there will be given the size of the merger), there is little evidence at this juncture such changes would result in a tidal wave of unrest leading to the first UFCW win at either of the companies. The times-are-a-changin' rapidly with the advent of the gig and ecommerce economies, though, and we will see how events unfold at the new Amazon/Whole Foods.

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