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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

FOR THE COUNTY OF IMPERIAL

STEPHANY SALAZAR, on behalf of others similarly situated and the State of California under the Private Attorneys General Act,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

SYNGENTA CROP PROTECTION, LLC; SYNGENTA SEEDS, LLC; and DOES 1 through 50, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No. ECU004703

Hon. L. Brooks Anderholt
Dept. 9

CLASS ACTION

FIRST AMENDED CLASS AND REPRESENTATIVE ACTION COMPLAINT

1. Failure to Pay All Wages Owed
2. Failure to Pay All Overtime Wages
3. Meal Period Violations
4. Rest Period Violations
5. Untimely Payment of Wages
6. Wage Statement Violations
7. Waiting Time Penalties
8. Failure to Reimburse Business Expenses
9. Unfair Competition
10. Civil Penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act (Labor Code §§ 2698 *et seq.*)

Action Filed: April 28, 2026

Plaintiff STEPHANY SALAZAR, on behalf of all others similarly situated and the State of California under the Private Attorneys General Act ("Plaintiff") brings this FIRST AMENDED CLASS AND REPRESENTATIVE ACTION COMPLAINT against Defendants SYNGENTA CROP PROTECTION, LLC; SYNGENTA SEEDS, LLC; and DOES 1 through 50, inclusive (collectively "Defendants"), alleging as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. This is a class action for wage and hour violations brought under the California Code of Civil Procedure section 382 for Defendants' violations of the California Labor Code and Business Professions Code.

2. Defendants misclassified Plaintiff and class members as exempt. As such, Defendants failed to lawfully compensate Plaintiff and class members for all hours worked, and at the regular rate of pay for overtime and meal and rest premiums, as required by California law.

3. Defendants filed to compensate Plaintiff and the class members for all hours suffered or permitted to work in violation of the applicable IWC Wage Order.

4. Defendants' underpayment of wages was facilitated by their company-wide practices of auto-deducting meal periods and failing to pay reporting time wages.

5. Defendants' employment policies, practices, and payroll administration systems enabled and facilitated these violations on a company-wide basis with respect to the class members.

6. As a result, Defendants are liable to Plaintiff and the class members for the underlying wages, interest, and penalties including waiting time, late payment of wages, and wage statement penalties in the amounts according to proof.

JURISDICTION & VENUE

7. Jurisdiction of this action is proper in this Court under Article VI, Section 10 of the California Constitution as the causes of action are premised upon violations of California law.

8. The monetary damages and restitution sought exceed the minimal jurisdiction limits of the Superior Court.

9. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because, upon information and belief, Defendants have sufficient minimum contacts in California, or otherwise intentionally avail

themselves to the California economy so as to render the exercise of jurisdiction over them by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

10. Venue is proper in this Court under Code of Civil Procedure sections 393(a), 395, and/or 395.5 because, upon information and belief, Defendants conducted business and committed some of the alleged violations in this County.

PARTIES

A. Plaintiff Stephany Salazar

11. Plaintiff Salazar is an individual over 18 years of age who worked for Defendants in California as a non-exempt employee from about September 2024 to December 2025. Plaintiff was hired as a Customer Service Representative and also performed work as a Sales Coordinator.

12. The State of California, via the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA"), is the real party in interest in this action. (*Kim v. Reins Int'l California, Inc.* (2020) 9 Cal. 5th 73, 81 [The "government entity on whose behalf the plaintiff files suit is always the real party in interest."]). To the extent permitted by law, including pursuant *Balderas v. Fresh Start Harvesting, Inc.* (2024) 101 Cal. App. 5th 533 and *Rodriguez v. Packers Sanitation Services Ltd., LLC* (2025) 109 Cal.App.5th 69, the PAGA claim is brought exclusively as a representative action and does not include arbitrable claims.

B. Defendants

13. Defendant Syngenta Crop Protection, LLC is a Delaware corporation that maintains operations and conducts business throughout the State of California, including in this county.

14. Defendant Syngenta Seeds, LLC is a Delaware limited liability company that maintains operations and conducts business throughout the State of California, including in this county.

15. The true names and capacities, whether individual, corporate, or otherwise, of the parties sued as DOES 1 through 50, are presently unknown, unascertainable, or uncertain, and are sued by such fictitious names under Code of Civil Procedure section 474. Upon information and belief, each of DOES 1 through 50 constitutes a legal employer or is otherwise legally responsible in some manner for the acts and omissions alleged herein. This Complaint may be amended to reflect their true names and capacities once ascertained.

16. Upon information and belief, Defendants in this action are employers, co-employers, joint employers, and/or part of an integrated employer enterprise, as each of the Defendants exercised control over the wages, hours, and working conditions of the employees, suffered and permitted them to work, and otherwise engaged them as employees under California law.

17. Upon information and belief, at least some of the Defendants have common ownership, common management, interrelationship of operations, and centralized control over labor relations and are therefore part of an integrated enterprise and thus jointly and severally responsible for the acts and omissions alleged herein, including pursuant to Labor Code sections 558, 558.1, and 1197.1.

18. Upon information and belief, Defendants acted in all respects pertinent to this action as an alter-ego, agent, servant, joint employer, joint venturer, co-conspirator, partner, in an integrated enterprise, or in some other capacity on behalf of all other co-defendants, such that the acts and omissions of each defendant may be legally attributable to all others.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

19. This action is brought individually and on behalf of the following class pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 382:

a. All current and former non-exempt employees who worked for Defendants in California at any time from four years prior to the filing of this action through date of class certification.

20. Plaintiff reserves the right to establish various subclass definitions as appropriate at the class certification stage, according to proof.

21. The class is ascertainable and shares a well-defined community of interest in this litigation:

a. Numerosity: The class is estimated to exceed 50 individuals, although the precise membership of the entire class is unknown at this time. The class is so numerous that joinder of all class members is impracticable. The identities of class members are ascertainable by inspection of Defendants' employment and payroll records.

b. Typicality: Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the other class members. They were subject to the same policies and practices of Defendants, which resulted in losses to the class. Proof of common unlawful business practices, which Plaintiff experienced, will establish the right of the class to recover on the causes of action alleged herein.

c. Adequacy: Plaintiff is an adequate class representative; will take all necessary steps to protect the class members' interests adequately and fairly; has no interest antagonistic to other class members; and is represented by attorneys who have substantial experience prosecuting, defending, resolving, and litigating wage and hour class, collective, and representative actions in California state and federal courts.

d. Superiority: A class action is superior to other means for adjudicating this dispute. Individual joinder is impractical. Class treatment will allow for common issues to be resolved in a single forum, simultaneously, and without duplication of effort and expense.

e. Public Policy Considerations: Certification of this lawsuit as a class action advances the State of California's strong public interest in ensuring its approximately millions of employed residents are properly paid the wages they earned for the hours they worked. Class actions provide a mechanism for enforcement of labor laws and allow for vindication of employee rights by unnamed class members.

22. Common questions of law and fact as to the class members predominate over questions affecting only individual members. The common questions of law and fact exist as to whether the employment policies and practices formulated by Defendants and applied to the class members constitute violations of California law.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

23. Defendants misclassified Plaintiff as exempt for approximately the first three months of her employment. Plaintiff and class members did not meet the requirements of the California Wage Order 4 and Labor Code section 525(a).

24. First, Plaintiff did not regularly exercise discretion and independent judgment in performing her duties during the majority of her working time. Plaintiff was responsible for answering customer service calls, but she relied upon policies and practices set by Defendants to resolve issues. Therefore, Plaintiff did not regularly exercise discretion or independent judgment.

25. Furthermore, Plaintiff did participate in any managerial or supervisory duties and therefore, does which further demonstrates that Plaintiff lacked essential managerial and supervisory responsibilities that are essential roles of employees who would meet the administrative or executive exemption.

26. Finally, Plaintiff's annual salary while classified as exempt was $60,000. At the time, the minimum salary for qualified exempt employees would have been $66,560 further demonstrating Plaintiff's misclassification. As a result, Plaintiff and the class members were non-exempt workers whom Defendants misclassified as exempt.

27. To the extent that Plaintiff worked more than 8 hours in one day or 40 hours in one week, Plaintiff should have been paid overtime wages. Additionally, to the extent that Plaintiff worked through those weeks without meal or rest periods, Plaintiff was entitled to meal and rest period premiums. Although Defendants eventually correctly reclassified Plaintiff as non-exempt, they failed to compensate Plaintiff for all overtime wages, meal period and rest premiums owed as a result of Defendants' misclassification.

28. Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the class members at the lawful minimum wage rate for all hours worked, resulting in unpaid minimum wages.

29. Defendants engaged in an unlawful timekeeping practice. Specifically, Defendants did failed to track Plaintiff's, or the class members'. Instead, Defendants only paid Plaintiff and the class members based on their scheduled hours regardless of any work completed outside of those hours. For example, Plaintiff was typically scheduled to work 7:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday

despite Plaintiff's job duties requiring more than eight (8) hours of work on a given day. These duties include, but are not limited to, communications with global clients at odd hours before starting, sales meetings early in the morning before Plaintiff's scheduled work time, and follow-up calls with Defendant's customers over the weekend. As a result, Plaintiff sometimes took calls from overseas clients either extremely late in the night or early in the morning, which Plaintiff was not paid for.

30. Likewise, Plaintiff's responsibilities often required more than eight (8) hours of work in a day or forty (40) hours in a week. However, Defendants failed to provide any means of tracking this additional time worked to Plaintiff or the class members. Plaintiff is informed and believes other employees suffered similar violations.

31. Defendants maintained an unlawful practice of auto-deducting meal periods resulting in unpaid hours worked. Defendants regularly subtracted one hour of work from Plaintiff and the class members' time to account for compliant meal periods. However, Plaintiff and the class members sometimes either worked through their meal period or were interrupted. These auto deductions create a rebuttable presumption that Defendants failed to accurately pay their employees pursuant to California wage laws, whereby Defendants subtracted one hour of work from each shift worked by Plaintiff and the class members, resulting in unpaid hours. As a result of this unlawful time-keeping practice, Defendants failed to account for the total number of hours Plaintiff and the class members worked on these days in the payroll system resulting in unpaid hours worked.

32. Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the class members overtime wages and the lawful rate of pay for overtime hours worked, resulting in unpaid overtime wages. As a result of Defendants' unlawful time-keeping practices, Defendants failed to account for Plaintiff and the class members overtime hours. For example, Plaintiff and the class members' maintained client relations with clients located globally and sometimes required attention at times outside of their set schedules. Defendants maintained a practice of only accounting for hours worked within the set scheduled. As a result, when the class members took calls after working eight (8) hours in one day or forty (40) hours in one week, Defendants failed to account for the overtime hours worked.

33. Additionally, Defendant required Plaintiff to perform additional job functions beyond the scope of the job Plaintiff was hired to do. This often resulted in extreme stress for Plaintiff and

required Plaintiff to work additional hours. For example, Defendants hired Plaintiff to perform customer service job functions, but later also assigned Plaintiff sales responsibilities in addition to her baseline job duties. This included creating quotes for hybrid seeds, communicating quotes to customers for approval, creating sales orders, and coordinating with the warehouse to get production started on those sales orders. Occasionally, these responsibilities amounted to more work than possible to complete within eight (8) hours in one day or forty (40) hours in one week. When Plaintiff worked outside of those hours to complete her responsibilities, Defendants failed to account for the additional hours. Plaintiff is informed and believes other employees suffered similar violations, whereby Defendants required class members to perform work overtime "off-the-clock." As a result, Defendants sometimes failed to pay all overtime wages earned.

34. Furthermore, to the extent that Plaintiff worked more than 8 hours in one day or 40 hours in one week during the months she was misclassified, Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff for these overtime hours. This error resulted in underpaid overtime wages.

35. Plaintiff and the class members sometimes experienced missed, late, short, and interrupted meal periods to keep up with the demands of the job. Defendants assigned such heavy workloads, including covering coworkers' tasks, to Plaintiff and the class members that they sometimes had to work through their days continuously to complete their work. Because Defendants maintained an unlawful time-keeping policy of not tracking Plaintiff and the class members' clock ins and outs, Defendants failed to track whether or not Plaintiff and the class members took meal periods.

36. Furthermore, Defendants engaged in an unlawful auto-deducting practice. Specifically, Defendants automatically deducted one hour from Plaintiff and the class members' time to account for meal periods regardless of whether a compliant meal period was taken resulting in non-compliant meal periods. As a result, Defendants failed to pay meal period premiums when Plaintiff and the class members experienced non-compliant meal periods.

37. Additionally, to the extent that Plaintiff worked through workdays without meal periods in the months that she was misclassified, she was owed meal period premiums. However, Defendants failed to provide any meal period premiums for those days resulting in unpaid premium wages.

38. Plaintiff and the class members sometimes experienced non-compliant rest periods to keep up with the demands of the job. Defendants assigned such heavy workloads to Plaintiff and the class members that they often had to work continuously through the day to complete all tasks resulting in missed rest periods. When Plaintiff and the class members experienced non-compliant rest periods, Defendants failed to pay rest period premiums in violation of the Labor Code.

39. Additionally, to the extent that Plaintiff worked through workdays without rest periods in the months that she was misclassified, she was owed rest period premiums. However, Defendants failed to provide any premiums for those days resulting in unpaid premium wages.

40. Defendants failed to pay all wages and premiums owed to class members during their employment as set forth in this notice, and also failed to timely pay those amounts to departing employees upon separation of employment. Defendants did not pay waiting time penalties for the late payments.

41. Defendants failed to provide accurate itemized wage statements to the class members each pay period as a result of the policies and practices set forth in this complaint.

42. Plaintiff and other class members cannot promptly and easily determine from the wage statement alone the wages paid or earned without reference to other documents or information. Indeed, these wage statement violations are significant because they sow confusion among Plaintiff and other class members with respect to what amounts were owed and paid, at what rates, the number of hours worked, and how those amounts were or should be calculated. The wage statements reflect a false statement of earnings and concealed the underlying problems and underpayments of employee wages.

43. Defendants required Plaintiff and the class members to incur costs for work-related purposes without full reimbursement. In direct consequence of their job duties, Plaintiff and the class members unavoidably and necessarily incurred these losses, expenditures, costs, and as a matter of policy and practice. As one example, Plaintiff was required to sometimes complete work from home during the weekend or outside office hours during the week. Although Defendants provided laptops and work phones, Defendants failed to provide reimbursement for internet expenses incurred as a result of Plaintiff and the class members' at-home work. Instead, Defendants expected Plaintiff and the class members to incur these costs on their own without reimbursement.

44. Because of the uniform policies and practices set forth in this complaint, including the failure to accurately account for wages earned or hours worked, Defendants failed to accurately maintain records in accordance applicable Labor Code and wage orders.

<u>FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

FAILURE TO PAY ALL WAGES OWED

Violation of Labor Code §§ 200, 218, 1194, 1194.2 and 1197

(All Claims Alleged by Plaintiff and Class Members Against All Defendants)

45. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

46. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 200, 218, 1182.12, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1 and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Hours and Days of Work" and "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable orders), which require non-exempt employees be timely paid at least the state or local minimum wage (if higher) for each hour of work, and further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to pay all minimum wages (plus liquidated damages). In addition to minimum wages, Labor Code § 200 states that "'wages' includes all amounts for labor performed by employees of every description, whether the amount is fixed or ascertained by the standard of time, task, piece, commission basis, or other method of calculation."

47. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to pay Plaintiff and class members at least the lawful minimum wage for each hour worked in violation of Labor Code sections 1182.12, 1194, 1194.2, 1197, 1197.1 and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Hours and Days of Work" and "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable orders), including payment at the lawful local and county minimum wage ordinances in effect. As a result, Defendants are liable for all associated damages, including liquidated damages for the minimum wage violations pursuant to Labor Code § 1194.2.

48. Defendants' unlawful acts and omissions deprived Plaintiff and class members of minimum, regular and overtime wages in amounts to be determined at trial. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to recover the full amount of the unpaid wages, plus liquidated damages in an amount equal to the wages unlawfully unpaid (and interest thereon), in addition to interest, attorneys'

fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code sections 1194 and 1194.2, 218.6 and any other applicable statutes.

<u>SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

FAILURE TO PAY ALL OVERTIME WAGES

Violation of Labor Code §§ 510 and 1194

49. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

50. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 204, 510, 558, 1194, and 1198, which require non-exempt employees be timely paid overtime wages all overtime hours worked, and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to pay all overtime compensation for overtime hours worked.

51. Defendants failed in their affirmative obligation to pay Plaintiff and class members no less than one and one-half times their respective "regular rate of pay" for all hours worked in excess of eight hours in one day, 40 hours in one week, or the first eight hours worked on the seventh day of work in any one workweek, and no less than twice their respective "regular rate of pay" for all hours over 12 hours in one day and any work in excess of eight hours on any seventh day of a workweek for such hours worked, in violation of Labor Code sections 204, 510, 558, 1194, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Hours and Days of Work" sections of the applicable orders).

52. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to recover the full amount of the unpaid overtime, in addition to interest, statutory and civil penalties, and attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

<u>THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION</u>

MEAL PERIOD VIOLATIONS

Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 512

53. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

54. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 226.7, 558 and 512, which require non-exempt employees be provided complaint meal periods (or meal period premiums in lieu thereof), and which further provide a private right of action for an

employer's failure to lawfully provide all meal periods and/or pay meal period premiums at the lawful regular rate of compensation.

55. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently provide Plaintiff and class members compliant, duty-free meal periods of not less than 30 minutes beginning before the fifth hour of hour for each work period of more than five hours per day and a second duty-free meal period of not less than 30 minutes beginning before the tenth hour of hour of work in violation of Labor Code sections 226.7, 512, 558, 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Meal Periods" sections of the applicable orders).

56. Further, Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently pay Plaintiff and class members one additional hour of pay at the respective regular rate of compensation for each workday that a fully compliant meal period was not provided, in violation of Labor Code sections 226.7, 512, 558, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the "Meal Periods" sections of the applicable orders).

57. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to recover the full amount of the meal period premiums owed, in addition to interest, statutory and civil penalties, and attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION

REST PERIOD VIOLATIONS

Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 516

58. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

59. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 516, which require non-exempt employees be authorized to take complaint rest periods (or rest period premiums in lieu thereof), and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to lawfully provide all rest periods and/or pay rest period premiums at the lawful regular rate of compensation.

60. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently authorize and permit Plaintiff and class members to receive compliant, duty-free rest periods of not less than ten (10) minutes for every four hours worked (or major fraction thereof) in violation of Labor Code

sections 226.7, 516, 558, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders (the “Rest Periods” sections of the applicable orders).

61. Further, Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to consistently pay Plaintiff and class members one additional hour of pay at the respective regular rate of compensation for each workday that a fully compliant rest period was not provided, in violation of Labor Code sections 226.7, 516, 558, and 1198 and the IWC Wage Orders.

FIFTH CAUSE OF ACTION

UNTIMELY PAYMENT OF WAGES

Violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 210, 218

62. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

63. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the IWC Wage Orders and Labor Code §§ 204, 204b, and 210 which require non-exempt employees be timely paid all wages owed each pay period, and which further provide a private right of action for an employer’s failure to comply with this obligation. Labor Code § 218 authorizes individuals to sue directly for wages and penalties due under these sections, including Labor Code § 210(c)’s statutory late payment penalties.

64. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to timely pay all wages, including paid sick leave and meal and rest premiums, earned by Plaintiff and class members twice during each calendar month on days designated in advance by the employer as regular paydays (for employees paid on a non-weekly basis) and on the regularly-scheduled weekly payday for weekly employees, if any, in violation of Labor Code sections 204 and 204b and the IWC Wage Orders (the “Minimum Wages” sections of the applicable orders).

65. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to recover the full amount of the unpaid wages, in addition to a statutory penalty in the amount of $100 for the initial violation for each failure to pay each employee and $200 for all subsequent violations and for all willful or intentional violations for each failure to pay each employee, plus 25 percent of the amount unlawfully withheld under provided in Labor Code § 210, in addition to interest, attorneys’ fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

SIXTH CAUSE OF ACTION

WAGE STATEMENT VIOLATIONS

Violation of Labor Code § 226

66. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

67. This cause of action is brought by a wage statement subclass pursuant to Labor Code § 226(a) which requires non-exempt employees be provided accurate itemized wage statements each pay period, and which further provide a private right of action for an employer's failure to comply with this obligation.

68. Defendants knowingly and intentionally failed in their affirmative obligation to provide accurate itemized wage statements to Plaintiff and class members resulting in injury to Plaintiff and class members. Specifically, the wage statements issued to Plaintiff and class members did not accurately state each pay period all of the information required by Labor Code § 226(a)(1)-(9).

69. Defendants' unlawful acts and omissions deprived Plaintiff and class members of accurate itemized wage statements, causing confusion and concealing wage and premium underpayments.

70. As a result, Plaintiff and class members are entitled to recover the statutory penalty of $50 per employee for the initial pay period in which a violation occurred and $100 per employee for each violation in a subsequent pay period, up to an aggregate penalty of $4,000 per employee, in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code section 226(e).

SEVENTH CAUSE OF ACTION

WAITING TIME PENALTIES

Violation of Labor Code §§ 201 *et seq*.

71. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

72. This cause of action is brought by a waiting time subclass pursuant to Labor Code §§ 201 through 203, which require an employer to timely pay all wages earned upon termination of employment, and which further provide a private right of action to recover statutory waiting time

penalties each day an employer fails to comply with this obligation, up to a maximum of 30 days wages.

73. Defendants willfully failed and continue to fail in their affirmative obligation to pay all wages earned and unpaid to Plaintiff and class members immediately upon termination of employment or within 72 hours thereafter for employees who did not provide at least 72 hours prior notice of his or her intention to quit, and further failed to pay those sums for 30 days thereafter in violation of Labor Code sections 201 through 203 and the IWC Wage Orders.

74. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to recover a waiting time penalty for a period of up to 30 days, in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law.

EIGHTH CAUSE OF ACTION

FAILURE TO REIMBURSE BUSINESS EXPENSES

Violation of Labor Code § 2802

75. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

76. Defendants willfully failed in their affirmative obligation to reimburse Plaintiff and a reimbursement subclass for all necessary expenditures, losses, expenses, and costs incurred by them in direct discharge of the duties of their employment, in violation of Labor Code section 2802.

77. Defendants' unlawful acts and omissions deprived Plaintiff and class members of lawful reimbursements for business expenses in amounts to be determined at trial. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to recover the amount unreimbursed expenses of Plaintiff and class members in addition to interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code section 2802.

NINTH CAUSE OF ACTION

UNFAIR COMPETITION

Violation of Business and Professions Code §§ 17200 *et seq.*

78. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

79. Defendants have engaged and continue to engage in unfair and/or unlawful business practices in the State of California in violation of California Business and Professions Code § 17200 by committing the foregoing wage and hour violations alleged throughout this Complaint.

80. Defendants' dependence on these unfair and/or unlawful business practices deprived Plaintiff and continue to deprive other class members of compensation to which they are legally entitled, constitutes unfair and/or unlawful competition, and provides an unfair advantage to Defendants over competitors who have been and/or are currently employing workers in compliance with California's wage and hour laws. These failures constitute unlawful, deceptive, and unfair business acts and practices in violation of Business and Professions Code section 17200 *et seq.*

81. Plaintiff is a victim of Defendants' unfair and/or unlawful conduct alleged in this Complaint, and Plaintiff, as an individual and on behalf of others similarly situated, seeks full restitution of the moneys as necessary and according to proof to restore all monies withheld, acquired, and/or converted by Defendants pursuant to Business and Professions Code §§ 17203 and 17208.

82. Plaintiff does not have an adequate remedy at law for past or future violations, to the extent the statute of limitations on each of the alleged causes of action do not extend to the four year limitation provided under the UCL or to the extent the underlying Labor Code and IWC Wage Order violations do not provide a private right of action.

83. Plaintiff and class members are entitled to injunctive relief against Defendants, restitution, and other equitable relief to return all funds over which Plaintiff and class members have an ownership interest and to prevent future damage and the public interest under Business and Professions Code § 17200 *et seq.* Plaintiff and class members are further entitled to recover interest, attorneys' fees, and costs to the extent permitted by law, including under Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5.

TENTH CAUSE OF ACTION

CIVIL PENALTIES UNDER THE PRIVATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL ACT

Violation of Labor Code §§ 2698 *et seq.*

(By Plaintiff on Behalf of the State and the Aggrieved Employees Against All Defendants)

84. All outside paragraphs of this Complaint are incorporated into this section.

85. Plaintiff brings this cause of action as a proxy for the State of California on behalf of the following "aggrieved employees" pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA"), codified as Labor Code section 2698 *et seq.*:

a. All current and former non-exempt employees who worked for Defendants in California at any time from one year prior to the postmark date of the initial PAGA notice through date of trial.

86. Plaintiff reserves the right to amend, supplement, or add to this description of the aggrieved employees, according to proof.

87. The State of California, via the Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA"), is the real party in interest in this action with respect to this cause of action. (*Kim v. Reins Int'l California, Inc.* (2020) 9 Cal. 5th 73, 81 [The "government entity on whose behalf the plaintiff files suit is always the real party in interest."])

88. Labor Code section 2699(a) provides: "Notwithstanding any other provision of law,, any provision of this code that provides for a civil penalty to be assessed and collected by the Labor and Workforce Development Agency or any of its departments, divisions, commissions, boards, agencies, or employees, for a violation of this code, may, as an alternative, be recovered through a civil action brought by an aggrieved employee on behalf of the employee and other current or former employees against whom a violation of the same provision was committed pursuant to the procedures specified in Section 2699.3. "

89. Any allegations regarding violations of the IWC Wage Orders are enforceable as violations of Labor Code section 1198, which states: "[t]he employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the order is unlawful."

90. Labor Code section 2699.3 sets forth the procedure for commencing an action for civil penalties under the PAGA.

91. On **March 2, 2026**, Plaintiff paid the requisite PAGA filing fee and provided written notice (by online electronic filing with the LWDA and by certified mail to Defendants) of Defendants' alleged Labor Code violations, including the facts and theories to support the alleged violations.

92. A true and correct copy of Plaintiff's written PAGA notice, entitled "Notice of Labor Code Violations" is attached hereto as Exhibit 1 and incorporated by reference as though fully set forth herein (the "PAGA notice").

93. To date, neither Plaintiff nor Plaintiff's counsel has received a response to Plaintiff's written PAGA notice from the LWDA.

94. Within 33 calendar days of the postmark date of the notice sent by Plaintiff, neither Plaintiff nor Plaintiff's counsel has received written notice by certified mail from any defendant providing a description of any actions taken to cure the alleged violations.

95. Now that at least 65 days have passed from Plaintiff notifying Defendants of these violations, without notice of cure from Defendants or notice from the LWDA of its intent to investigate the alleged allegations and issue the appropriate citations to Defendants, Plaintiff exhausted all prerequisites and commenced this civil action under Labor Code section 2699 *et seq.*

96. As set forth in the PAGA notice attached as Exhibit 1 and incorporated into this Complaint, Defendants committed the following violations and are liable for all corresponding civil penalties:

a. ***Misclassification of Employment***. Violation of Labor Code § 515(a) and Wage Order 4.

b. ***Unpaid Hours Worked/Minimum Wage.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 1194, 1197, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

c. ***Unpaid Overtime***. Violation of Labor Code §§ 510, 1194, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

d. ***Unpaid Meal Period Premium Wages.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 512, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

e. ***Unpaid Rest Period Premium Wages.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 516, 1198; IWC Wage Orders.

f. ***Untimely Payment of Wages During Employment.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 204b, 210.

g. ***Untimely Payment of Wages Upon Separation of Employment.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 201, 202, 203, 256.

h. ***Non-Compliant Wage Statements.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 226, 226.3.

i. ***Unreimbursed Employee Expenses.*** Violation of Labor Code §§ 2802, 2804.

j. ***Failure to Maintain Accurate Records.*** Violation of Labor Code § 1174; IWC Wage Orders.

97. Plaintiff seeks to collect all recoverable civil penalties for the Labor Code violations alleged in this Complaint and the PAGA notice (including amendments thereto) against Defendants pursuant to Labor Code section 2699(a) and (f), in addition to attorneys' fees, costs, and interest to the extent permitted by law, including under Labor Code section 2699(k).

PRAYER

Plaintiff prays for judgment as follows:

a. For certification of this action as a class action;

b. For appointment of Plaintiff as the class representative;

c. For appointment of above-captioned counsel for Plaintiff as Class Counsel;

d. For division of class members into appropriate classes and/or subclasses according to proof;

e. For recovery of all statutory penalties and liquidated damages;

f. For disgorgement of all amounts wrongfully obtained to the extent permitted by law;

g. For restitution and injunctive relief;

h. For attorneys' fees and costs of suit, including expert fees, to the extent permitted by law, including (without limitation) under Labor Code §§ 218.5, 226, 1194, 2802 and Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5.

i. For recovery of damages in amount according to proof;

j. For all recoverable pre- and post-judgment interest;

k. For this action to be maintained as a representative action under the PAGA;

l. For Plaintiff and counsel of record to be provided with all enforcement capability as if the action were brought by the State of California or the California Division of Labor Enforcement;

m. For recovery of all civil penalties and other recoverable amounts under the PAGA;

n. For reasonable attorneys' fees and costs of suit, including expert fees, to the extent permitted by law, associated with the PAGA claims pursuant to Labor Code § 2699, and Code of Civil Procedure section 1021.5 and any other applicable sections; and

o. For such other relief the Court deems just and proper.

Dated: May 28, 2026

Ferraro Vega Employment Lawyers, Inc.

Nicolas P. Ahadzadeh
Attorney for Plaintiff Stephany Salazar

<u>EXHIBIT 1</u>

Notice of Labor Code Violations

FERRARO VEGA
SAN DIEGO EMPLOYMENT LAWYERS

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March 2, 2026

NOTICE OF LABOR CODE VIOLATIONS
CALIFORNIA LABOR CODE SECTIONS 2698 *et seq.*

VIA CERTIFIED U.S. MAIL
- Electronic Return Receipt -

Syngenta Crop Protection, LLC
410 Swing Road
Greensboro, NC 27409

- PAGA Notice & Filing Fee -
Submitted electronically to the Labor and Workforce Development Agency

Syngenta Seeds, LLC
2200 Cabot Drive Suite 400
Lisle, IL 60532

Dear LWDA Officer and Company Representatives:

This letter serves as written notice under Labor Code section 2699.3 on behalf of **STEPHANY SALAZAR** ("Plaintiff(s)") and all other "covered employees" of the following "Defendant(s)":

SYNGENTA CROP PRODUCTION, LLC; SYNGENTA SEEDS, LLC

Defendants shall mean and include the foregoing in addition to any other related employer entities, individuals under Labor Code sections 558 and 558.1, and all others who may be later added upon further investigation and discovery as liable employers.

This office serves as legal counsel for Plaintiff. If the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") does not investigate the facts, allegations, and violations set forth in this notice within the statutorily prescribed 65-day period under Labor Code section 2699.3, Plaintiff intends to commence a civil action against Defendants as a proxy and agent of the State of California under the Private Attorneys General Act ("PAGA"). "PAGA allows an 'aggrieved employee'—a person affected by at least one Labor Code violation committed by an employer—to pursue penalties for all the Labor Code violations committed by that employer." *Huff v. Securitas Security Services USA, Inc.* (2018) 23

Cal.App.5th 745, 751; *Kim v. Reins International California, Inc.* (2020) 9 Cal.5th 73, 79. Plaintiff maintains standing to pursue these claims against Defendants as an aggrieved employee.

Through this notice, Plaintiff requests that Defendants complete an internal investigation and audit of the wage and hour and employment practices at issue and make a good faith effort to correct any violations. Plaintiff attempts to identify the non-compliant policies and practices affecting the aggrieved employees so that the parties may resolve the underlying damages and penalties in judgment or settlement approved by the Superior Court of California under Labor Code section 2699(s). Defendants are notified that any attempt to resolve this case should be conducted in coordination with Plaintiff's counsel to protect the interests of Plaintiff, the aggrieved employees, and the State of California via the LWDA. Plaintiff advises Defendants this letter should be also considered a reasonable attempt at settlement of this matter, subject to an exchange of additional documents and information. *Graham v. Daimler Chrysler Corp.* (2004) 24 Cal.4th 553, 561.

- BACKGROUND -

Defendants employed Plaintiff during the PAGA Period in the position of CSR Sales Coordinator from about September 2024 to December 2025. During their employment Plaintiff and the other covered (i.e., aggrieved) employees were subject to the wage and hour and employment protections set forth in the California Labor Code and IWC Wage Orders.

Through this notice, Plaintiff informs the LWDA of the Labor Code violations set forth herein. The "aggrieved employees" include Plaintiff and the following individuals:

> All current and former non-exempt employees, including those misclassified as non-exempt, and exempt employees who worked for Defendants in the State of California during one-year period preceding the date of this notice through the current date and the date of trial in any pending action (the "covered employees" and the "PAGA Period"). As defined, these covered current and former employees are "aggrieved employees" under PAGA.

Plaintiff reserves the right to expand or narrow the definition of the "covered employees" in the forthcoming civil action. Furthermore, Plaintiff seeks all recoverable civil penalties for Defendants' violations and reserves the right to supplement this notice as further investigation is completed and further facts, witnesses, and violations are uncovered.

- PAGA CLAIMS -

<u>Misclassification of Employment</u>
Violation of Labor Code § 515(a) and Wage Order 4

Defendants violated Labor Code § 515(a) and Wage Order 4 with respect to the covered employees.

Labor Code § 515(a) states that the Industrial Welfare Commission may establish exemptions from the requirement that an overtime rate of compensation be paid pursuant to Sections 510 and 511 for executive, administrative, and professional employees, if the employee is primarily engaged in the duties that meet the test of the exemption, customarily and regularly exercises discretion and independent judgment in performing those duties, and earns a monthly salary equivalent to no less than two times the state minimum wage for full-time employment.

In California, Wage Order 4, Section 1(A) states, "Provisions of Sections 3 through 12 shall not apply to persons employes in administrative, executive, or professional capacities." The Executive exception requires the employee's duties involve management of the enterprise they're involved in among other duties. To qualify for the Administrative Exemption under Wage Order 4, Section 1(A)(2), an employee must meet several specific criteria. First, their primary duties must involve either office or non-manual work directly related to management policies or general business operations of the employer or its customers, or work in the administration of a school or educational institution that is directly related to academic instruction or training. In addition, the employee must "customarily and regularly exercise discretion and independent judgment" in their role. The employee must also either regularly and directly assist a proprietor or someone in an executive or administrative role, perform specialized or technical work under only general supervision that requires special training or knowledge, or handle special assignments and tasks under general supervision.

Furthermore, the employee must be "primarily engaged" in exempt duties, meaning more than 50% of their workweek must be spent on such tasks. This includes not only core exempt duties but also work that is "directly and closely related" to those functions or is a necessary means of carrying them out. To determine if this standard is met, both the actual work performed and the employer's realistic expectations for the role must be considered. Finally, the employee must earn a monthly salary that is at least twice the state minimum wage for full-time work, defined as 40 hours per week.

Defendants misclassified Plaintiff as exempt for the first three months of her employment. Plaintiff worked as a CSR Sales Coordinator and did not meet the test of any exemption. First, Plaintiff did not regularly exercise discretion and independent judgment in performing her duties during the majority of her working time. Plaintiff was responsible for answering customer service calls, but she relied upon policies and practices set by Defendants to resolve issues. Therefore, Plaintiff did not regularly exercise discretion or independent judgment. Furthermore, Plaintiff did participate in any managerial or supervisory duties and therefore, does which further demonstrates that Plaintiff lacked essential managerial and supervisory responsibilities that are essential roles of employees who would meet the administrative or executive exemption. Finally, Plaintiff's annual salary while classified as exempt was $60,000. At the time, the minimum salary for qualified exempt employees would have been $66,560 further demonstrating Plaintiff's misclassification. As a result, Plaintiff and the covered employees were non-exempt workers whom Defendants misclassified as exempt.

To the extent that Plaintiff worked more than 8 hours in one day or 40 hours in one week, Plaintiff should have been paid overtime wages. Additionally, to the extent that Plaintiff worked through those weeks without meal or rest periods, Plaintiff was entitled to meal and rest period premiums. Although Defendants eventually corrected this mistake by reclassifying Plaintiff as non-exempt, they failed to compensate Plaintiff for all overtime wages, meal period and rest premiums owed as a result of Defendants' misclassification.

As a result, Claimant may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, as provided under Labor Code § 515(a) and Wage Order 4 along with all other civil penalties permitted by law.

<u>Unpaid Hours Worked/Minimum Wage</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 1194, 1197, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 1194, 1197, and 1198, along with the California Minimum Wage Order, the applicable local minimum wage ordinances, and the "Hours and Days of Work" and "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable IWC Wage Orders with respect to the covered employees.

<u>Labor Code section 1194</u> renders it unlawful for an employee to receive less than the legal minimum wage for hours worked in California. <u>Labor Code section 1197</u> further mandates that "[t]he minimum wage for employees fixed by the commission is the minimum wage to be paid to employees, and the payment of a lower wage than the minimum so fixed is unlawful." <u>Labor Code section 1198</u> renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The <u>California Minimum Wage Order</u> and the applicable sections of the <u>IWC Wage Orders</u> further require payment of minimum wages for all hours worked. The "Minimum Wages" sections of the applicable IWC Wage Order provide that "[e]very employer shall pay to each employee, on the established payday for the period involved, not less than the applicable minimum wage for all hours worked in the payroll period, whether the remuneration is measured by time, piece, commission, or otherwise." The foregoing California wage laws require payment of "not less than the applicable minimum wage *for all hours worked* in the payroll period" and California law does not allow averaging of pay over

the hours worked in the pay period, even if the total pay results in an average above the minimum wage. *Armenta v. Osmose, Inc.* (2005) 135 Cal.App.3d 314, 324.

Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the covered employees at the lawful minimum wage rate for all hours worked, resulting in unpaid minimum wages. Defendants engaged in an unlawful timekeeping practice. Specifically, Defendants did not allow Plaintiff or the covered employees to clock in our out. Instead, Defendants only paid Plaintiff and the covered employees based on their scheduled hours regardless of any work completed outside of those hours. For example, Plaintiff was typically scheduled to work 7:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday. However, the nature of Plaintiff's work involved communications with global clients. As a result, Plaintiff sometimes took calls from overseas clients as late as 8:00 pm. Likewise, Plaintiff's responsibilities often required more than 8 hours of work in a day or 40 hours in a week. However, Defendants failed to provide any means of tracking this additional time worked to Plaintiff or the covered employees. Plaintiff is informed and believes other employees suffered similar violations.

Additionally, Defendants maintained an unlawful practice of auto-deducting meal periods resulting in unpaid hours worked. Defendants regularly subtracted one hour of work from Plaintiff and the covered employees' time to account for compliant meal periods. However, Plaintiff and the covered employees sometimes did not take meal periods, as described in detail above. Regardless of the accuracy, Defendants subtracted one hour of work from each shift Plaintiff and the covered employees worked resulting in unpaid hours. As a result of this unlawful time-keeping practice, Defendants failed to account for the total number of hours Plaintiff and the covered employees worked on these days in the payroll system resulting in unpaid hours worked.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Unpaid Overtime
Violation of Labor Code §§ 510, 1194, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 510, 1194, and 1198, along with the "Hours and Days of Work" sections of the applicable IWC Wage Orders with respect to the covered employees.

Labor Code section 510 requires "[a]ny work in excess of eight hours in one workday and any work in excess of 40 hours in any one workweek and the first eight hours worked on the seventh day of work in any one workweek shall be compensated at the rate of no less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for an employee;" and "any work in excess of 12 hours in one day shall be compensated at the rate of no less than twice the regular rate of pay for an employee;" and "any work in excess of eight hours on any seventh day of a workweek shall be compensated at the rate of no less than twice the regular rate of pay of an employee." Labor Code section 1194 renders it unlawful for an employee to receive less than the legal overtime rate for overtime hours worked in California. Labor Code section 1198 renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The IWC Wage Orders further require payment of overtime wages for all overtime hours worked, including the "Hours and Days of Work" sections.

Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and the covered employees overtime wages and the lawful rate of pay for overtime hours worked, resulting in unpaid overtime wages. As a result of Defendants' unlawful time-keeping practices, Defendants failed to account for Plaintiff and the covered employees overtime hours. For example, Plaintiff and the covered employees' maintained client relations with clients located globally and sometimes required attention at times outside of their set schedules. Defendants maintained a practice of only accounting for hours worked within the set scheduled. As a result, when the covered employees took calls after working 8 hours in one day or 40 hours in one week, Defendants failed to account for the overtime hours worked.

Additionally, Plaintiff's job responsibilities included covering various areas outside of Customer Service. For example, Defendants sometimes required Plaintiff to track inventory and act as project management in addition to her baseline job duties. Occasionally, these responsibilities amounted to more work than possible to complete within 8 hours in one day or 40 hours in one week. When Plaintiff worked outside of those hours to complete her responsibilities, Defendants failed to account for the additional hours. Plaintiff is informed and believes other employees suffered similar violations. As a result, Defendants sometimes failed to pay all overtime wages earned.

Additionally, to the extent that Plaintiff worked more than 8 hours in one day or 40 hours in one week during the months she was misclassified, Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff for these overtime hours. This error resulted in underpaid overtime wages.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Unpaid Meal Period Premium Wages
Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 512, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 226.7, 512, and 1198, along with the related sections of the IWC Wage Orders with respect to the covered employees.

Labor Code section 512 and the IWC Wage Orders require that employers provide an uninterrupted 30-minute meal period after no more than five hours of work and a second meal period after no more than 10 hours of work. *See Brinker Restaurant Corp. v. Superior Court* (2012) 53 Cal.4th 1004, 1049. Labor Code section 226.7 requires that if a meal period is late, missed, short, or interrupted, the employer must pay one additional hour of pay at the employee's "regular rate" of compensation. *Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 858, 862 ("We hold that the terms are synonymous: "regular rate of compensation" under section 226.7(c), like "regular rate of pay" under section 510(a), encompasses all nondiscretionary payments, not just hourly wages"). "[T]ime records showing noncompliant meal periods raise a rebuttable presumption of meal period violations, including at the summary judgment stage." *Donohue v. AMN Services, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 58, 61. Labor Code section 1198 renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The IWC Wage Orders, including Section 11 (Meal Periods), further require one uninterrupted 30-minute meal period after no more than five hours of work and a second meal period after no more than 10 hours of work and an additional hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of compensation for each workday that a compliant meal period is not provided. Pursuant to Section 11(A) of the IWC Wage Orders, the California Supreme Court has held that the on-duty meal period exception is "exceedingly narrow" and applies only when (1) "the nature of the work prevents the employee from being relieved of all duty" and (2) *both* "the employer and employee have agreed, in writing, to the on-duty meal period." *Augustus v. AMB Security Services, Inc.* (2016) 2 Cal.5th 257, 266-276 (emphasis added). If these two requirements are not met, then the employer owes the employee one hour of premium pay for each non-compliant meal period taken under the purported on-duty meal arrangement. *Naranjo v. Spectrum Security Services, Inc.* (2019) 40 Cal.5th 444, 459.

Plaintiff and the covered employees sometimes experienced missed, late, short, and interrupted meal periods to keep up with the demands of the job. Defendants assigned such heavy workloads, including covering coworkers' tasks, to Plaintiff and the covered employees that they sometimes had to work through their days continuously to complete their work. Because Defendants maintained an unlawful time-keeping policy of not tracking Plaintiff and the covered employees' clock ins and outs, Defendants failed to track whether or not Plaintiff and the covered employees took meal periods. Furthermore, Defendants engaged in an unlawful auto-deducting practice. Specifically, Defendants automatically deducted one hour from Plaintiff and the covered employees' time to account for meal periods regardless of whether a compliant meal period was taken resulting in non-compliant meal periods. As a result, Defendants failed to pay meal period premiums when Plaintiff and the covered employees experienced non-compliant meal periods.

Additionally, to the extent that Plaintiff worked through workdays without meal periods in the months that she was misclassified, she was owed meal period premiums. However, Defendants failed to provide any meal period premiums for those days resulting in unpaid premium wages.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Unpaid Rest Period Premium Wages
Violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7, 516, 1198; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 226.7, 516, and 1198, and the related sections of the IWC Wage Orders with respect to Plaintiff and the covered employees.

Labor Code sections 226.7 and 516 and the IWC Wage Orders require that employers authorize and permit an uninterrupted 10-minute rest period for each four-hour period (or major fraction thereof) that an employee works. Labor Code section 226.7 requires that if a rest period is non-compliant, the employer must pay one additional hour of pay at the employee's "regular rate" of compensation. *Ferra v. Loews Hollywood Hotel, LLC* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 858, 862 ("We hold that the terms are synonymous: "regular rate of compensation" under section 226.7(c), like "regular rate of pay" under section 510(a), encompasses all nondiscretionary payments, not just hourly wages"). Labor Code section 1198 renders "employment of any employee for longer hours than those fixed by the order or under conditions of labor prohibited by the [IWC Wage Orders]" unlawful. The IWC Wage Orders, including Section 12 (Rest Periods), further require one uninterrupted 10-minute rest period for each four-hour period (or major faction thereof) worked and an additional hour of pay at the employee's regular rate of compensation for each workday that a compliant rest period is not authorized or permitted.

Plaintiff and the covered employees sometimes experienced non-compliant rest periods to keep up with the demands of the job. Defendants assigned such heavy workloads to Plaintiff and the covered employees that they sometimes had to work continuously through the day to complete all tasks resulting in missed rest periods. When Plaintiff and the covered employees experienced non-compliant rest periods, Defendants failed to pay rest period premiums in violation of the Labor Code.

Additionally, to the extent that Plaintiff worked through workdays without rest periods in the months that she was misclassified, she was owed rest period premiums. However, Defendants failed to provide any meal period premiums for those days resulting in unpaid premium wages.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Untimely Payment of Wages During Employment
Violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 204b, 210

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 204 and/or 204b and 210, as applicable, with respect to Plaintiff and the covered employees.

Labor Code section 204(a) requires payment of "all wages" for non-exempt employees at least twice each calendar month. Labor Code section 204(d) states all wages due must be paid "not more than seven calendar days following the close of the payroll period." Labor Code section 204b applies to employees paid on a weekly basis and also requires the payment for all labor within the required pay periods. Labor Code section 210 provides "every person who fails to pay the wages of an employee as provided in Section … 204 … shall be subject to a civil penalty" of $100 for an initial violation and $200 plus 25% of the amount unlawfully withheld for a subsequent violation.

Because Defendants failed to pay all wages and premiums in each pay period in which such wages were earned at the lawful rate, Defendants violated Labor Code section 204 and/or 204b (for weekly employees, as applicable). Defendants violated Labor Code sections 204 and 204b by failing to pay all wages and premiums owed on the regular pay days scheduled each pay period within seven calendar days of the close of the payroll period, as a result of the policies and practices set forth in this notice.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Untimely Payment of Wages Upon Separation of Employment
Violation of Labor Code §§ 201, 202, 203, 256

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 201, 202, and 203 with respect to the covered employees by failing to pay all wages and premiums owed upon termination of employment.

Labor Code section 201 requires that if an employer fires an employee, the wages must be paid immediately. Labor Code section 202 requires that if an employee quits without providing 72 hours' notice, his or her wages must be paid no later than 72 hours thereafter. Labor Code section 202 states that if an employee provides 72 hours' notice, the final wages are payable upon his or her final day of employment. Labor Code section 203 requires an employer who fails to comply with Labor Code sections 201 or 202 to pay a waiting time penalty for each employee, up to a period of 30 days additional compensation.

Defendants failed to pay all wages and premiums owed to covered employees during their employment as set forth in this notice, and also failed to timely pay those amounts to departing employees upon separation of employment. Defendants did not pay waiting time penalties for the late payments. As a result, Defendants violated Labor Code sections 201, 202, and 203.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Non-Compliant Wage Statements</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 226, 226.3

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 226(a) and 226.3 with respect to the covered employees by failing to furnish itemized wage statements each pay period that accurately list all information required by Labor Code section 226(a)(1) through (9).

<u>Labor Code section 226(a)</u> requires an employer to furnish wage statements to employees semimonthly or at the time of each payment of wages, "an accurate itemized statement in writing showing:" (1) gross wages earned, (2) total hours worked, (3) the number of piece rate units earned and applicable piece-rate in effect, (4) all deductions, (5) net wages earned, (6) the inclusive dates of the pay period, (7) the name of the employee and last four digits of SSN or an EIN, (8) the name and address of the legal name of the employer, and (9) all applicable hourly rates in effect during the pay period and the number of hours worked at each hourly rate by the employee.

Defendants failed to provide accurate itemized wage statements to the covered employees each pay period as a result of the policies and practices set forth in this notice. Defendants violated Labor Code section 226(a)(1) and (5) by not listing the correct "gross wages earned" or "net wages earned," as the employees earned wages and premiums that were not paid, resulting in an inaccurate reflection, and recording of "gross wages earned" on those wage statements. Likewise, in violation of Labor Code section 226(a)(9), Defendants failed to state on employee wage statements each pay period the applicable hourly rates in effect and the number of hours worked at that rate, as Defendants failed to pay all wages and premiums owed to employees. The amounts stated are instead depreciated and underpaid, resulting in an inaccurate reflection on the pay stub.

Additionally, Defendants violated Labor Code section 226(a)(2) by failing to accurately list employees' "total hours worked," as the wage statements did not accurately include the uncompensated time plaintiff and other covered employees worked due to Defendants' unlawful timekeeping policy and practice that failed to account for all hours worked.

Plaintiff and other covered employees cannot promptly and easily determine from the wage statement alone the wages paid or earned without reference to other documents or information. Indeed, these wage statement violations are significant because they sow confusion among Plaintiff and other covered employees with respect to what amounts were owed and paid, at what rates, the number of hours worked, and how those amounts were or should be calculated. The wage statements reflect a false statement of earnings and concealed the underlying problems and underpayments of employee wages.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Unreimbursed Employee Expenses</u>
Violation of Labor Code §§ 2802, 2804

Defendants violated Labor Code section 2802 with respect to the covered employees by failing to reimburse the covered employees for all necessary expenditures or losses incurred as part of their job duties.

<u>Labor Code section 2802</u> requires an employer to "indemnify his or her employee for all necessary expenditures or losses incurred by the employee in direct consequence of the discharge of his or her duties, or of his or her obedience to the directions of the employer, even though unlawful, unless the employee, at the time of obeying the directions, believed them to be unlawful." *See, e.g., Espinoza v. West Coast Tomato Growers, LLC*, 2016 WL 4468175 at *4, n.2 (S.D. Cal. Aug. 24, 2016, No. 14-CV-2984 W (KSC)).

<u>Labor Code section 2804</u> affirms that "[a]ny contract or agreement, express or implied, made by any employee to waive the benefits of this article or any part thereof, is null and void, and this article shall not deprive any employee or his personal representative of any right or remedy to which he is entitled under the laws of this State."

Defendants required Plaintiff and the covered employees to incur costs for work-related purposes without full reimbursement. In direct consequence of their job duties, Plaintiff and the covered employees unavoidably and necessarily incurred these losses, expenditures, costs, and as a matter of policy and practice. For example, Plaintiff and the covered employees sometimes completed work from home. Although Defendants provided laptops and work phones, Defendants failed to provide reimbursement for internet expenses incurred as a result of Plaintiff and the covered employees' at-home work. Instead, Defendants expected Plaintiff and the covered employees to incur these costs on their own without reimbursement.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

<u>Failure to Maintain Accurate Records</u>
Violation of Labor Code § 1174; IWC Wage Orders

Defendants violated Labor Code sections 1174 and the IWC Wage Orders by failing to maintain accurate employee payroll records with respect to Plaintiff and other covered employees.

<u>Labor Code section 1174</u> requires that employers maintain accurate "payroll records showing the hours worked daily by and the wages paid to, and the number of piece-rate units earned by and any applicable piece rate paid to, employees employed at the respective plants or

establishments." Section 7(A) of the IWC Wage Orders, which may be enforced through Labor Code section 1198, mandates similar recordkeeping obligations.

Because of the policies and practices set forth in this notice, including the failure to accurately account for wages earned or hours worked, Defendants failed to accurately maintain records in accordance with Labor Code section 1174 and the IWC Wage Orders.

As a result, Plaintiff may recover civil penalties as an individual and on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees, up to the maximum amount allowed as set forth under the Labor Code.

Attorneys' Fees and Costs
Labor Code § 2699(k)(1)

Plaintiff has been compelled to retain the services of counsel to protect the interests of other covered employees and the State of California. Plaintiff continues to incur attorneys' fees and costs, which are recoverable under California law, including Labor Code section 2699(k)(1).

- LITIGATION HOLD NOTICE –

This letter imposes a duty upon all defendants and their respective employees, officers, directors, executives, attorneys, human resource and payroll personnel, accountants, and other agents to preserve all physical and electronic evidence, including electronically stored information and emails, which relate to the employment of Plaintiff and the covered employees specified in this notice. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, Defendants' written employment and payroll policies and handbooks; the covered employees' personnel files and payroll records, such as paystubs, time records, wage statements, compensation reports, as well as the underlying electronic data in Excel or similar format. Memoranda and internal and external correspondence relating to the subject matter of this notice shall also be maintained. Failure to preserve and retain relevant evidence may constitute spoliation of evidence and result in an adverse inference or sanctions.

If you have any questions regarding the scope of your obligations to preserve evidence, please consult your legal counsel and always err on the side of caution. Periodic or regularly scheduled purges or deletions of information covered by this hold must be suspended immediately.

- CONCLUSION -

If the LWDA does not pursue enforcement, Plaintiff intends to bring representative claims on behalf of the State of California and the covered employees seeking civil penalties for violations of the Labor Code and the IWC Wage Orders, along with attorneys' fees, costs, interest, and other appropriate relief.

Please advise if the LWDA intends to investigate any of the factual or legal allegations set forth in this notice. Defendants may contact Plaintiff's counsel with any questions regarding this letter or the forthcoming lawsuit.

Sincerely,

Elyssa Martinez

Elyssa Martinez

LMP

Cc Plaintiff Stephany Salazar
HR Representative, Fabricio Silva - fabricio.silva@syngenta.com