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ELECTRONICALLY FILED BY
Superior Court of California,
County of Monterey
On 12/4/2023 11:24 AM
By: Agnes Nazarian, Deputy

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

COUNTY OF MONTEREY

MARISELA GUTIERREZ SANCHEZ, as
an aggrieved employee and private attorney
general;

Plaintiff,

vs.

RIVER VALLEY FARMS, LLC, a
California limited liability company;
SOUTHERN PACIFIC FARMING, INC.;
a Florida corporation; SOUTHERN
PACIFIC FARMING II, LLC, California
limited liability company; and DOES 1
through 50, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.: 23CV003910

**REPRESENTATIVE ACTION
COMPLAINT**

**(1) VIOLATION OF CALIFORNIA
LABOR CODE § 2699, ET SEQ.
(PRIVATE ATTORNEYS
GENERAL ACT)**

1 Plaintiff MARISELA GUTIERREZ SANCHEZ (“Plaintiff”), as an aggrieved employee
2 and a as private attorney general, based upon facts that either have evidentiary support or are
3 likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity for further investigation and
4 discovery, alleges as follows:

5 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

6 1. Plaintiff bring this action against Defendants RIVER VALLEY FARMS, LLC;
7 SOUTHERN PACIFIC FARMING, INC.; SOUTHERN PACIFIC FARMING II, LLC and
8 DOES 1 THROUGH 50 (hereinafter also collectively referred to as “Defendants”) as a
9 representative action on behalf of herself and certain other current and former non-exempt
10 employees of Defendants against whom one or more of the alleged violations was committed
11 (hereinafter collectively referred to as the “Aggrieved Employees”) pursuant to California Labor
12 Code sections 2698, et seq. Plaintiff is an aggrieved employees against whom one or more of the
13 alleged violations was committed. The civil penalties sought by Plaintiff exceed the minimal
14 jurisdiction limits of the Superior Court and will be established according to proof at trial.

15 2. The Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to the California Constitution,
16 Article VI, Section 10, which grants the superior court “original jurisdiction in all other causes”
17 except those given by statute to other courts. The statutes under which this action is brought do
18 not specify any other basis for jurisdiction.

19 3. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because, upon information and belief,
20 Defendants are citizens of California, have sufficient minimum contacts in California, or
21 otherwise intentionally avail themselves of the California market so as to render the exercise of
22 jurisdiction over them by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and
23 substantial justice.

24 4. Venue is proper in this Court because, upon information and belief, Defendants
25 maintain offices, have agents, and/or transact business in the State of California, County of
26 Monterey.

26 **PARTIES**

27 5. Plaintiff MARISELA GUTIERREZ SANCHEZ is an individual residing in the
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County of Monterrey, State of California.

6. Defendant RIVER VALLEY FARMS, LLC is, and at all times herein mentioned was, a limited liability company organized and existing under the laws of the State of California, and registered to do business in the state of California.

7. Defendant SOUTHERN PACIFIC FARMING, INC. is, and at all times herein mentioned was, a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Florida, and registered to do business in the state of California.

8. Defendant SOUTHERN PACIFIC FARMING II, LLC is, and at all times herein mentioned was, a limited liability company organized and existing under the laws of the State of California, and registered to do business in the state of California.

9. Plaintiff is ignorant of the identities of defendants Does 1 through 50, inclusive, and therefore sues these defendants by such fictitious names. The Doe defendants may be individuals, partnerships, or corporations. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that, at all times mentioned herein, each of the Doe defendants was the parent, subsidiary, agent, servant, employee, co-venturer, and/or co-conspirator of each of the other defendants and was at all times mentioned acting within the scope, purpose, consent, knowledge, ratification and authorization of such agency, employment, joint venture and conspiracy. Plaintiff will amend this Complaint to allege their true names and capacities when ascertained. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that each of the fictitiously named Doe defendants is responsible in some manner for the occurrences herein alleged, and that Plaintiff's damages as herein alleged were proximately caused by its conduct.

10. Defendants are and at all times herein mentioned were, (a) conducting business in the County of Monterey, State of California, and (b) the employer of Plaintiff consistent with the California Labor Code and Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Orders ("Wage Orders").

11. Plaintiff further alleges that Defendants, directly or indirectly controlled or affected the working conditions, wages, working hours, and conditions of employment of Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees so as to make each of said Defendants employers and employers jointly liable under the statutory provisions set forth herein. Defendants share a same address, have same

1 corporate officers/managers, and exercised control over the wages, hours, working conditions,
2 and trainings of Plaintiffs and the Class such that each Defendant is an employer of Plaintiffs and
3 the Class.

4 **GENERAL ALLEGATIONS**

5 12. Defendants are an agricultural company.

6 13. Defendants employed Plaintiff MARISELA GUTIERREZ SANCHEZ to work as
7 a seasonal harvester since approximately May 2019.

8 14. At all relevant times set forth herein, Defendants employed Plaintiff and
9 Aggrieved Employees as hourly-paid or non-exempt employees.

10 15. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants had the authority to
11 hire and terminate Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees; to directly or indirectly control work rules,
12 working conditions, wages, working hours, and conditions of employment of Plaintiff and
13 Aggrieved Employees; and to hire and terminate the employment of Plaintiff and Aggrieved
14 Employees.

15 16. At all times herein mentioned, Defendants were subject to the Labor Code of the
16 State of California and the applicable Industrial Welfare Commission Orders.

17 17. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges that Defendants engaged in
18 an ongoing and systematic scheme of wage abuse against their hourly-paid or non-exempt
19 employees. As set forth in more detail below, this scheme involved, *inter alia*, regularly requiring
20 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to work off-the-clock without compensation, thereby failing
21 to pay them for all hours worked, including minimum and overtime wages. Defendants also
22 implemented time rounding practices that resulted in the systematic underpayment of wages to
23 Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees, including minimum and overtime wages. Defendants also
24 implemented policies that prohibited Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees from accurately
25 recording the actual time worked, resulting in a failure to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
26 Employees all wages owed. In addition, Defendants routinely failed to permit Plaintiff and the
27 Aggrieved Employees to take timely and duty-free meal periods and rest periods in violation of
28 California law. Defendants also failed to reimburse Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all

1 necessary business-related expenses, failed to pay all wages owed upon termination of
2 employment, unlawfully withheld or deducted collected of wages, and failed to maintain accurate
3 records.

4 18. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants have implemented
5 policies and practices which failed to provide Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees with timely and
6 duty-free meal periods. Defendants routinely failed to relieve Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees
7 of all duties during their meal periods, regularly failed to relinquish control over Plaintiff and
8 Aggrieved Employees during their meal periods, regularly failed to permit Plaintiff and
9 Aggrieved Employees a reasonable opportunity to take their meal periods, and regularly impeded
10 or discouraged Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees from taking thirty (30) minute uninterrupted
11 meal breaks no later than the end of their fifth hour of work and/or from taking a second thirty
12 (30) minute uninterrupted meal break no later than their tenth hour of work for shifts lasting more
13 than ten (10) hours. Defendants also failed to maintain accurate records of meal periods taken by
14 Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees.

15 19. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants did not adequately
16 inform Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees of their right to take meal periods under California
17 law. Moreover, Defendants systematically disregarded their own written policies regarding the
18 provision and timing of meal periods for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Instead,
19 Defendants' actual policy and practice was to schedule Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees in a
20 way the prohibited them from taking timely and duty-free meal periods, and to require Plaintiff
21 and Aggrieved Employees to work through their meal periods, for which they were not
22 compensated.

23 20. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff
24 and Aggrieved Employees premium wages for meal periods that were missed, late, interrupted,
25 or shortened in violation of California law. Defendants knew or should have known that Plaintiff
26 and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive all meal periods or payment of one additional
27 hour of pay at their regular rate of pay when a meal period was missed, short, late, and/or
28 interrupted. Notwithstanding this knowledge, Defendants routinely failed to provide legally

compliant meal periods to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees, and routinely failed pay one additional hour of pay to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees at their regular rate of pay when a meal period was missed, short, late, and/or interrupted.

21. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants have implemented policies and practices which prohibited Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees from taking timely and duty-free rest periods. Defendants regularly failed to provide, authorize, and permit Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to take full, uninterrupted, off-duty rest periods for every shift lasting three and one-half (3.5) to six (6) hours and/or two full, uninterrupted, off-duty rest periods for every shift lasting six (6) to ten (10) hours, and failed to make a good faith effort to authorize, permit, and provide such rest breaks in the middle of each work period.

22. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants did not adequately inform Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees of their right to take rest periods under California law. Moreover, Defendants systematically disregarded their own written policies regarding the provision and timing of rest periods for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Instead, Defendants' actual policy and practice was to schedule Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees in a way that regularly prohibited them from taking timely and duty free rest periods, and to regularly require Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to work through their rest periods.

23. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants failed to pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees premium wages for rest periods that were missed, late, interrupted, or shortened in violation of California law. Defendants knew or should have known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive all rest periods or payment of one additional hour of pay at their regular rate of pay when a rest period was missed, short, late, and/or interrupted. Notwithstanding this knowledge, Defendants routinely failed to authorize and permit Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to take duty-free rest periods, and failed to pay one additional hour of pay to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees at their regular rate of pay when a rest period was missed, short, late and/or interrupted.

24. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendant regularly required Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to perform work off-the-clock. Although Defendants

1 prohibited overtime, Defendants still regularly required Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees
2 complete all of their assigned duties. To do so, Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were regularly
3 required to perform work off-the-clock for which they were not compensated.

4 25. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Plaintiff and Aggrieved
5 Employees worked more than eight (8) hours in a day, and/or forty (40) hours in a week.

6 26. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to
7 pay overtime compensation to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees when they worked in excess
8 of eight (8) hours in a single work day and/or forty (40) hours in a single work week, or in excess
9 of twelve (12) hours in a single work day and/or eighty (80) hours in a single work week.
10 Defendants knew or should have known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to
11 receive certain wages for overtime or double overtime compensation and that they were not
12 receiving wages for overtime or double overtime compensation.

13 27. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants failed to pay
14 overtime to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all overtime hours worked based on regular
15 rates of pay correctly calculated to include all applicable remuneration.

16 28. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to
17 pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees at least minimum wages for all hours worked. Defendants
18 knew or should have known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive at
19 least minimum wages for all hours worked and that they were not receiving at least minimum
20 wages for all hours worked. Defendants' failure to pay minimum wages included, *inter alia*,
21 failing to pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees at the required minimum wage pursuant to
22 California law, and requiring Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees to perform work off the clock.

23 29. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to
24 pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees at least minimum wages for all hours worked.
25 Defendants knew or should have known that Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees were entitled
26 to receive at least minimum wages for all hours worked and that they were not receiving at least
27 minimum wages for all hours worked. Defendants' failure to pay minimum wages included, *inter*
28 *alia*, failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees at the required minimum wage pursuant

1 to California law, requiring Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to perform work off-the-clock.

2 30. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to
3 pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages owed to them upon discharge or resignation.
4 Defendant knew or should have known that Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees were entitled
5 to receive all wages owed to them upon termination within the time permissible under California
6 Labor Code section 202. Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees did not receive payment of all
7 final wages owed to them upon discharge or resignation, including overtime compensation and
8 minimum wages within any time permissible under California Labor Code section 202.

9 31. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to
10 pay Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees all wages within any time permissible under California
11 law, including, *inter alia*, California Labor Code section 204. Defendants knew or should have
12 known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive all wages owed to them
13 during their employment. Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees did not receive payment of all
14 wages, including overtime compensation, minimum wages, and meal and rest period premiums,
15 within any time permissible under California Labor Code section 204.

16 32. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to
17 provide complete or accurate wage statements to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Defendants
18 knew or should have known that Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees were entitled to receive
19 complete and accurate wage statements in accordance with California law, but, in fact, they did
20 not receive complete and accurate wage statements from Defendants. The deficiencies included,
21 *inter alia*, the failure to include the total number of hours worked, the actual gross wages earned,
22 the correct rates of pay, and number of piece-rate units paid and any applicable piece rate.

23 33. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to
24 keep complete or accurate payroll records for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees. Defendants
25 knew or should have known that Defendants were required to keep complete and accurate payroll
26 records for Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees in accordance with California law, but, in fact, did
27 not keep complete and accurate payroll records.

28 34. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants regularly failed to

maintain accurate records relating to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees' work periods, meal periods, total daily hours, hours per pay period, and applicable pay rates

35. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants implemented policies and practices that allowed Defendants to deduct from the wages paid to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees. Defendants' policies and practices allowing for deduction of wages does not comport with any exception enumerated in California Labor Code section 224, and is therefore unlawful under California law.

36. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants failed to reimburse Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all necessary business-related expenses, including but not limited to work related tools. Defendants knew or should have known that Defendants were required to reimburse Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for all necessary business-related expenses and costs, but, in fact, failed to do so in violation of California law.

37. Throughout the time period involved in this case, Defendants knew or should have known that they had a duty to compensate Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees pursuant to California law. Defendants had the financial ability to pay such compensation, but willfully, knowingly, and intentionally failed to do so, and falsely represented to Plaintiff and Aggrieved Employees that they paid all wages owed to them, all in order to increase Defendants' profits.

38. On or about September 13, 2023, Plaintiff notified Defendants via certified mail and filed an online PAGA claim notice with the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency ("LWDA") identifying Defendants' violations of the California Labor Code identified in this Complaint and Plaintiff's intent to bring a claim for civil penalties under California Labor Code section 2698 *et seq.* in accord with Cal. Lab. Code section 2699.3. As of the filing of this Complaint, the LWDA has not responded to Plaintiff's PAGA claim notice.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

(Violation of California Labor Code § 2699, Et Seq.)

(Against All Defendants)

39. Plaintiff incorporates by reference and re-alleges as if fully stated herein each and every allegation set forth above.

1 40. Plaintiff brings their first and only cause of action as a representative action on
2 behalf of herself and similarly Aggrieved Employees in the capacity as a private attorney general
3 pursuant to the Private Attorneys General Act of 2004, California Labor Code section 2698, *et*
4 *seq.* (“PAGA”).

5 41. PAGA specifically provides for a private right of action to recover civil penalties
6 for violations of the Labor Code as follows: “Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any
7 provision of this code that provides for a civil penalty to be assessed and collected by the Labor
8 and Workforce Development Agency or any of its departments, divisions, commissions, boards,
9 agencies, or employees, for a violation of this code, may, as an alternative, be recovered through
10 a civil action brought by an aggrieved employee on behalf of himself or herself and other current
11 or former employees pursuant to the procedures specified in Section 2699.3.” Cal. Lab. Code §
12 2699(a).

13 42. Plaintiff was employed by Defendants and the Labor Code violations alleged
14 above were committed against her during her time of employment. Plaintiff and the other non-
15 exempt employees of Defendants are therefore “aggrieved employees” as defined by California
16 Labor Code section 2699(c) in that they are all current or former employees of Defendants, and
17 one or more of the alleged violations were committed against them.

18 43. As set forth in detail above, during all times relevant to this Action, Defendants
19 have routinely subjected Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to violations of California Labor
20 Codes by:

- 21 a. Failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all earned minimum wage
22 compensation in violation of Labor Code §§ 1194 and 1198 *et seq.*
- 23 b. Failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all earned overtime
24 compensation in violation of Labor Code §§ 204, 510, 1194, and 1198 *et seq.*
- 25 c. Failing to provide legally required meal periods to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved
26 Employees, and failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees an additional
27 hour of premium pay for meal period violations in violation of Labor Code §§
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226.7 and 512.

- d. Failing to provide authorize and permit Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees to take duty-free rest periods, and failing to pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees an additional hour of premium pay for rest period violations in violation of Labor Code §§ 226.7 and 512.
- e. Failing to timely pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages at the end of their employment in violation of Labor Code § 203.
- f. Failing to timely pay Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees all wages owed during employment in violation of Labor Code § 204.
- g. Failing to furnish Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees with complete, accurate, itemized wage statements in violation of Labor Code § 226.
- h. Failing to maintain accurate records relating to Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees' work periods, meal periods, total daily hours, hours per pay period, total wages and compensation, and applicable pay rates in violation of Labor Code § 1174(d) and the applicable IWC Wage Order.
- i. Failing to reimburse Plaintiff and the Aggrieved Employees for necessary business-related expenses in violation of Labor Code §§ 2800 and 2802.

44. Pursuant to California Labor Code sections 2699 and 2699.5, Plaintiff, individually and on behalf of the Aggrieved Employees and the State of California, request and are entitled to recover penalties against Defendants for the Labor Code violations described above, including but not limited to penalties under California Code of Regulations Title 8 sections 11114 penalties under California Labor Code sections 2699, 558, 210, 1197.1, 225.5, 226, 226.3 and 1174.5, and 1197.1, and any and all additional penalties and sums as provided by the California Labor Code and/or other statutes. The exact amount of the applicable penalties, in all, is in an amount to be shown according to proof at trial.

45. Plaintiff has exhausted her administrative remedies pursuant to Labor Code § 2699.3. On September 13, 2023, Plaintiff, through her counsel of record, by online filing with the

1 Labor and Workforce Development Agency (“LWDA”) and by certified mail to the Defendants,
2 notified Defendants and the LWDA of the specific provisions of the Labor Code and IWC Wage
3 Orders that Defendants have violated, including the facts and theories to support the violations,
4 and of Plaintiff’s intent to bring a claim for civil penalties under PAGA. Plaintiff also paid the
5 filing fee required under Labor Code § 2699.3. As of the filing of this Complaint, more than sixty-
6 five (65) days have elapsed since the mailing of Plaintiff’s September 13, 2023, notice, and the
7 LWDA has not indicated that it intends to investigate the violations discussed in the notice.
8 Accordingly, Plaintiff may commence a civil action to recover penalties for herself and other
9 Aggrieved Employees pursuant to Labor Code § 2699.3.

10 46. Plaintiff was compelled to retain the services of counsel to file this court action to
11 protect her interests and the Aggrieved Employees, and to assess and collect the civil penalties
12 owed by Defendants. Plaintiff therefore seeks an award of reasonable attorneys’ fees and costs
13 pursuant to Labor Code § 2699(g)(1), and any other applicable statute.

14 47. Plaintiff may amend this complaint as a matter of right pursuant to California
15 Labor Code § 2699.3 as this complaint has been filed within sixty days of the time periods
16 specified in Labor Code §2699.3.

17 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

18 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, individually and on behalf of all other aggrieved employees, and
19 as a private attorney general, prays for relief and judgment against Defendants, jointly and
20 severally, as follows:

21 **As to the First Cause of Action**

22 1. For statutory attorneys’ fees and costs pursuant to 2699(g)(1) of California Labor
23 Code;

24 2. For the imposition of civil penalties pursuant to California Labor Code §§ 2699,
25 210, 558, 226, 226.3, 1174.5, 1197.1 and all other penalties allowed by the California Labor Code
26 and/or other applicable statutes; and

27 3. For such other relief as the Court deems just and proper
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1 Dated: December 4, 2023

2 **PROTECTION LAW GROUP**

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4 By: _____
5 Heather Davis
6 Amir Nayebdadash
7 Priscilla Gamino
8 *Attorneys for Plaintiff*
9 MARISELA GUTIERREZ SANCHEZ
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