

Lockyer Valley farm directors fined \$35,000 for underpaying farm workers

13 September 2010

The operators of a Lockyer Valley farm have been fined a total of \$35,360 for underpaying seven fruit and vegetable pickers.

Nu Life Organic Farms Pty Ltd, which formerly operated a cucumber farm at Grantham, has been fined \$25,500.

Company directors Trevor John Bell and Peter John Hill, who were involved in running the farm, have also been fined \$4930 each.

The penalties, imposed in the Federal Magistrates Court in Brisbane, are the result of a prosecution by the Fair Work Ombudsman.

The Fair Work Ombudsman initiated litigation after finding that seven Japanese workers had been underpaid \$20,000.

The Court ordered the company to back-pay the former employees amounts ranging from \$682 to \$3822.

The workers were paid about \$8.50 an hour when they should have been getting almost \$17 an hour.

Handing down his decision, Magistrate Michael Jarrett said there was a need to send a message “to employers and the community generally that underpayment of wages will not be tolerated”.

“This is particularly the case where vulnerable employees are involved,” he said.

Magistrate Jarrett said Bell, Hill and the company had demonstrated “reckless disregard” for their legal obligations and shown no remorse for their actions.

Fair Work Ombudsman Executive Director Michael Campbell says employers should note that the Courts are taking a dim view of employers who seek to exploit vulnerable workers.

The Fair work Ombudsman has a number of tools on its website – www.fwo.gov.au - to assist employees and employers understand their respective rights and obligations.

Employers or employees seeking assistance can also contact the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. For translations call 13 14 50.

Media inquiries:

Ryan Pedler, Senior Adviser, Media & Stakeholder Relations
(03) 9954 2561, 0411 430 902
ryan.pedler@fwo.gov.au

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Contact us

Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94