



## Civil Rights Department

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### Civil Rights Department Announces \$100K Settlement Over Alleged Sexual Harassment of Santa Cruz County Farmworker

*If approved by the court, the proposed settlement requires Ayoquezco Farms to implement new policies and procedures to protect against sexual harassment in the workplace*

**SACRAMENTO** – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today announced reaching a \$100,000 settlement with Ayoquezco Farms over the alleged sexual harassment of a woman who had been employed as a seasonal strawberry picker. The settlement, which is subject to court approval, [follows a lawsuit](#) filed by CRD last year. If approved by the court, the proposed settlement will also require Ayoquezco Farms to implement new policies and procedures to help protect against future instances of sexual harassment in the workplace.

“Sexual harassment is unacceptable and unlawful in every single workplace in California,” said **CRD Director Kevin Kish**. “It takes courage to speak out, and if you come forward, our team at the Civil Rights Department is committed to standing up for all our state’s residents. This settlement puts robust requirements in place to prevent against future discrimination at Ayoquezco Farms and makes it clear that there are consequences for harassment.”

In November 2021, CRD received a complaint against Ayoquezco Farms, headquartered in Watsonville in Santa Cruz County, and its owner alleging sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and retaliation. According to the complaint, the owner allegedly subjected the employee, just days after she was hired in 2018, to sexual harassment and a hostile work environment, including by making crude sexual remarks and other unlawful misconduct. When the complainant brought the matter to a supervisor, the defendants, rather than investigating or addressing the concerns, allegedly retaliated by escalating the sexual harassment and creating working conditions which were so intolerable that the complainant was forced to resign.

Pursuant to its statutory authority, CRD investigated the administrative complaint, and determined in 2022 that there was sufficient evidence that the defendant discriminated against and unlawfully harassed the complainant. After an unsuccessful attempt at mediation, CRD filed a lawsuit in 2023. The proposed settlement announced today aims to resolve the lawsuit and will, among other things, require Ayoquezco Farms to:

- Develop and implement company policies and complaint procedures regarding harassment, discrimination, or retaliation within 90 days.
- Establish and put into effect investigation policies for the handling and investigation of complaints of unlawful harassment, discrimination, or retaliation.
- Distribute information on the new policies and reporting procedures to all employees within 30 days of the start of every new strawberry harvest season.
- Train all supervisory and non-supervisory staff on the new policies and on protections against harassment, discrimination, or retaliation under state and federal law.
- Report on compliance with the terms of the settlement to CRD for a period of five years.
- Pay \$90,000 in compensation for alleged harms to the complainant and \$10,000 to cover legal costs associated with the litigation.

If you or someone you know has been the victim of discrimination, CRD may be able to assist you through its complaint process. General information about CRD's complaint process and how to file a complaint is available [here](#). Additional information regarding California's laws against sexual harassment is available [here](#).

The proposed settlement was litigated by Assistant Chief Counsel Nelson Chan, Senior Staff Counsel Soyeon Oum, and Staff Counsel Juan Gamboa.

A copy of the proposed settlement, which is subject to court approval, is available [here](#). A copy of the lawsuit filed by CRD in 2023 is available [here](#).

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*The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. CRD's mission is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state-funded programs and activities, and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit [calcivilrights.ca.gov](http://calcivilrights.ca.gov).*

