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Federal Court Rules World's Largest Carrot Grower Discriminated Against Farmworkers with Disabilities

Case can now move forward to trial on potential monetary damages and relief for farmworkers

SACRAMENTO – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today highlighted a U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California decision ruling that Grimmway Farms — purportedly the largest grower, producer, and shipper of carrots in the world — engaged in a pattern or practice of disability discrimination against farmworkers. The ruling comes after CRD filed a lawsuit against the farm in 2021. As a result of the decision, the case can now move forward to trial on potential monetary damages and other forms of relief for affected workers.

“This decision is a major victory for disability rights and the rights of farmworkers across California,” **said CRD Director Kevin Kish.** “The court has ruled loud and clear that forcing injured workers into unpaid leave is disability discrimination. Here in California, farmworkers have rights, they are protected, and we will not shy away from fighting on their behalf.”

Injured Workers Forced Out

In 2021, CRD filed a lawsuit against Grimmway Farms for alleged disability discrimination against farmworkers who suffered injuries or illnesses that affected their ability to work. According to the lawsuit, Grimmway Farms for years automatically funneled workers with job-related and other disabilities into taking unpaid leave, making little to no effort to find alternatives such as providing assistive aids or different work assignments. While some employees were able to use workers' compensation benefits, as soon as those benefits expired, they faced a nearly impossible choice: take unpaid leave or get back to work without accommodations. As a result, hundreds of workers were deprived of their rights and many were effectively terminated.

What Now?

In a more than 50-page decision, the federal court found that Grimmway Farms engaged in systemic disability discrimination by automatically placing disabled workers on unpaid leave when other reasonable accommodations were available. The court also made clear that CRD may pursue relief on a group-wide basis. The case is now set to go to trial to determine potential damages for affected farmworkers, as well liability on remaining claims made in CRD's underlying lawsuit. The trial date has

not yet been set, but the case can be tracked on the [website for U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California](#).

If you or someone you know has experienced disability discrimination, CRD may be able to assist you through its [complaint process](#). The department also [provides general information and factsheets online](#) about civil rights protections, including on [employment discrimination based on disability](#).

You can learn more about the case by [reading a copy of the court's ruling](#) and a [copy of the department's underlying lawsuit against Grimmway Farms](#).

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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.

