

UFW urges Fresno County Agriculture Commissioner to take action against Gerawan Farming

By Robert
Rodriguez

- United Farm Workers say Gerawan Farming should be punished for violating the state's pesticide regulations.
- Gerawan Farming violated the rules by not telling workers that a pesticide was being applied near them.
- Nearly three dozen workers allege they were made sick from pesticide exposure, but the county did not find evidence that pesticide drift happened.

About 30 members of the United Farm Workers union rallied outside the Fresno County Agriculture Commissioner's office on Friday, demanding that the county take action against Gerawan Farming for violating pesticide regulations.

Gerawan, one of the largest tree fruit growers in the state, was found in violation of failing to notify workers that a pesticide was being applied within a quarter mile of where they were picking nectarines. The incident happened in 2013 in Reedley and it took county officials more than a year to complete the investigation.

Protestors said the county has had more than enough time to penalize the farming company.

"We came here today to tell the county that they need to do something so that this doesn't happen again," said Ignacio Perez, a field worker. "This could happen to me in the future and it could affect me or my family."

Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Melissa Cregan said the case was complex and involved more than 50 witnesses, including some that came forward as late as September of last year.

"The timeline seems lengthy but we wanted to make sure that we are looking into everything that needs to be pursued," Cregan said. "And it does not mean we are not taking action."

Cregan said the county is in the process of reviewing what enforcement action it may take and if a fine is appropriate.

UFW leaders said the incident also caused injury to nearly three dozen workers. The county's investigation report shows 13 of the 43 field workers involved in the incident said they experienced illness-like symptoms, including headache, nausea, dry mouth and itchiness. However, none of the workers reported the problem to a field foreman or sought medical attention, the report states. Also, the county determined that there was no evidence that pesticide drift had occurred.

Jose Erevia, compliance manager for Gerawan, said the company has cooperated fully with the investigation and was unaware that any employee might have been made sick.

"We take these issues very seriously and we encourage our employees to report any and all injuries to us immediately," Erevia said.

Contact Robert Rodriguez: brodriguez@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6327 or [@FresnoBeeBob](https://twitter.com/FresnoBeeBob) on Twitter.