FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Issued by: Hannemann Law Firm, APC — Counsel for Cross-Complainant Leticia Ridaura
Media Contact: Brian G. Hannemann, Esq.
1042 N. Mountain Ave., Suite B-222, Upland, CA 91786
(909) 980-7878 | bghesq@gmail.com

THIRTY-YEAR EXECUTIVE ALLEGES AGRICULTURAL GIANT SMUGGLED UNAPPROVED CHEMICALS ONTO "ORGANIC" PRODUCE BOUND FOR AMERICAN GROCERY SHELVES — THEN FIRED HER WITHIN HOURS OF LEARNING SHE HAD HIRED A LAWYER

Cross-complaint filed in Imperial County alleges chemical smuggling across the Mexican border, a scheme to suppress injury reports among H-2A farmworkers, and retaliation against the company's own Chief Operating Officer

EL CENTRO, Calif. — August 12, 2026 — Leticia Ridaura spent thirty years building the Scaroni Family of Companies. She started at an entry-level desk in 1996 and rose to Chief Operating Officer. According to a cross-complaint filed August 7 in Imperial County Superior Court, what she found at the top of that company was a scheme to put unapproved agrochemicals on produce sold to American families as organic — and a company that destroyed her career when she refused to look away.

The cross-complaint, *Ridaura v. Valley Harvesting & Packing, Inc.*, *et al.*, Case No. ECU004760, was filed on behalf of Ms. Ridaura against twelve interrelated entities operating under the Scaroni Family of Companies umbrella and against founder Steve Scaroni and his sons Matt Scaroni and David Scaroni.

"Just because it is not organic does not mean it's bad"

The cross-complaint alleges that the companies' Mexican farming operations, run through Harvest Tek de Mexico, knowingly used unapproved and synthetic chemicals and pesticides on produce grown for export to the United States.

It alleges the chemicals never crossed the border through any lawful channel. Instead, according to the filing, employees who commuted daily across the U.S.–Mexico border were directed to carry the chemicals across in person — bypassing the requirement to declare them, identify their intended use, confirm they appeared on the approved list, and pay applicable fees. The pleading alleges this was deliberate, and that eliminating the paper trail was the point: no declaration, no documentation, no record that unapproved chemicals had ever touched the crop.

The produce was, in the words of the cross-complaint, **"overwhelmingly designated as organic."**

- more -

Ms. Ridaura alleges she complained. Repeatedly. She alleges she went directly to Steve Scaroni in the fall of 2024 after overhearing his son arrange a chemical pickup, and was told he would speak with Matt. She alleges she complained again weeks later, and was told the chemicals were there “to secure better crop yields.” She alleges she complained a third time, in early 2025, after an assistant confirmed that Matt Scaroni “ordered them and did not want them to go through import.”

That third time, according to the cross-complaint, Steve Scaroni delivered his son’s answer:

“Just because it is not organic does not mean it’s bad.”

Ms. Ridaura was then told that Matt was in charge of Mexico, and that she had enough to do without being involved in the issue.

Where that produce goes

The cross-complaint alleges that the Scaroni entities handle the crop from seed to harvest to haul — farming inputs, watering, maintenance, harvesting, and sale. It alleges the produce is sold to major American produce companies including Fresh Express, Christopher Ranch, Foxy Fresh Produce, Blazer, Wilkinson, and Gee.

From there, according to the filing, it enters a supply chain that reaches **Costco, Walmart, Albertsons, Aldi, Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, Subway, and Jersey Mike’s.**

Those companies represent to the market that the produce was grown in compliance with organic certification standards — including Oregon Tilth, QAI Quality Assurance International, and the USDA National Organic Program. **None of them is accused of any wrongdoing in the cross-complaint.** The allegation is that they were told the same thing consumers were told.

The pleading alleges that when Harvest Tek exported loads of produce, **the invoices and food safety paperwork represented to clients and to USDA border inspection agents that only approved methods had been used, paperwork that allowed the produce to move to retailers and consumers as organic.**

If proven, the cross-complaint alleges, those practices violate the Organic Foods Production Act, the USDA National Organic Program regulations, the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, FIFRA, the California Sherman Food, Drug and Cosmetic Law, and the California Organic Products Act. In the words of the filing, those practices by cross-defendants “expose consumers to uninspected and unapproved chemicals in food products sold throughout the United States.”

Every parent who paid the organic premium believing it bought their children something safer is entitled to know what this cross-complaint alleges was actually growing in those fields.

- more -

The workers in those fields

The cross-complaint alleges a second scheme, aimed at the people who harvest the crop.

The Scaroni companies are self-insured for workers' compensation, according to the filing, and bore direct financial responsibility for every claim. The cross-complaint alleges they responded by requiring employees — including H-2A guest workers — to sign or initial forms **every single day** declaring that they had suffered no injury, no incident, no first-aid event. Crews were often required to sign **before the workday ended**, swearing to the absence of injuries during hours that had not yet happened. Workers who refused were allegedly told by foremen that their production numbers would be lowered, making termination more likely.

Then, according to the cross-complaint, the company used those signatures as a weapon, producing an injured worker's own pre-signed form to argue the injury was fabricated.

The filing describes what that system meant in practice:

- **A longtime truck dispatcher** allegedly passed out in the field. He was not sent home or medically evaluated. He returned to work. He passed out again. A coworker drove him home. He passed out a third time on the way, and 911 was called. He was hospitalized and diagnosed with a heart attack. Months later, the cross-complaint alleges, his benefits had been cut off, no workers' compensation claim had been filed, and he had been placed on unpaid, unapproved leave — because David Scaroni and in-house counsel had determined the injury was "personal." When Ms. Ridaura objected, David Scaroni allegedly told her he "cannot be responsible for people's poor personal choices," and added: *"he was overweight and didn't take care of himself and I'm sure that is why he had a heart attack."*
- **Three H-2A workers** were injured in a car crash driving to a lettuce field in their own vehicle — transportation the H-2A program requires the employer to provide, but which the company allegedly made them supply themselves to cut costs. David Scaroni allegedly directed that the crash be treated as "personal" because the workers were not yet "working," and initially authorized no medical treatment. Ms. Ridaura alleges she overrode him and sent them to the hospital. He allegedly told her he disagreed, that "now everyone that has any minor issue will expect to be treated," and that he would have preferred to persuade the injured men to go home to Mexico and be removed from the contract.

- more -

- **A worker vomiting through a shift** during a summer of extreme heat was allegedly given Gatorade, a cooling vest, and time in an air-conditioned truck. Then he was sent back to work. He was hospitalized only after he returned to company housing and worsened. To Ms. Ridaura's knowledge, the incident was never reported.
- **A measles outbreak** among workers in the Mexican harvesting operation was allegedly met with an instruction from Matt Scaroni to keep the sick and exposed workers laboring in groups. When Ms. Ridaura sent him photographs of the rashes and asked to separate, house, test, and treat the crew, he allegedly became irate and blamed her for driving up healthcare costs.

H-2A workers, the cross-complaint notes, have their immigration status, their housing, and their future employment tied to the employer who signs their contract. They were, in the language of the filing, "particularly vulnerable."

Fired in under five hours

The cross-complaint alleges Ms. Ridaura's objections cost her everything.

She alleges she was subjected to escalating age-based comments: "aren't you tired," "surely you want out," and, in a meeting where all three Scaronis were present, Matt Scaroni's remark that "everyone becomes irrelevant with age." She alleges her bonus was cut for the first time in over a decade. She alleges she was told to cancel medical appointments and reschedule them for "sometime next year… of course, unless you are dying."

On March 31, 2026, she was told her COO title would be eliminated and that she would become a part-time project manager at $60,000 a year with no benefits, a massive salary cut. The stated reason, according to the filing: she was the highest-paid person in the county, and younger employees needed the money.

Days later, she alleges, Steve Scaroni told her she could resolve things "the easy way or the hard way." The easy way required her to sign over her equity, account for every payment she had authorized in thirty years, and surrender her deferred compensation documentation. The next day she was allegedly sent a three-sentence DocuSign transferring away her rights, with no consideration, no description of what she was giving up, and no explanation. She refused.

On April 9, 2026, her attorneys sent a letter of representation and a litigation hold.

Within five hours, Steve Scaroni left her a voicemail terminating her employment.

The companies then sued her. They later amended their complaint to name her daughter and her husband as alleged co-conspirators.

- more -

Statement of counsel

“Leticia Ridaura gave this company thirty years. She was fired by voicemail five hours after she asked a lawyer for help. That is not a coincidence, and we intend to prove it to a jury.”

“Every family that reaches for the organic label is making a decision about what they are willing to pay to keep something off their children’s plates. This cross-complaint alleges that decision was made for them, in a field they will never see, by people who decided a better yield was worth more than the truth. And the workers who harvested that crop were allegedly asked to sign away their injuries before the shift was even over.”

— Brian G. Hannemann, Hannemann Law Firm, APC, counsel for Leticia Ridaura

About the case

Leticia Ridaura v. Valley Harvesting & Packing, Inc., *et al.*, Superior Court of California, County of Imperial, El Centro Courthouse, Case No. ECU004760. Ms. Ridaura brings claims for whistleblower retaliation (Cal. Labor Code §§ 98.6, 1102.5), age discrimination and retaliation (Cal. Gov’t Code §§ 12940(a), (h)), wrongful termination in violation of public policy, breach of oral contract and promissory estoppel, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and indemnity (Cal. Labor Code § 2802). She has exhausted her administrative remedies and received right-to-sue notices from the California Civil Rights Department. She demands a jury trial.

Ms. Ridaura is represented by Brian G. Hannemann of Hannemann Law Firm, APC, and Zack Broslavsky and Jonathan A. Weinman of Broslavsky & Weinman, LLP.

The statements in this release describe allegations contained in a cross-complaint filed with the Superior Court of California, County of Imperial. Allegations are not evidence and have not been proven. The cross-defendants have not yet responded to the cross-complaint and are presumed not liable unless and until proven otherwise in a court of law. No retailer, grocer, restaurant, produce distributor, or certifying organization named in this release is alleged in the cross-complaint to have engaged in any wrongdoing.

###