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THIRTY-YEAR EXECUTIVE ALLEGES AGRICULTURAL COMPANY BROUGHT UNAPPROVED CHEMICALS ACROSS THE MEXICAN BORDER FOR USE ON PRODUCE SOLD AS ORGANIC — THEN FIRED HER WITHIN HOURS OF LEARNING SHE HAD HIRED A LAWYER

Lawsuit filed in Imperial County alleges undeclared chemical transport across the Mexican border, a practice of discouraging 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. In a lawsuit now pending in Imperial County Superior Court, she alleges that what she found at the top of that company was a practice of putting unapproved agrochemicals on produce sold to American families as organic — and a company that destroyed her career when she refused to look away.

The action, *Ridaura v. Valley Harvesting & Packing, Inc., et al.*, Case No. ECU004760, is brought 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.

What Ms. Ridaura alleges she found

Ms. Ridaura alleges that the companies' Mexican farming operations, run through a related growing entity, knowingly used unapproved and synthetic chemicals and pesticides on produce grown for export to the United States.

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

The produce, she alleges, was designated overwhelmingly as organic.

Ms. Ridaura alleges she complained. Repeatedly. She alleges she went directly to the company's founder in the fall of 2024 after overhearing his son arrange a chemical pickup, and was told he would speak with his son. 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 to her that the chemicals had been ordered deliberately outside the import process.

That third time, she alleges, the founder relayed his son's position back to her: that produce being something other than organic did not make it harmful. She alleges she was then told that her colleague was in charge of Mexico, and that she had enough to do without involving herself in the issue.

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Where that produce goes

Ms. Ridaura alleges that the Scaroni entities handle the crop from seed to harvest to haul — farming inputs, watering, maintenance, harvesting, and sale — and that the produce is sold to major American produce companies, which in turn supply national grocery, restaurant and retail chains.

Those purchasers represent to the market that the produce was grown in compliance with organic certification standards. Ms. Ridaura's lawsuit does not accuse any purchaser, retailer, restaurant, distributor or certifying organization of any wrongdoing. Her allegation is that they were told the same thing consumers were told.

She further alleges that when export loads left the Mexican operation, the accompanying invoices and food safety paperwork represented to clients and to federal border inspectors that only approved methods had been used, and that this paperwork is what allowed the produce to move onward to retailers and consumers as organic.

Ms. Ridaura alleges the practices she describes would violate federal organic production law, federal food and drug law, federal pesticide law, and the corresponding California statutes governing food safety and organic labeling, and that they exposed consumers to unapproved chemicals in food 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 lawsuit alleges was actually growing in those fields.

The workers in those fields

The lawsuit describes a second set of practices, aimed at the people who harvest the crop.

Ms. Ridaura alleges the Scaroni companies are self-insured for workers' compensation and bore direct financial responsibility for every claim. She 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 and no first-aid event. Crews were often required to sign **before the workday ended**, she alleges, attesting 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.

She alleges the company then used those signatures against the workers who gave them, producing an injured worker's own pre-signed form to argue the injury had been fabricated.

Ms. Ridaura alleges the following examples of what that system meant in practice:

- **A longtime truck dispatcher** 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, she alleges, his benefits had been cut off, no workers' compensation claim had been filed, and he had been placed on unpaid, unapproved leave, because an executive and in-house counsel had determined the injury was personal rather than work-related. When she objected, she alleges the executive told her he could not be held responsible for employees' own lifestyle choices, and attributed the heart attack to the man's weight and personal habits.

- **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 she alleges the company made them supply themselves to cut costs. She alleges an executive directed that the crash be treated as personal because the workers were not yet on the clock, and initially authorized no medical treatment. She alleges she overrode him and sent them to the hospital, and that he told her afterward he disagreed, that treating minor issues would lead every worker to expect treatment, and that he would have preferred to persuade the injured men to return home to Mexico and be removed from the contract.
- **A worker vomiting through a shift** during a summer of extreme heat was given Gatorade, a cooling vest and time in an air-conditioned truck, then 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 to keep the sick and exposed workers laboring in groups. She alleges that when she sent photographs of the rashes and asked to separate, house, test and treat the crew, the executive became irate and blamed her for driving up healthcare costs.

H-2A workers, Ms. Ridaura notes, have their immigration status, their housing and their future employment tied to the employer who signs their contract, which she alleges left them especially exposed to pressure of this kind.

Fired in under five hours

Ms. Ridaura alleges her objections cost her everything.

She alleges she was subjected to escalating age-based comments, including suggestions that she must be tired and must want out, and a remark in a meeting with all three Scaronis present 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 the following year, unless she happened to be dying.

On March 31, 2026, she alleges 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, she alleges: she was the highest-paid person in the county, and younger employees needed the money.

Days later, she alleges, the founder told her she could resolve things the easy way or the hard way. The easy way, she alleges, 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 electronic signature request 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, the founder 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.

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 lawsuit 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, age discrimination and retaliation, wrongful termination in violation of public policy, breach of oral contract and promissory estoppel, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and indemnity under the California Labor Code. 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 made by Ms. Ridaura in a civil action pending in the Superior Court of California, County of Imperial. Allegations are not evidence and have not been proven. The cross-defendants have not yet responded and are presumed not liable unless and until proven otherwise in a court of law. No retailer, grocer, restaurant, produce distributor or certifying organization is alleged to have engaged in any wrongdoing.

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