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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Washington Farm Group Calls State L&I Fine Against Gebbers Farms “Enforcement by Crucifixion”**

*The \$2 million fine cannot be justified by the accusations, especially since a crucial one has already been thrown out by a judge. The unprecedented fine suggests the state agency is following the discredited enforcement approach of a former EPA Regional Administrator.*

A state-wide farm group is pushing back against the \$2 million fine announced December 21, 2020 by the State Department of Labor & Industries. Save Family Farming is accusing the state department’s leaders of following a now discredited EPA Regional Administrator’s approach to regulatory compliance. [A video of Region VI administrator Al Armendariz](#) from 2010 shows him following the Roman model of pacification in enforcing the law. He said the Romans would enter a Turkish town, find the first five men and crucify them. The town, he said, that made the town “easier to manage in the next few years.”

[Save Family Farming’s video](#) decrying the state’s action includes a clip of the administrator’s comments. The embarrassment to the EPA leadership caused the administrator to resign after the video became public.

“Such a large fine requires an exceptional level of violations and unassailable proof,” said Gerald Baron, Executive Director of Save Family Farming. “But it appears that proof is missing.” Baron pointed to the decision by an industrial insurance judge that ruled the state’s key accusation of the farm failing to comply with the state’s emergency rules was wrong.

Another accusation was that the farm failed to report the death of a worker to the state. But a Gebbers’ spokesperson explained to Save Family Farming that the worker was taken to the hospital where he died and medical privacy laws prevented the farm from even learning about his death for several days.

An interview with Gebbers’ spokesperson Amy Philpott explaining Gebbers’ position is [available at this link](#).

“What is truly sad about the state’s action here,” Baron noted, “is that it leaves a false impression that this farm and by implication all farmers did not do what they needed to to protect their valued employees.” A document on the group’s website includes a comment from local health officials calling Gebber’s protection protocols “impeccable,” and points to the 99.73 percent non-infection rate among the farm's many employees.

“Farm labor activists have claimed farm workers were at exceptional risk and tried to stop them from even coming to harvest crops,” Baron said. “The facts show that these workers were far safer on the job than in the community and they had less illness than non-farm employees in these communities. It would have been appropriate for the state to clarify that.”

Save Family Farming will follow the appeal by Gebbers Farms and if the farm proves that the state’s accusations are false, will help make certain that the public knows about this abusive and unwarranted enforcement action by a state agency.

*Formed in 2016 to respond to the “What’s Upstream” campaign which illegally used an EPA grant to promote false accusations against farmers, Save Family Farming has three affiliate farm advocacy groups: Whatcom Family Farmers, Skagit Family Farmers and Eastern Washington Family Farmers.*