

Basin/Northwest

Mattawa workers return to work

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MATTAWA — A-B Hop Farm workers returned to their jobs Thursday after a three-day strike at the Mattawa apple orchard.

"They're 100 percent satisfied," said Miguel Juarez, administrator for the United Farm Workers Union.

No one answered the phone Wednesday and Thursday afternoons at A-B Hops.

The workers, who had been thinning Granny Smith, Fuji, Gala and Red Delicious apples, began picketing the company Monday. About 70 of the company's 80 employees joined the strike, demanding higher pay and better work conditions.

Bosses and union leaders reached an agree-

ment around 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, Juarez said.

The agreement calls for a pay raise from \$5.10 to \$6 an hour.

It also outlines the method used to compute salaries for nonhourly work. Employees who prune the trees during winter generally are paid per tree or row, Juarez explained.

A-B also agreed to regularly clean employee restrooms and to provide more drinking water stations for workers.

Several employees complained a company supervisor was verbally abusive to them. In response, the company manager agreed to put the supervisor on a two-day probation. If any more complaints are voiced about the supervisor, he will be fired, the manager reportedly said.

The manager also agreed to reprimand other employees who treat the apple pickers poorly and to repair a malfunctioning punch card machine.

Picketers vowed Tuesday that they would not return to work until A-B provides a written guarantee they will not be fired or laid off because of the strike.

However, company officials refused to make such a promise.

Some workers still fear retaliation, Juarez said, but overall, they view this strike as a success.

"The workers are more confident, and they know that united we can make a difference," he said.

This is the second strike in two weeks to hit the Mattawa area. A strike at King Fuji Ranch ended June 18 with an agreement promising a \$1-an-hour raise for most workers.

As news of the higher pay spreads, Juarez expects more strikes to hit Basin orchards.