

Malaga cherry workers strike

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By The World staff

MALAGA — Chelan County sheriff's deputies were called to a Malaga orchard this morning to help settle a pay dispute between the owner, Hal Lyons, and about 40 cherry pickers.

The workers quit their jobs because they wanted better pay but refused to leave the property, said inspector Mike Harum of the Chelan County Sheriff's Office. Deputies told the workers they had to leave the property, located a few miles west of Malaga on Joe Miller Road, but gave them time to pack up their belongings.

"Because they aren't employed there anymore, they have no legal right to be on the property," Harum said.

Guadalupe Gamboa, director of the state chapter of the United Farmworkers of America, said the employees asked that their pay be raised from \$4 to \$5 per box of cherries picked.

"It seems to be a violation of state law for minimum wages," Gamboa said. Workers are making about \$30 for an 8-9 hour day, he said.

"Their concern was they weren't making any money, and when they complained to the owner he threatened them," Gamboa alleged. "It's pretty serious type stuff."

Representatives from the union were on their way to the scene this morning with plans to talk with the workers and the orchardist.

Meanwhile, the workers planned to stand on county right of way alongside the orchard as a protest, Harum said.

Harum said the workers told him this morning, through an interpreter, that they came to work at the orchard about four days ago. They negotiated a price per bin, then went to work. They were staying in the orchard's state-certified labor camp.

"There's very little negotiations," Gamboa said. "Workers have very little bargaining power. The only power is when they get involved in a work stoppage or a union gets involved."

Harum said deputies were first called to the orchard Wednesday night, when a worker was refusing to leave. But the worker had gone by the time deputies got there, he said.