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**PRESS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release  
September 14, 1998**

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**Workers at Auvil Fruit Company began returning to work this harvest after favorable settlement of their retaliation lawsuit.**

Sunnyside: This Monday, September 14, 1998, eight workers returned to work at Auvil Fruit Company after a favorable settlement was reached in a lawsuit they initiated against the company. Earlier this year over two dozen workers filed a lawsuit against Auvil Fruit Company alleging they were fired or denied re-employment for participating in a four-day harvest time work stoppage that started Labor Day of last year. Auvil Fruit Company is owned by prominent apple grower, Grady Auvil, a recipient of the 1998 Washington Medal of Merit Award.

Approximately 150 workers went on strike September 1, 1997 with the backing of the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO (UFW). The strike was about excessive quality requirements and arbitrary firings by company foremen. On the first day of the bitter four-day strike, 26 patrol cars from Kittitas and Grant County Sheriffs and the Washington State Patrol responded to company complaints that proved to be unfounded. Several Washington State Patrol officers brandished assault rifles at the peaceful protesters.

“We are very happy that the United Farm Workers supported us in our strike and helped us get our jobs back,” Said Ignacio Sanchez, on of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. “We are very appreciative of the support the UFW has given us,” he added. “United we can create change and we hope to continue to work towards improving conditions at Auvil Fruit Company.”

The settlement agreement gives plaintiffs in the lawsuit the right to return to work at Auvil Fruit Company this harvest season. The settlement agreement states that workers who sign-up at Auvil Fruit before September 10, 1998 will have jobs this harvest. Auvil Fruit Company will be hiring the plaintiffs in the order they signed-up with the company until all of the plaintiffs have been re-hired. The company will notify the UFW of the availability of jobs three days prior to the starting date and provide a list of the workers who are to return to work. The UFW will then notify the workers that they are to return to work.

“The return of these workers to their previous jobs is a great victory for these workers and for all workers who stand up for their rights,” said Guadalupe Gamboa, Regional Director of the United Farm Workers of America. “We are happy to work with Auvil Fruit to get the workers back to work. If Auvil Fruit Company allows the collective bargaining process to take place then unresolved labor management problems can be reduced or eliminated.”

Unlike warehouse and industrial workers, collective bargaining laws do not cover farm workers in this state. State case law protects workers who try to organize from interference with these efforts. However an employer is not legally obligated to engage in collective bargaining even if a majority of its employees want to have union representation. Currently the UFW has only one collective bargaining agreement in Washington State. This collective bargaining agreement, with the largest wine producer in the state, Stimson Lane, Ltd, was obtained after an eight-year effort that at one time involved an international boycott of the company's wines.

“My co-workers and I are very happy to be returning to work” said Jose Nevarez, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. “Myself and most of the other workers who who found ourselves without a job after the work stoppage have been with the company for many years. We all feel very thankful that the United Farm Workers found attorneys to help us get our jobs back. We feel vindicated and good about standing up for ourselves. At the same time we will remain vigilant.”

In addition to reinstatement, plaintiffs in the lawsuit will receive \$40,000 (forty thousand) as compensation for lost wages. Furthermore, Auvil Fruit Company has agreed to treat workers in a non-discriminatory, non-retaliatory manner in the future. In return the plaintiffs have agreed to drop the lawsuit with prejudice.