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**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
FOR THE COUNTY OF MERCED**

BARTOLA SANTIAGO, individually, and on  
behalf of all others similarly situated,

*Plaintiff,*

v.

GREEN VALLEY LABOR, INC., a California  
corporation; THE BURCHELL NURSERY,  
INC., and DOES 1 through 10, inclusive,

*Defendants.*

Case No.: 21CV-00413

**CLASS AND REPRESENTATIVE  
ACTION**

[Assigned for all purposes to: Hon. Brian L.  
McCabe]

**ORDER GRANTING  
PLAINTIFF'S MOTION FOR  
PRELIMINARY APPROVAL OF CLASS  
ACTION SETTLEMENT**

[Filed with Notice of Motion and Motion,  
Memorandum of Points and Authorities; the  
Declaration of Justin F. Marquez]

**PRELIMINARY APPROVAL HEARING**

Date: October 24, 2024

Time: 8:15 a.m.

Dept: 8

Complaint filed: February 5, 2021

FAC filed: January 14, 2022

SAC filed: September 19, 2024

Trial date: Not set

The Court has before it Plaintiff Bartola Santiago's ("Plaintiff") Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement. Having reviewed the Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement, the Declaration of Justin F. Marquez, the Class Action and PAGA Settlement Agreement and Class Notice (which is referred to here as the "Settlement Agreement"), and good cause appearing, the Court hereby finds and orders as follows:

1. The Court finds on a preliminary basis that the Settlement Agreement appears to be fair, adequate, and reasonable and therefore meets the requirements for preliminary approval. The Court grants preliminary approval of the Settlement and the Settlement Class based upon the terms set forth in the Settlement Agreement between Plaintiff Bartola Santiago and Defendants Green Valley Labor, Inc. ("Green Valley") and The Burchell Nursery, Inc. ("Burchell Nursery" and collectively with Green Valley, "Defendants"), attached to the Declaration of Justin F. Marquez in Support of Plaintiff's Motion for Preliminary Approval of Class Action Settlement as Exhibit 1.

2. The Settlement falls within the range of reasonableness of a settlement which could ultimately be given final approval by this Court, and appears to be presumptively valid, subject only to any objections that may be raised at the Final Approval Hearing and final approval by this Court. The Court notes that Defendants have agreed to create a common fund of \$500,000.00 to cover (a) settlement payments to class members who do not validly opt out; (b) a \$25,000.00 payment to the State of California, Labor & Workforce Development Agency for its share of the settlement of claims for penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act, with 75% of which (\$18,750.00) will be paid to the LWDA and 25% (\$6,250.00) will be paid to eligible Aggrieved Employees; (c) Class Representative service payment of up to \$10,000.00 for Plaintiff Bartola Santiago; (d) Class Counsel's attorneys' fees, not to exceed 33 1/3% of the Gross Settlement Amount (\$166,666.67), and up to \$15,000.00 in costs for actual litigation expenses incurred by Class Counsel; and (e) Settlement Administration Costs of up to \$30,000.00.

3. The Court preliminarily finds that the terms of the Settlement appear to be within the range of possible approval, pursuant to California Code of Civil Procedure § 382 and

applicable law. The Court finds on a preliminary basis that: (1) the settlement amount is fair and reasonable to the class members when balanced against the probable outcome of further litigation relating to class certification, liability and damages issues, and potential appeals; (2) significant informal discovery, investigation, research, and litigation have been conducted such that counsel for the parties at this time are able to reasonably evaluate their respective positions; (3) settlement at this time will avoid substantial costs, delay, and risks that would be presented by the further prosecution of the litigation; and (4) the proposed settlement has been reached as the result of intensive, serious, and non-collusive negotiations between the Parties with the assistance of a well-respected class action mediator. Accordingly, the Court preliminarily finds that the Settlement Agreement was entered into in good faith.

4. A final fairness hearing on the question of whether the proposed settlement, attorneys' fees and costs to Class Counsel, payment to the State of California, Labor & Workforce Development Agency for its share of the settlement of claims for penalties under the Private Attorneys General Act, and the class representative's enhancement award should be finally approved as fair, reasonable and adequate as to the members of the class is hereby set in accordance with the Implementation Schedule set forth below.

5. The Court provisionally certifies for settlement purposes only the following class (the "Settlement Class"): "all persons who were employed by Green Valley and assigned to work for Burchell Nursery in California as hourly-paid or non-exempt employees during the Class Period."

6. "Class Period" means the period from February 5, 2017 to May 17, 2023.

7. The Court finds, for settlement purposes only, that the Settlement Class meets the requirements for certification under California Code of Civil Procedure § 382 in that: (1) the Settlement Class Members are so numerous that joinder is impractical; (2) there are questions of law and fact that are common, or of general interest, to all Settlement Class Members, which predominate over individual issues; (3) Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Settlement Class Members; (4) Plaintiff and Class Counsel will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Settlement Class Members; and (5) a class action is superior to other

1 available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.

2 8. The Court appoints as Class Representative, for settlement purposes only,  
3 Plaintiff Bartola Santiago. The Court further preliminarily approves Plaintiff's ability to request  
4 an incentive award up to \$10,000.00.

5 9. The Court appoints, for settlement purposes only, Justin F. Marquez, Benjamin  
6 H. Haber, and Daniel J. Kramer of Wilshire Law Firm, PLC as Class Counsel. The Court further  
7 preliminarily approves Class Counsel's ability to request attorneys' fees of up to one-third of  
8 the Total Settlement Amount (\$166,666.67), and costs not to exceed \$15,000.00.

9 10. The Court appoints CPT Group, Inc. as the Settlement Administrator with  
10 reasonable administration costs estimated not to exceed \$30,000.00.

11 11. The Court approves, as to form and content the Class Notice, attached to the  
12 Settlement Agreement. The Court finds on a preliminary basis that plan for distribution of the  
13 Notice to Settlement Class Members satisfies due process, provides the best notice practicable  
14 under the circumstances, and shall constitute due and sufficient notice to all persons entitled  
15 thereto.

16 12. The parties are ordered to carry out the Settlement according to the terms of the  
17 Settlement Agreement.

18 13. Any class member who does not timely and validly request exclusion from the  
19 settlement may object to the Settlement Agreement.

20 14. The Court orders the following Implementation Schedule:

22 Defendants to provide Class List to the 23 Settlement Administrator	14 days after notice of entry of the Court's order granting Motion for Preliminary 24 Approval
25 Settlement Administrator to mail the Notice 26 Packets	14 days after receipt of the Class List from the Defendant
27 Response Deadline	45 days after Notice is mailed out by the

	Settlement Administrator
Deadline to Provide Written Objections, if any	45 days after Notice is mailed out by the Settlement Administrator
Deadline to file Motion for Final Approval, Request for Attorney's Fees and Costs, and Service Award to Plaintiff	16 court days before hearing on Motion for Final Approval, which is <u>1-21-25</u> ;
Final Approval Hearing	<u>2-6-24</u> at <u>8:15</u> <u>a.m.</u> /p.m., or first available date thereafter, in Department 8. The hearing may be continued to another date without further notice to the Class Members.

15. The Court further ORDERS that, pending further order of this Court, all proceedings in this lawsuit, except those contemplated herein and in the settlement, are stayed.

**IT IS SO ORDERED.**

DATE:

10/24/24

Brian L. McCabe  
Hon. Brian L. McCabe  
Merced County Superior Court