

Shepherds Allege that an Antitrust Conspiracy Has Kept Them Below the Poverty Line

Denver, September 1, 2015: Today, two former shepherds filed a class action lawsuit alleging that ranchers across the Western United States colluded to depress shepherd wages, illegally deducted expenses from their meager paychecks, and misled state and federal governments in a pattern of racketeering activity. Filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado, the complaint describes an industry that has manipulated temporary worker visas to push American workers out of the business and replace them with foreign workers who are less likely to complain about egregious working conditions. The Complaint alleges that most shepherds earn between \$2 and \$3 per hour and seventy percent reported never having access to a functioning toilet.

“The amount they paid us never seemed right,” said Plaintiff Esliper Huaman, a former shepherd. “Many fellow shepherds are still suffering under these low wages, and I hope that I can help benefit them through this complaint. They should not be exploited for their lack of knowledge of the law and their employers should not be able to take advantage of them.”

“Our clients are attacking long-standing exploitative practices by the ranchers and their industry associations,” explained Towards Justice Director of Litigation Alexander Hood, the lead attorney for the Plaintiffs. “Those practices have depressed wages for shepherds to such a degree that almost all American workers have been pushed out of the industry, vulnerable foreign workers are routinely imported, and the public somehow accepts that paying people \$2-\$3 per hour is okay. It is not.”

“The terminology that ranchers use to describe workers in this industry – words like ‘jumpers’ and ‘runaways’ – harkens to a much darker era in American history,” said Towards Justice Executive Director Nina DiSalvo. “In 2015 the abysmal wages paid to the shepherds who raise Colorado lamb and sheer American wool are not only unjust, they are illegally low due to collusive activity that we believe violates the Sherman Antitrust Act.”