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Estimated printed pages: 3

Sacramento Bee, The (CA)

August 19, 2005

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: BUSINESS

Page: D1

Topics:

**Index Terms:**

PROFILE

WOMEN

**Winemaker settles suits alleging bias****R.H. Phillips agrees to pay four female ex-workers \$180,000.**

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Article Text:

They say their supervisors at R.H. Phillips vineyard in Esparto knew them as "mujeres problematicas," problem women who spoke up too much. They spoke up about the lack of bathroom breaks, and the drinking water they said tasted like diesel. They spoke up about the sexually humiliating things they said their supervisor yelled at them.

They spoke up, they said, and they were ignored.

So on Thursday, under the noontime sun in Woodland, Amelia Alcauter, 51, Antonia Chavez, 44, Maria Elena Carabez, 43, and Angela Aparicio, 27, spoke up again. They hailed their \$180,000 settlement with the winery as a victory for all women. Flanked by their lawyers from the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Equal Rights Advocates and **Talamantes Villegas** Carrera, LLP, they stood in front of the ornately columned Yolo County courthouse where they had filed their lawsuits.

In 2004, the women filed a pair of lawsuits against R.H. Phillips and one of its general managers, claiming sexual discrimination, harassment, retaliation, wrongful termination, failure to pay minimum wage, and failure to provide rest periods, meal periods, tools and equipment. They were seeking lost and unpaid wages and unspecified damages for emotional distress.

On one side of Thursday's loosely organized press conference, the women's friends, children and co-workers held handwritten signs in English and Spanish that read, "Sexual abuse is against the law" and

"Enough with workplace abuse."

On the other side of them stood Mike Jaeger, the president of R.H. Phillips Inc.; Sam McAdam, the winery's lawyer, and two other representatives.

R.H. Phillips officials denied all of the women's allegations and said they settled because it was cheaper than going to trial.

"We believe the allegations made by these four women are without merit, and we deny they were discriminated against in any way," Jaeger said, reading from a prepared statement.

"We want our management and employees to focus on making great wines, rather than worrying about depositions and a trial," he said.

McAdam said he did not know what motive the women might have for claiming such abuses, but that it was a good question to ask of them.

"The claim of gender discrimination," he said, "is false and outrageous."

Alcauter said in Spanish she was fighting for other women like her. "How many more like us are out there?" she asked.

The women said they endured the same harsh conditions as their male counterparts. In court papers, they said they were denied potable water and were transported from place to place crammed into the back of a pickup truck with no seatbelts.

They also said they experienced certain abuses specifically because they are women. They said they were not allowed to use the restroom for hours on end and often experienced great stomach and kidney pain. They said they were told they were more trouble than men because they couldn't urinate in between vineyard rows. They said their supervisor referred to them with derogatory terms for prostitutes and female dogs and sometimes made sexual references that embarrassed them.

Carabez's eyes filled with tears when she said she was talked to that way in front of her children. That, she said, was the biggest humiliation of all.

In 2003, the four women were not called back for their seasonal jobs as they had been in previous years. R.H. Phillips said their positions were contracted out, but the women say the winery chose not to hire women for field work and put them on a black list. They said they have since had trouble finding work in the area.

Aparicio said she felt timid when they first filed the two lawsuits charging the winery with gender discrimination and sexual harassment. She'd never done anything like that. But Alcauter had been resolute.

"Ya basta," she said. Enough was enough. She had never learned to read and write, so someone accompanied her to court to help fill out the papers.

"Women have to fight," she said in Spanish after the conference. "We don't have to be humiliated. Because we're worth a lot."

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