

Behind the Harvest: Private Equity and Worker Safety at Grimmway Farms

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a bunch of freshly harvested carrots. The carrots are orange with some green tops still attached. The background is a dark, blurred field of more carrots. A blue geometric pattern, resembling a zigzag or a series of connected triangles, is overlaid on the right side of the image.



Grimmway Farms (Grimmway) is the largest carrot grower in the [world](#), growing through acquiring smaller operations since the 1990s when it bought the farm that invented baby carrots. Grimmway was acquired by private equity firm Teays River Investments in 2021 and has continued to grow through acquisitions, controlling between 40-50% of the US carrot market share in [recent](#) years. Grimmway and its largest competitor Bolthouse Farms, also owned by a private equity firm, control up to 80% of US carrot production combined.

“There’s only two sources,” Adam Waglay, cofounder and co-CEO of Bolthouse owner Butterfly Equity, [told](#) Forbes. “We joke around — it’s kind of like the OPEC of carrots.”

In its present form, Grimmway Produce Group (Grimmway), operates in California and [nine](#) other states from Washington to Florida. Grimmway grows carrots, potatoes, and other vegetables and is sold under many different labels, including Cal Organic, Bunny-Luv, and department store [generic](#) brands, such as [Target](#), Publix, and Trader Joe’s.

As a key player in the organic produce and carrot industry, many customers buy their products because of perceived environmental and health impacts, but may not think much about the thousands of farmworkers that do the hard work of planting, cultivating, and harvesting carrots across the company's growing regions. Grimmway workers make it possible to stock grocery stores around the world with year-round carrots and other vegetables, but the company has been plagued by a series of labor abuse scandals that Teays River has failed to address.

As private equity firms continue to [acquire](#) large portions of the US agricultural supply chain, these firms and their investors must focus on the agricultural workers that allow these companies and our nations’ food system to operate. It will require a longer term investment in improved working conditions to turn around a long [history](#) of labor rights abuses in the agricultural industry.

Private equity's growth in the agricultural industry

Private equity firms generally raise money from institutional investors like endowments and pension funds to purchase companies and quickly make a company more profitable before selling it in a relatively short period of time. This business model can lead to worse working conditions for farmworkers, increased prices for consumers, and risky financial strategies that can heighten risk for bankruptcy and jeopardize institutional investors. Experts expect that private equity investment in agriculture will continue to [grow](#) in future years.

Founded in 2007, Teays River Investments is a private equity firm based in Carmel, Indiana that invests in agricultural businesses. The firm maintains a low profile, with very little web presence or publicly available information about its investment strategy or portfolio companies and investments.

In 2025, Micah Vincent took over as CEO of Teays River Investments. Vincent [previously](#) worked at a financial firm and multiple private equity and venture capital backed companies. He served as the Director of the Indiana Office of Management and Budget from 2015 to 2019, [appointed](#) by Governor Mike Pence.



History of labor abuse in the agricultural industry

The agricultural industry in the US has a long [history](#) of labor abuse that still plagues the industry today. Historical exclusions of the sector from traditional workplace protections that were passed in the Jim Crow era when agricultural workers were largely Black [continue](#) to this day, even as the workforce has changed significantly. Agricultural workers are [excluded](#) entirely from the main US labor law, the National Labor Relations Act, and have [exemptions](#) from the [Fair Labor Standards Act](#) and many state-level protections, such as workers' compensation [insurance](#). California is one of the few states that has a [state](#) level labor law that covers agricultural workers.

The results of these exclusions in the industry generally include poverty wages, dangerous worksites, little to no [benefits](#), [child labor](#), regular [violations](#) of federal law, and [conditions](#) that have largely been eliminated in most other industries.

Labor issues are compounded by the unique legal status of most agricultural workers. While estimates vary due to an often hidden workforce, most estimates consider that the majority of farmworkers across the country are either undocumented or working under an H2A work visa.

A 2019 [survey](#) by the advocacy organization Centro de Derechos del Migrante (CDM) found that there is a large power imbalance between H2A guest workers and their employers because the visas are tied to a single employer. Employers control which workers can enter the US and if workers are fired or quit, they can lose their housing and ability to remain in the US, leading many to feel that they must remain in abusive working conditions.





Dangerous working conditions, wage theft, and other violations plague Grimmway Farms

Grimmway has grown to employ from [6,000](#) to [8,000](#) people across 95,000 acres of crops and has faced criticism, lawsuits, and fines from regulatory agencies since its acquisition by Teays River Investments in 2021.

In September 2025, a federal judge [ruled](#) that Grimmway engaged in a pattern or practice of disability discrimination against farmworkers. According to the judge, injured workers were [regularly](#) pushed into a process that illegally denied them light duty or other accommodations, leaving many without income or forcing them to choose between returning without accommodations or losing their jobs altogether.

According to the Sacramento Bee, “The company, which employs thousands in California’s Central Valley, has faced scrutiny over its labor practices in the past but has maintained that it complies with employment laws.”

Just a month before this ruling, the US Department of Labor [announced](#) that Grimmway was ordered to pay \$427,456

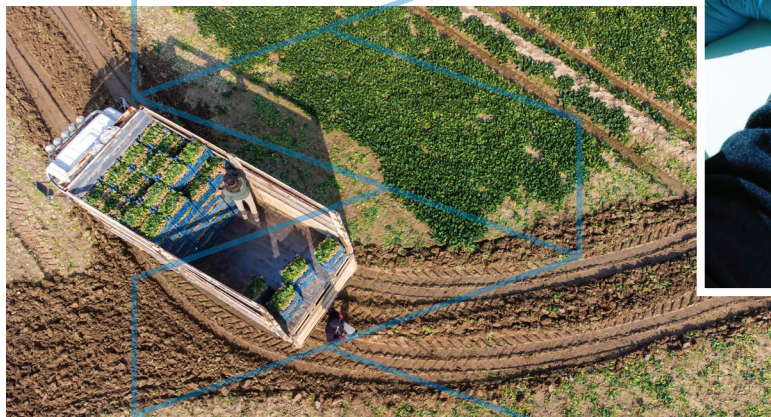
in back wages and penalties after a separate investigation found that in Washington state, US and H2A workers were underpaid and subjected to unsafe housing conditions and transportation, in violation of federal law.

“Agricultural workers are a vital part of maintaining the U.S.’s food supply and often work under physically grueling conditions. As one of the largest producers of carrots in the country, Grimmway Enterprises has a responsibility to ensure that all of their employees have a safe, sanitary working environment and are paid their rightfully earned wages,” [said](#) Wage and Hour Division District Director Thomas Silva in Seattle.

Since acquisition by Teays River, the company has been fined [over \\$145,342](#) by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) over 19 violations, including seven categorized by OSHA as “serious.” About half of these violations have been contested, and those cases remain open as of August 2026.

Grimmway OSHA Fines

Citation Type	Issuance Date	Abatement Due Date	Current Penalty	Initial Penalty	Latest Event
Other	10/07/2025	10/22/2025	\$425	\$425	C - Contested
Other	10/07/2025	10/22/2025	\$315	\$315	C - Contested
Serious	10/07/2025	10/15/2025	\$15,300	\$15,300	C - Contested
Serious	10/07/2025	10/15/2025	\$15,300	\$15,300	C - Contested
Serious	03/13/2025	03/25/2025	\$7,650	\$15,300	B - Modified - Abatement Credit
Other	02/19/2025		\$635	\$635	C - Contested
Other	02/19/2025	03/10/2025	\$635	\$635	C - Contested
Serious	02/19/2025	03/03/2025	\$15,300	\$15,300	C - Contested
Serious	02/19/2025	03/03/2025	\$18,000	\$18,000	C - Contested
Other	03/19/2024	04/05/2024	\$5,000	\$5,000	O - Administrative Law Judge Order
Other	03/19/2024		\$425	\$425	O - Administrative Law Judge Order
Other	03/19/2024	03/29/2024	\$850	\$18,000	O - Administrative Law Judge Order
Serious	03/19/2024	03/29/2024	\$9,000	\$9,000	C - Contested
Serious	03/19/2024	03/29/2024	\$18,000	\$18,000	C - Contested
Other	10/19/2023	11/06/2023	\$635	\$635	Z - Issued
Other	07/07/2023	09/01/2023	\$8,000	\$11,162	I - Informal Settlement
Other	07/08/2021	07/27/2021	\$850	\$850	I - Informal Settlement
Other	07/08/2021	07/27/2021	\$0	\$635	I - Informal Settlement
Other	08/04/2021	08/23/2021	\$0	\$425	I - Informal Settlement
			\$116,320	\$145,342	



“Even a worker losing their life wasn’t going to stop them from finishing the work. We’re just a piece of trash for them.”

—Grimmway farmworker who tried to help Rosa Sanchez

A tragic, preventable death

One of the most devastating deaths at Grimmway occurred in 2023, when Rosa Miriam Sanchez [died](#) in the fields after being run over by a truck twice. Sanchez was a 58 year-old immigrant from El Salvador who came to the United States hoping to provide a better life for her children. She was reported to have died in her daughters’ arms, who was also working in the same crew at Grimmway.

A local news outlet [reported](#) at the time that “Employees were permitted to perform work functions, such as harvesting operations in close proximity to a Commercial Truck being driven in an unsafe manner. . . . Witnesses said they became further incensed when they were told to get back to work while Sanchez’s body lay in the field under a yellow covering while awaiting an ambulance.”

California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (CalOSHA) interviews with Grimmway workers inspected by PESP provide even more context than the original news coverage described. CalOSHA inspectors interviewed workers about the incident and the truck driver involved. Multiple employees and supervisors told CalOSHA inspectors that the driver of the truck had previously driven unsafely in the fields, hitting objects such as water jugs, farm equipment, and almost hitting workers

on multiple occasions. These same employees told investigators that they had reported this behavior to Grimmway supervisors but the company supervisors did nothing to stop the driver from putting workers at risk. One employee reported that when she told the Grimmway supervisor about a previous example of dangerous driving around workers, the supervisor laughed and said “as long as he did not hit a person, it is OK.” The driver acknowledged that he was driving a large truck with an obstructed rear view in reverse at about 25 miles per hour in the field when he struck Ms. Sanchez, although he denied previously hitting objects like water jugs, farm equipment, and harvesters.

The Grimmway supervisor that did not act on the complaints from multiple employees was never interviewed by CalOSHA because Grimmway sought to quash his subpoena and found him an attorney who declined to allow his client to answer any questions based on his fifth amendment right against self incrimination.

The OSHA inspection shows a troubling lack of concern by Grimmway employees about health and safety in the workplace that led to a fully preventable death of a farmworker harvesting carrots for the company.



Conclusion

Grimmway Produce Group is one of the largest agricultural employers in the country providing produce to some of the biggest [retailers](#) in the world, such as Walmart, Target, Trader Joes, Whole Foods, and [Costco](#). Teays River controls over \$1billion in assets under management with investments from large US pension funds. Private equity proponents often tout the advantages of scale and resources that come with private equity-backed acquisition and consolidation; however, companies like Grimmway and Teays River have not shown that these additional resources and economies of scale have produced any improvement to the longstanding difficult and dangerous working conditions in the agricultural industry.

Teays River should immediately commit to a set of workforce principles that ensure:

- A sustainable minimum wage
- Equitable scheduling and hours of work
- Paid sick leave and affordable healthcare
- A workplace free of discrimination and harassment
- Safe working conditions
- Protections in the event of layoffs
- The right to organize free of discrimination and harassment
- Protection from technology that undermines working conditions

Pension funds and other investors should assess the hazards associated with investing in private equity firms in the agricultural space, particularly where portfolio companies have a track record of labor rights violations and insist on reforming problematic practices within the portfolio companies these private equity firms own.

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