



Issue Date: 12 December 2018

CASE NO.: 2018-FDA-00005

In the Matter of:

MONIQUE BRYANT,
Complainant,

v.

FARMERS RICE COOPERATIVE,
Respondent.

DECISION AND ORDER
APPROVING SETTLEMENT

This case involves the employee protection provisions of Section 402 of the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (“FSMA”), P.L. 111-353 (Jan. 4, 2011), codified at Federal, Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, 21 U.S.C. § 399d, and the implementing regulations set forth at 29 C.F.R. Part 1987. Monique Bryant (“Complainant”) is a self-represented litigant. Attorney Kim Lucia represents Respondent. The matter is currently not set for hearing. On December 10, 2018, the parties submitted a Settlement and Release Agreement (“Settlement Agreement”) that resolved all issues pending for hearing in this matter.

At any time after the filing of objections to the Assistant Secretary’s findings, the case may be settled if the participating parties agree to a settlement and the settlement is approved by the administrative law judge. 29 C.F.R. § 1987.111(d)(2). A copy of the settlement shall be filed with the ALJ. *Id.* Any settlement approved by the administrative law judge will constitute the final order of the Secretary and may be enforced pursuant to § 1987.113. 29 C.F.R. § 1987.111(e).

The Settlement Agreement includes a general release of liability which resolves matters and potential matters under a multitude of state and federal laws other than the FSMA. My authority over settlement agreements is limited to the statutes that are within my jurisdiction, and I have restricted my review of the Settlement Agreement to ascertaining whether its terms fairly, adequately, and reasonably settle this FSMA case. *Mann v. Schwan’s Food Company*, ARB No. 09-017, ALJ No. 2008-STA-00027, slip op. at 4 (ARB Dec. 31, 2008).

The Settlement Agreement also included a confidentiality provision agreed to by the parties. The files maintained by this Office, including this Settlement Agreement, are subject to disclosure under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), unless an exemption applies. 5 U.S.C. § 552; *Johnson v. U.S. Bancorp*, ARB No. 13-014, 13-046, ALJ No. 2010-SOX-00037, slip op. at

2 (ARB July 22, 2013). The Department of Labor has regulations that govern the FOIA process, and exemptions are determined at the time of the request, not at the time of the filing of the agreement. 29 C.F.R. Part 70; *Johnson v. U.S. Bancorp*, ARB No. 13-014, 13-046, ALJ No. 2010-SOX-00037, slip op. at 2 (ARB July 22, 2013). The parties agree that the Settlement Agreement is confidential, which I construe to mean they object to any disclosure under FOIA. I order that the settlement agreement be placed in a sealed and separate envelope, clearly marked with notice that the parties object to disclosure and seek the procedures of 29 C.F.R. § 70.26 prior to any release of information.

As construed, and after carefully considering the terms of the Settlement Agreement, I find that the terms and conditions appear to be fair, adequate, and reasonable. I further find that the Settlement Agreement is not contrary to the public interest.

The terms and conditions of the Settlement Agreement are incorporated by reference into this Decision and Order and are hereby adopted and approved. The parties are ordered to carry out the provisions of the Settlement Agreement. The parties having resolved all the issues pending for hearing, the matter is now fully concluded. All dates are vacated. The matter is closed.

SO ORDERED.

RICHARD M. CLARK
Administrative Law Judge