



Whistleblower Hotline Highlights Company Values & Promotes Global Ethics within the Agricultural Industry



The Company

Global agricultural grower committed to “delighting consumers and enriching their employees and communities”.



The Challenge

Provide a resource for employees to voice issues and speak up about behavior that is not consistent with the company values –delivering swift resolutions for all internal and external stakeholders.



The Result

An efficient process to safeguard the company values of honesty, fairness, and respect, while also mitigating potential business risk for the Reiter brand.

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- Mario Gonzalez, Director of Internal Audit

Some companies implement an employee hotline to check off a compliance box. Some do it to support their broader governance, risk, and compliance objectives. Some may even claim that they’re trying to build a better workplace culture, but few demonstrate as clear a commitment to using their hotline as a tool to help make the world a truly better place as Reiter Affiliated Companies—which has extended its whistleblower implementation beyond its employees to include its contractors, suppliers, and the communities where they work, live, and raise their families.

Higher Standards Promote Ethics in Agriculture

Historically, the agricultural industry has suffered from a lack of ethical standards, compliance measures and poorly monitored worker welfare. With many wholesalers typically procuring their produce from independent growers, there was a lack of transparency and accountability for the ethical treatment of farmworkers and packhouse workers throughout the supply chain. Since many wholesalers do not directly employ these workers, it was easy for them to abdicate responsibility for their working conditions in the fields. The lack of a vertically integrated business structure sometimes meant that farmworkers had inadequate protection from sexual harassment, wage theft, and other worker welfare issues common to unregulated workplaces.

Over the years however, consumers have dramatically changed the marketplace, calling for clear transparency in the supply chain and demanding the legal and ethical treatment of agricultural workers. Reiter has long been at the forefront of worker welfare, and as a family run business for more than a century, have always been committed to supporting a happy, legal, and ethical workplace for their farmworkers. As part of this commitment, Reiter enforces a strict code of conduct throughout their global farming operations, that incorporates standards from their customer, Driscoll’s, and organizations like the International Labor Organization (ILO), Global Social Compliance Program (GSCP) Standards, and Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI). Reiter also contributes two percent of its profits annually to philanthropic organizations and initiatives that support farmworker housing, medical clinics, childcare centers, educational institutions, and other organizations that contribute to the wellbeing of farmworkers and their families.

Reiter’s commitment to ethics is revealed in concrete results. The percentage of farm workers in Mexico eligible for Social Security (IMSS) rose from less than 20% to 85% between 2015 and 2018. Reiter and their affiliated companies contributed more than one million kilos of berries to local food banks globally and berries produced from their operations in Baja California have all been 100% Fair Trade certified since 2016.

With WhistleBlower Security's *IntegrityCounts*, Reiter was able to:

- **Quickly discover and address** ethical, illegal, or inappropriate issues across its global business
- **Proactively discover patterns and trends** of potentially problematic behavior
- **Provide a confidential way** for employees to present issues to management and lessen the potential for legal claims
- **Concretely demonstrate** its leadership role in the ethics of global agriculture

How the Hotline Keeps Things Cool

Before implementing its Whistleblower *IntegrityCounts* system, Reiter faced the same challenges many other companies do. If someone wanted to notify management about a problem in the field, they would make a call that would have to be transcribed by an operator and then emailed to the appropriate individuals. Operators wouldn't always capture all the information that Reiter's managers needed, because information intake wasn't properly formalized. Language barriers also posed a problem since Reiter has operations all over the world—and not everyone speaks fluent English, or mainstream Spanish.

Adoption of the Whistleblower platform helped Reiter address all these shortcomings and more. One of the most important transformations occurred as a result of the work WhistleBlower and Reiter did collaboratively to systematize incident intake. Bringing a consistent, custom-designed structure to intake calls helped ensure that Reiter's managers all receive the information they need—and callers would not have that nagging feeling that they forgot to mention something important following their call.

WhistleBlower also provides Reiter with call intake services in all the languages they needed, included English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Portuguese, and Mexican indigenous languages, with the option to add more language support as needed. In addition, Reiter can make it easier for field workers to report issues via its customized mobile website and the popular WhatsApp messaging service.

Reiter is even extending its implementation of the Whistleblower platform to members of the communities where they have an operational presence. So, if an employee—or even an employee of a contractor to a grower—engages in some unacceptable behavior, community representatives can have a high level of confidence that Reiter will hold that person accountable.

Perhaps most importantly, with the Whistleblower platform, Reiter now has a unified, effective, and cost-efficient platform for receiving, processing, distributing, managing, and tracking incidents across all geographies and topics. That's a major advantage for an organization that's committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethics in the challenging world of global agriculture.

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More than Software

Gonzalez adds that the value Reiter is getting from WhistleBlower goes far beyond the functionality of the *IntegrityCounts* software. For one thing, there's all the work WhistleBlower put into understanding Reiter's specific requirements and objectives—as well as the commitment WhistleBlower demonstrated during the initial implementation to meeting Reiter's expectations regarding employee training, wait-times, and other success metrics.

In addition, there is a strong ongoing partnership that Reiter has with WhistleBlower as it seeks to continuously improve and refine its hotline processes. "Accountability across an organization like ours—with so many critical relationships beyond the four walls of the company and such a diverse set of ethics to stay on top of—is not a simple 'one and done' project," says Gonzalez. "So, we really appreciate how responsive WhistleBlower is whenever we reach out, whether we have technical questions about the software or are looking for best-practice guidance on governance issues."

Ultimately, though, what Gonzalez and Reiter appreciate most about WhistleBlower is its corporate values. "The people at WhistleBlower really understand that true ethical excellence requires everyone across their organization and ours—from Reiter's employees to WhistleBlower's call center staff and tech support team—to all be aligned in the same direction," says Gonzalez. "I look forward to seeing the impact of our work with WhistleBlower in the future on both the culture here at Reiter and the ethical leadership we hope to drive across the agricultural industry."