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LABOUR EXPLOITATION

Breaches earn slap

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THREE companies penalised after an extensive poultry industry investigation received small fines, it has been revealed.

This is despite the Fair Work Ombudsman inquiry discovering extensive exploitation of overseas workers and thousands of dollars in wages unaccounted for among 34 labour hire companies. The companies provided staff for chicken company Baiada Group.

The inquiry, which began in 2013, found evidence foreign workers were underpaid and forced to work "extremely" long hours by companies providing labour for Baiada's three NSW poultry processing sites.

The three companies found to have breached labour laws were fined \$850 for each violation by the FWO.

One of these companies, JLP Poultry PL, closed before the fine could be issued.

JL Poultry PL, one of three labour hire firms used by Baiada at its Tamworth plant, failed to issue pay slips to employees as required. But FWO was unable to pursue the \$850 fine

because the company deregistered last December.

JL Poultry took seven months to provide records to FWO and failed to account for \$130,333 in wages paid by Baiada. Another Baiada contractor, Global HR Net, was issued with two \$850 fines by FWO for not issuing proper pay slips or keeping correct records.

FWO found Global HR Net had "misclassified" staff as independent contractors when they were actually employees.

A third Baiada contractor, WL Jian PL, was fined for not issuing proper pay slips or keeping records for seven years.

Worker exploitation and labour laws were discussed at last week's National Horticulture Convention in Queensland, where US Potato Board chief executive Blair Richardson said 80 per cent of millennials — people age 19-36 — wanted to know where and how their food was grown.

"They want to know what you're putting in your food, are you treating your employees properly — it's not just about food, they want transparency throughout the system," Mr Richardson said.