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## Rest Breaks and Meal Periods—Tips to Stay in Compliance

Keeping on top of employment laws can be a daunting task. One of the areas Washington dairy farmers need to be aware of is the requirement to provide rest breaks and meal periods to non-exempt employees. This article provides highlights of some important information.

### Rest Break Requirements

- One 10-minute paid rest break for every 4 hours worked.
- Taken around the middle of the 4-hour segment, but no later than the end of the third hour.

### Meal Period Requirements

- One 30-minute unpaid meal period for every 5 hours worked.
- Timing: the meal period must be taken at least 2 hours into the shift, and no more than 5 hours after the start of the shift.

Washington law provides only a few very limited exceptions to these general requirements.



**Rebecca A. Boyette**  
Natural Resources Industry  
Group Associate  
503-796-2930  
rboyette@schwabe.com



**Stephanie P. Berntsen**  
Natural Resources Industry  
Group Shareholder  
206-689-1235  
sberntsen@schwabe.com

## Best Practices

- Ensure breaks and meal periods are taken. Have a written policy. Train your supervisors.
- Document. Keep time cards, signed weekly statements and supervisor logs. If an employee misses a break or meal period, document it and the reason why.
- Communicate. Make it clear to employees that breaks and meal periods are mandatory. This means no adding breaks to lunch and no forfeiting breaks or lunch to arrive late/leave early.

## Risks

- Costly wage claims are possible if missed meal periods or rest breaks result in unpaid work time.
- Washington farmers have faced lawsuits in recent years for failing to separately pay rest breaks for piece-rate workers. Workers paid on a piece rate basis must be compensated for rest breaks separately from, and in addition to, the piece rate.