

Protecting National Security and Upholding Public Safety

## News Release

**December 13, 2006** 

U.S. Uncovers Large-Scale Identity Theft Scheme Used By Illegal Aliens to Gain Employment at Nationwide Meat Processor

Worksite enforcement investigation reveals that hundreds of U.S. citizens and lawful residents may have been victimized

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Julie L. Myers, Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Chairman Deborah Platt Majoras and Cache County (UT) Attorney N. George Daines today announced that approximately 1,282 persons have been arrested as part of an ongoing worksite enforcement investigation into immigration violations and a massive identity theft scheme that has victimized large numbers of U.S. citizens and lawful U.S. residents.

Yesterday, ICE agents executed civil search warrants at six facilities owned by Swift & Company (Swift), one of the nation's largest processors of fresh pork and beef. Agents executed warrants at Swift facilities in Greeley, Colorado; Grand Island, Nebraska; Cactus, Texas; Hyrum, Utah; Marshalltown, Iowa; and Worthington, Minnesota.

In total, agents apprehended 1,282 illegal alien workers on administrative immigration violations at Swift facilities. Of these, 65 have also been charged with criminal violations related to identity theft or other violations, such as re-entry after deportation. Countries of origin of those arrested were: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Peru, Laos, Sudan and Ethiopia; others have yet to be identified. The investigation is ongoing.

"Violations of our immigration laws and privacy rights often go hand in hand," said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. "Enforcement actions like this one protect the privacy rights of innocent Americans while striking a blow against illegal immigration."

"This investigation has uncovered a disturbing front in the war against illegal immigration. We believe that the genuine identities of possibly hundreds of U.S. citizens are being stolen or hijacked by criminal organizations and sold to illegal aliens in order to gain unlawful employment in this country. Combating this burgeoning problem is one of ICE's highest priorities," said Assistant Secretary Myers.

Evidence uncovered during the investigation, which began in February 2006, indicates that hundreds of these illegal aliens may have illegally assumed the identities of U.S. citizens and improperly used their Social Security numbers and other identity documents in order to gain employment at Swift facilities. ICE and the FTC have identified hundreds of U.S. citizens whose stolen identities have been used by these aliens and have reported being victimized by this identity theft scheme. ICE and the FTC are working to identify other victims who may be unaware that their identities have been stolen.

The investigation has uncovered criminal organizations around the country that traffic in genuine birth certificates and Social Security cards belonging to U.S. citizens. In recent months, ICE agents have arrested several members of these organizations in Minnesota, Texas, Utah and Puerto Rico. In some cases, these organizations have stolen legitimate identity documents and Social Security cards from unwitting U.S. citizens. In other cases, they have purchased these documents from U.S. citizens willing to sell their identities for money, including homeless people and individuals in jail.

ICE agents learned that many of these genuine identity documents were trafficked to locations around the country and sold to illegal aliens who used them to gain employment at Swift. By using valid Social Security numbers and birth certificates of U.S. citizens, these illegal aliens were able to thwart the Basic Pilot Employment Eligibility Verification system (Basic Pilot), a federal program designed to help employers detect unauthorized workers. Swift has used the Basic Pilot program since 1997.

The FTC has received hundreds of complaints from U.S. citizens across the country who allege that they became aware that their identities were being used illegally. Among the victim complaints were:

A victim in Texas stated their personal information was used for employment. Victim also reported he was pulled over and arrested once since the suspect used his information for illegal activity. Victim believes the suspect got his information because he lost his wallet. FTC information indicates suspect was working at Swift.

Victim in Texas reports that suspect obtained utility accounts and a Sprint wireless account using their information. The victim believes theft may be result of purse theft in 2001. FTC information indicates that suspect was working at Swift.

The FTC and ICE will notify any individuals who are identified as victims of this scheme. In the meantime, any U.S. citizens who suspect their identities were stolen in this scheme should report it via the FTC website at www.ftc.gov/idtheft or by calling the FTC's hotline at 1-877-ID-THEFT (1-877-438-4338), or by writing to the Identity Theft Clearinghouse, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20580.

Those illegal aliens arrested yesterday on administrative immigration violations are being detained and processed at locations around the country for removal proceedings or immediate return to Mexico. In certain cases where humanitarian or medical concerns were identified, ICE agents used their discretion and provided the alien with a notice to appear in court at a later date. All will be afforded due process under the law and an opportunity to appear before an Immigration Judge. Relatives or other concerned parties seeking information on the location or status of an illegal alien who may have been arrested at Swift facilities yesterday may call 866-341-3858.

Those illegal aliens who were charged with federal criminal violations will be remanded to the custody of the U.S. Marshal Service pending their criminal court proceedings before a federal judge. Those illegal aliens charged in state criminal violations will be remanded to the custody of state authorities pending their criminal court proceedings. ICE will seek to remove these individuals from the United States upon the resolution of their criminal charges and affiliated sentences.

This ongoing investigation is a collaborative effort between ICE, the FTC, the Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General, the Weld County (CO) District Attorney, the Cache County (UT) Attorney, the United States Attorney's offices for the Southern District of Iowa, the District of Colorado, the District of Nebraska, the Northern District of Texas and District of Utah, and the District of Minnesota. The Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General and U.S.

Customs and Border Protection provided critical assistance during the execution of warrants and processing of aliens.

-- ICE --

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.



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## **Fact Sheet**

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## WORKSITE ENFORCEMENT OPERATION UPDATE

Plant location	Alien administrative arrests	Alien criminal arrests	Total arrests
Cactus, TX	275	20	295
Greeley, CO	250	11	261
Grand Island, NE	260	1	261
Worthington, MN	230	0	230
Marshalltown, IA	88	2	90
Hyrum, UT	114	31	145
TOTALS*	1217	65	1282

Countries of origin of those arrested were: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Peru, Laos, Sudan, Ethiopia and others unknown.

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<sup>\*</sup>As of 12/13/06 at 8:30 a.m.