



News Releases

September 3, 2008

23 illegal alien workers for The Sun Valley Group arrested in ICE operation *Enforcement action at Arcata flower grower is part of ongoing ICE investigation*

ARCATA, Calif.- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents executed federal search warrants here yesterday at the local headquarters of one of the state's major wholesale flower growers, The Sun Valley Group, and at the residences of several of the company's employees, taking a total of 23 illegal alien workers into custody on administrative immigration violations.

Of those arrested, 19 were encountered at The Sun Valley Group's headquarters yesterday morning. Two other workers were arrested late yesterday as agents executed search warrants related to the ongoing investigation at the homes of nine of the company's employees. The final arrests occurred after two employees originally sought at the company's facility in the morning came forward and turned themselves in late in the afternoon.

A 24th employee of The Sun Valley Group, who was being sought as part of the ongoing investigation, was determined to be in the custody of the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department on an unrelated state charge. ICE agents processed the individual and lodged an immigration detainer against him ensuring he will come into ICE custody once the local case is completed.

The arrests are the result of an investigation that originated with a call to ICE's tip line. During the ensuing probe, agents uncovered evidence that some of The Sun Valley Group's workers used Social Security numbers and alien registration numbers that were either fraudulent, did not belong to them, or did not authorize employment. In addition, some of the company's workers are believed to have falsely claimed to be United States citizens or legal permanent residents.

"Employment is one of the key factors fueling illegal immigration, which is why worksite enforcement is a crucial part of our interior immigration enforcement strategy," said Mark Wollman, special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in San Francisco. "Every job held by an illegal alien is a job taken from a U.S citizen or legal resident of this area."

All of the illegal alien workers identified during yesterday's operation, including 18 men and six

women, are citizens of Mexico. They were photographed, fingerprinted and processed by ICE. They were also interviewed to elicit information about possible health, caregiver or other humanitarian issues, and to identify any urgent medical needs. The information aids ICE in making decisions about whether to detain an individual or permit a conditional humanitarian release.

Ultimately, 22 of those arrested yesterday were released from ICE custody. One of the male workers, who had an extensive criminal record, was turned over to the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department based on an outstanding warrant issued out of Southern California. The remaining 21 aliens were released under ICE supervision pending future immigration proceedings.

Only one of the illegal alien workers encountered during yesterday's enforcement action, a male who had been previously deported, will remain in ICE custody awaiting a hearing before an immigration judge.

Since ICE was established in March 2003, it has dramatically enhanced its efforts to combat the unlawful employment of illegal aliens in this country. So far this fiscal year (Sept. 30, 2007 through Aug. 15, 2008), ICE has made 1,035 criminal arrests tied to worksite enforcement investigations. Of those, 121 are owners, managers, supervisors or human resources employees accused of violations ranging from alien harboring to knowingly hiring illegal aliens. The remaining criminal defendants are workers arrested on charges including aggravated identity theft and Social Security fraud. ICE has also made approximately 4,500 administrative arrests for immigration violations during worksite enforcement operations this fiscal year.

To help employers build a legal workforce, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced a new initiative called the ICE Mutual Agreement between Government and Employers or IMAGE. IMAGE is designed to build cooperative relationships between the government and businesses, strengthen hiring practices, and reduce the unlawful employment of illegal aliens. The initiative also seeks to gain greater industry compliance and corporate due diligence through enhanced training and education of employers. ICE strongly encourages employers to review IMAGE program materials available at www.ICE.gov.

-- 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 five 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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News Releases

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18 illegal alien workers for The Sun Valley Group arrested in ICE operation *Enforcement action at Arcata flower grower is part of ongoing ICE investigation*

ARCATA, Calif.- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents executed a federal search warrant here this morning at the local headquarters of one of the state's major wholesale flower growers, The Sun Valley Group, arresting 18 illegal alien workers on administrative immigration violations.

Today's arrests are the result of an ongoing investigation that originated with a call to ICE's tip line. During the ensuing probe, agents uncovered evidence that some of The Sun Valley Group's workers used Social Security numbers and alien registration numbers that were either fraudulent, did not belong to them, or did not authorize employment. In addition, some of the company's workers are believed to have falsely claimed to be United States citizens or legal permanent residents.

"Employment is one of the key factors fueling illegal immigration, which is why worksite enforcement is a crucial part of our interior immigration enforcement strategy," said Mark Wollman, special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in San Francisco. "Every job held by an illegal alien is a job taken from a U.S citizen or legal resident of this area."

All of the illegal alien workers identified during today's operation, including 14 men and four women, are citizens of Mexico. They are being photographed, fingerprinted and processed by ICE. They are also being interviewed to elicit information about possible health, caregiver or other humanitarian issues, and to identify any urgent medical needs. The information aids ICE in making decisions about whether to detain an individual or permit a conditional humanitarian release.

As of late this afternoon, four of those arrested had been released from ICE custody. One of the male workers, who had an extensive criminal record, was turned over to the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department based on an outstanding warrant issued out of Southern California. In addition, three men were released initially on humanitarian grounds pending future immigration proceedings. The majority of the remaining illegal workers are expected to be released later

today under supervision while they await an immigration hearing.

Any illegal aliens encountered during the enforcement action who have prior criminal convictions or deportations will be transferred to ICE contract detention facilities in northern California and held pending an immigration hearing.

ICE has set up several local phone numbers family members of those arrested can call to get information about their relatives' detention status and the removal process. The phone numbers are: (707) 536-8808, 536-8595 or 536-7470. ICE agents handed out cards with the phone numbers to workers and family members who were encountered at the enforcement location.

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