



## News Releases

October 07, 2008

### **Approximately 300 Arrested by Ice Agents During Search of South Carolina Poultry Processing Plant**

GREENVILLE, S.C. - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents executed a federal criminal search warrant today at the Columbia Farms poultry processing plant as part of an ongoing, ten-month criminal investigation into its employment practices, which has already resulted in criminal charges against 11 supervisors and one human resources manager. The announcement was made by ICE Special Agent in Charge for the Office of Investigations in Atlanta, Kenneth A. Smith, and W. Walter Wilkins, U.S. Attorney for the District of South Carolina.

ICE agents are searching for evidence relating to the unauthorized employment of illegal aliens and other crimes. Today's enforcement action continues; however, thus far agents have administratively arrested approximately 300 illegal aliens.

Mr. Wilkins stated, "Our office is charged with enforcing the immigration laws against aliens who illegally enter our country, and those who illegally harbor and employ them. The execution of this search warrant today marks an important phase of this ongoing investigation into the hiring practices of this employer. Aggressive enforcement and investigative actions are vital to the integrity of our immigration system."

"Today's enforcement operation is the latest step in a comprehensive criminal investigation focused on identifying the individuals involved in allowing unauthorized workers to gain employment," said Smith. "ICE targets employers because the promise of employment draws illegal workers across our borders. By holding employers accountable, we are diminishing the magnet and discouraging others from breaking the law."

All of those administratively arrested will be interviewed, fingerprinted, and photographed by ICE agents and processed for removal from the United States. Everyone encountered will be medically screened and interviewed by a Public Health Service officer to determine if they have any medical, caregiver, or other humanitarian concerns. As a result of these screenings, ICE will identify individuals eligible for humanitarian release. So far, approximately 58 of the individuals arrested today have been identified as being eligible for an alternative to detention based on humanitarian reasons. These individuals will still be required to appear before a federal immigration judge who will ultimately determine whether or not they will be deported. Any

juveniles found to be in the country illegally who cannot be released to the custody of a trusted adult will be transferred into the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

ICE has contacted local consular officials, community groups, and the local school district to ensure they have accurate information regarding the operation. ICE has also established a toll-free number for family members to find out more information about the detention status of those arrested. Family members may call: 1-866-341-3858.

ICE agents will refer cases to the U.S. Attorney's Office for criminal prosecution upon identifying individuals who are in possession of stolen or unauthorized identification information, have previously been deported following a criminal felony conviction, or appear to be involved in other criminal activity. Any individuals identified as proper candidates for criminal prosecution will be remanded to the custody of the U.S. Marshal's Service.

The operation today follows the criminal cases filed earlier this year against 12 plant supervisory employees. In June, arrest warrants were issued for 11 supervisors at the plant, alleging that the men, all of Mexico, were illegally in the country, and were engaged in aggravated identity theft and the making of false statements to ICE authorities. Of the 11 charged, seven have pleaded guilty and are awaiting sentencing:

Juan Rodriguez, age 27; Juan Suarez, age 28; Evaristo Vasquez, age 39; Simon Gomez, age 28; Juan Olivares, age 32; Guadalupe Templos, age 34, and Federico Perez, age 37.

Two others are awaiting trial:

Victor Cruz-Soto and Nain Zarate-Camarero, both 28 years old.

The final two supervisors, Reyes Ramos and Fortino Cruz, were also charged with the same offenses but have not been arrested and are considered fugitives. Anyone with information on their whereabouts should contact the ICE toll-free tip line by dialing 1-877-2-DHS-ICE.

In July, the 12th individual charged was Elaine Crump, age 48, of Greenville, a human resources manager at the plant. She was indicted on 20 counts for filing false I-9 employment identification forms and is awaiting trial.

As with any criminal case, a charge is merely an accusation and a defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

-- 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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