



News Releases

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331 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 yesterday 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 nine supervisors, four plant employees 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 searched for evidence relating to the unauthorized employment of illegal aliens and other crimes. Yesterday's enforcement action resulted in the administrative arrests of 331 illegal aliens (123 females, 208 males).

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 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."

"Yesterday'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."

Of the 331 arrested yesterday, 11 (2 females, 9 males), including one plant supervisor, face criminal charges for various crimes including re-entry after deportation, aggravated identity theft, counterfeit documents and false statements. All have been transferred into the U.S. Marshal's custody.

All of those administratively arrested have been interviewed, fingerprinted, and photographed by ICE agents and processed for removal from the United States. The females arrested were transferred to the Atlanta City Detention Center in Atlanta, Georgia and the males were

transferred to the Stuart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia.

Everyone encountered was medically screened and interviewed by a Public Health Service officer to determine if they had any medical, caregiver, or other humanitarian concerns. As a result of these screenings, ICE indentified 83 individuals eligible for humanitarian release (77 females, 6males). These individuals will still be required to appear before a federal immigration judge who will ultimately determine whether or not they will be deported

Six juveniles were found to be in the country illegally. Three are from Mexico and three are from Guatemala. ICE released two of the juveniles to an authorized caregiver. ICE is working with the Mexican and Guatemalan consulates to reunite the remaining juveniles with their respective families back in their home countries.

Those arrested yesterday, represent the following countries: Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Costa Rica and Hungary.

ICE contacted local consular officials, community groups, and the local school district to ensure they have accurate information regarding the operation. ICE 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 follows the criminal cases filed earlier this year against nine plant supervisory employees and four plant employees. In June, arrest warrants were issued for nine 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 13 charged, nine have pleaded guilty, two have been sentenced and seven 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; Federico Perez, age 37; Daniel Badillo-Baca, age 20 and Guillermo Hernandez-Ramirez, age 31.

Two others are awaiting trial:

Victor Cruz-Soto, 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 14th 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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