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News Releases

NOVEMBER 8, 2011 DETROIT, MI

Michigan dairy farm and its owners sentenced for employing illegal aliens Ordered to pay nearly \$3 million in penalties

DETROIT – The owners of Aquila Farms, LLC, were sentenced Tuesday to three years of probation and ordered to pay fines totaling \$234,000 for hiring illegal aliens and aiding and abetting each other to do so. The convictions were the result of an investigation conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Johannes Martinus Verhaar and Anthonia Marjanne Verhaar both [pleaded guilty to the charges on June 28, 2011 \(http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1106/110628detroit.htm\)](http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1106/110628detroit.htm).

The company, Aquila Farms, LLC, a dairy operation based in Bad Axe, Mich., also pleaded guilty to harboring illegal aliens. The company encouraged or induced an alien to come to, enter or reside in the United States for commercial advantage or private financial gain knowing it was in violation of the law. Aquila Farms was sentenced to probation for five years, ordered to pay a fine of \$500,000 and required to make payments totaling \$2,000,000 in lieu of forfeiture. The company also pleaded guilty in June 2011.

"Building and supporting a business through the intentional use of people not lawfully authorized to work here is a model that we won't tolerate," said Brian M. Moskowitz, special agent in charge of ICE HSI in Detroit. "The defendants in this case were given an opportunity to bring their workforce into compliance and failed to do so and the significant ramifications of their actions speak for themselves."

Court records revealed that from 2000 to 2007, Aquila Farms employed 78 different illegal aliens, which constituted almost 75 percent of its workforce over that time period. Aquila Farms failed to conduct the necessary inquiries to determine the employment eligibility of their work force, as required by federal immigration laws.

According to the investigation, of the 78 illegal aliens hired by the Verhaars, some were hired on multiple occasions using different names or Social Security Numbers despite the Verhaars' being given notice by both the Social Security Administration and ICE HSI that its employees were not authorized to work. The defendants encouraged or induced the illegal aliens to reside in the United States by providing them with employment and free housing on the farm, away from scrutiny of ICE HSI and the surrounding community.

The Verhaars and Aquila Farms agreed to pay fines and a payment in lieu of forfeiture totaling \$2,734,000.

The case was initiated based on a lead by the Michigan State Police and investigated by ICE HSI special agents. The Huron County Sheriff's Office also assisted with the investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Janet Parker prosecuted this case on behalf of the U.S. government.

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