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Worksite Enforcement  
08/08/2018

### ICE executes federal search warrants in Nebraska, Minnesota and Nevada

133 arrested on immigration violations while executing the criminal warrants



GRAND ISLAND, Neb. — During a multi-state operation led by special agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), a series of criminal arrest warrants were executed Wednesday for 17 individuals connected to an alleged criminal conspiracy to exploit illegal alien laborers for profit, fraud, wire fraud and money laundering in Nebraska and Minnesota.

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In addition to these arrest warrants, authorities also served search warrants for [worksite hiring violations](#) at agricultural firms in Nebraska and Minnesota, and federal document search warrants at locations throughout Nebraska, in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota; Appleton, Minnesota; and Las Vegas, Nevada. During this investigation, authorities identified employees who were subject to arrest for immigration violations and were unlawfully working at these businesses. These individuals have been illegally residing and working in the United States; they may also have been exploited as part of this alleged criminal conspiracy. During the execution of these search warrants Aug. 8, 133 illegal workers were administratively arrested for immigration violations; some will be issued notices to appear before a federal immigration judge and released from custody; the rest will remain in ICE custody pending immigration court proceedings.

Law enforcement believes the alleged conspirators, 17 individuals located in multiple states, colluded to create an illegal alien workforce in their respective businesses. By doing so, they defrauded the U.S. government and created an unfair advantage over their competition businesses. Additionally, authorities suspect the illegal aliens who were knowingly hired as part of this alleged conspiracy were exploited by the conspirators through force, coercion, or threat of arrest and/or deportation. Specifically, these illegal aliens were allegedly required to cash their paychecks at an illegal remittance business for a fee, have tax money deducted from their pay even though this money was never paid to the government, and were coerced to remain quiet about this criminal activity.

Search warrants were served at the following businesses and locations:

- Christensen Farms with numerous locations in Appleton, Minnesota; Sleepy Eye, Minnesota; and Atkinson, Nebraska;
- Elkhorn River Farms in O'Neill, Nebraska;
- O'Neill Ventures in O'Neill, Nebraska;
- La Herradura Restaurant in O'Neill, Nebraska;
- El Mercado (grocery store) in O'Neill, Nebraska;
- A private ranch in O'Neill, Nebraska;
- La Herradura Restaurant in Stromsburg, Nebraska;
- GJW LLC with three locations in Ainsworth, Nebraska;
- J.E. Meurets Grain Company in Ainsworth, Nebraska;
- Herd Co Cattle Company in Bartlett, Nebraska; and
- Long Pine (farm) in Royal, Nebraska.

Note: The above list of locations does not include private residences included in the execution of search and arrest warrants.

This enforcement action is part of a 15-month, ongoing HSI investigation based on evidence that these companies allegedly knowingly hired illegal aliens at their facilities, and that many of these aliens are using fraudulent identification belonging to U.S. citizens.

"The job magnet in the United States is primarily what draws illegal aliens across our borders," said Special Agent in Charge Tracy J. Cormier, HSI St. Paul, which oversees Nebraska and Minnesota. "This HSI-led criminal investigation has shown that these targeted businesses were knowingly hiring illegal workers to unlawfully line their own pockets by cheating the workers, cheating the taxpayers, and cheating their business competitors."

The following individuals were listed in the indictment. Those marked with an asterisk (\*) are not yet in custody follow the Aug. 8 criminal arrests.

- Juan Pablo Sanchez Delgado, aka "Pablo,"
- Antonio De Jesus Castro, aka "Tony,"
- Magdalena Castro Benitez, aka "Nena,"
- Alma Hernandez Moreno, aka "Aunt,"

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- Anayancy Castro Hernandez, aka "Anay,"
- \*Fabian Castro, aka "Fabi,"
- Suni Sarahi Sanchez Delgado
- \*Osvaldo Sanchez Delgado, aka "Lalo," aka "Lalito,"
- John Christopher Good,
- \*Aracely Heredia Martinez, aka "Donita,"
- Eric Beringer,
- Christopher Thurlow,
- Mayra P. Jimenez Castellon,
- Asiyadeth Jimenez Castellon,
- John Glidden,
- \*Jaime Garcia Cota, aka "David," and
- Lillian Ajin.

This HSI-led enforcement action was coordinated with federal, state and local counterparts including the following agencies: U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Nebraska; ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations; U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Border Patrol, CBP Air and Marine Operations; and the following Nebraska law enforcement agencies: Holt County Sheriff's Office, O'Neill Police Department and Nebraska State Patrol.

In the context of any enforcement action, ICE utilizes prosecutorial discretion on cases involving humanitarian concerns, such as health or family considerations. Accordingly, during the enforcement action Wednesday, several individuals were processed and released from custody the same day on humanitarian grounds.

The illegal aliens who remain in ICE custody after being administratively arrested on immigration violations will be transported to a nearby processing facility and placed in removal proceedings. Detained aliens will be held in facilities in Nebraska and Minnesota while awaiting removal proceedings.

A 24-hour toll-free detainee locator hotline is available for family members of those arrested in this operation to field questions about their detention location and status, and the removal process. The hotline operates in English and Spanish; the phone number is 1-888-351-4024.

The allegations contained in federal indictments, complaints and warrants are merely accusations and are not proof of wrongdoing. All defendants are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

HSI is the federal law enforcement agency responsible for upholding the laws established by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which requires employers to verify the identity and work eligibility of individuals they hire.

These laws help protect jobs for U.S. citizens and other lawful residents, eliminate unfair competitive advantages for companies that unlawfully hire an illegal workforce, and strengthen public safety and national security.

As in this case, unauthorized workers often use stolen identities of legal U.S. workers, which can profoundly damage for years the identity-theft victim's credit, medical records and other aspects of their everyday life.

HSI's worksite enforcement investigators help combat worker exploitation, illegal wages, child labor and other illegal practices. Worksite enforcement investigations often involve additional criminal activity, such as alien smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, document fraud, worker exploitation and/or substandard wage and working conditions.

In addition to conducting investigations, HSI also uses I-9 audits to create a culture of compliance among employers. [In July, ICE announced a two-phase operation under this effort.](#)

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