

ICE raids Swift & Co. plants

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GREELEY -- Special agents from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement executed civil search warrants at six Swift & Co. plants in the midwest and Colorado to break a large identity theft scheme.

Swift is the third-largest beef producer in the U.S., and operations at six plants were suspended today as federal agents investigate the possible hiring of illegal immigrants, ICE officials said.

ICE agents executed the warrants at plants in Nebraska, Texas, Utah, Iowa and Minnesota, in addition to Greeley.

The six plants represent all of Swift's domestic beef processing and 77 percent of its pork production, the Greeley-based Swift reported today in an e-mailed statement.

Federal agents carrying up to 100 pairs of handcuffs entered the beef packing plant in Greeley and two buses and some vans were parked in the back of the building.

In a statement, ICE said agents still are in the process of apprehending illegal workers on administrative immigration violations and, in some cases, existing criminal arrest warrants. Additional criminal charges of aggravated identity theft and other violations may also be brought at a later time.

The agency states evidence uncovered during the investigation that began in February indicates that a large number of illegal immigrants may have assumed the identities of U.S. citizens or lawful U.S. residents and improperly used their Social Security numbers to gain employment at Swift facilities.

ICE is working with the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Trade Commission and other agencies on the case.

The number of those arrested isn't expected to be available until tomorrow.