



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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ICE takes custody of more than 100 workers at George's Processing Inc. poultry-processing plant as part of an ongoing criminal investigation

Springfield, Mo.— U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General (SSA-OIG) special agents this morning took into custody more than 100 individuals who are believed to be in the country illegally as part of an ongoing investigation into identity theft, Social Security fraud and a variety of immigration-related violations. The individuals arrested are employees of George's Processing Inc., a poultry-processing plant located in Butterfield, Mo.

The aliens were encountered when ICE and SSA-OIG agents executed two federal criminal search warrants as part of an ongoing criminal investigation into identity fraud and employment of illegal aliens. The United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri has previously charged five individuals, who have been arrested, convicted or pleaded guilty in separate cases as a result of this investigation, including:

- Esperanza Piedrasanta-Oxlaj, indicted on May 17 for Social Security fraud.
- Arnoldo De La Cruz-Garcia, pleaded guilty on April 12 to Social Security fraud.
- Jose Rivera-De Anda, pleaded guilty on April 12 to making a false claim of U.S. citizenship and Social Security fraud.
- Luis Cruz-Flores, pleaded guilty on March 7 to aggravated identity theft and Social Security fraud.
- Pedro Diego-Catalan, pleaded guilty on Aug. 29, 2005, to being an illegal alien in possession of a firearm.

Most of those arrested today are from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador and are still being interviewed and processed. A specific breakdown of nationalities, gender, etc., will not be available until tomorrow.

“These worksite enforcement actions help reduce the job magnet that encourages aliens to enter the country illegally,” said Pete Baird, assistant special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Kansas City. “This case is particularly troubling due to the existence of Social Security and identity fraud in addition to the numerous immigration-related violations.” Baird’s office covers Kansas and Missouri.

Those arrested today on administrative immigration charges will be transported to detention facilities in Wichita, Kan., Kansas City, Mo., and St. Louis after being processed. Hearings before federal immigration judges will be held in Kansas City, Mo.

ICE agents are interviewing all of those arrested today to record any medical, sole-caregiver or other humanitarian situations. In addition, medical professionals from the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS), a division of the Department of Health and Human Services, will give each person a medical screening; PHS professionals will also question each alien about childcare needs. Finally, each person arrested will be given a sheet, in English and Spanish, with contact information for the Barry County Division of Family Services. Several aliens will be conditionally released today for humanitarian reasons with a notice to appear before a federal immigration judge at a future date.

In all cases, the illegal aliens will be fingerprinted and placed in proceedings for removal from the United States.

Family members of illegal aliens who were arrested in today's operation may call ICE's toll-free family hotline regarding detention and the removal process. The phone number is: 866-341-3858.

Assisting ICE and SSA-OIG with today's arrests were officers and agents from the following agencies: Missouri Highway Patrol, U.S. Marshals Service's Fugitive Task Force and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This investigation and enforcement action are part of ICE's mandate to enforce the nation's immigration laws. In the last two years, ICE has prioritized cases involving national security and public safety threats, as well as egregious criminal violations, such as identity theft and Social Security fraud, as are alleged today.

Criminal charges are not proof of guilt. Defendants are considered innocent until proven guilty. This criminal case is still under investigation.

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.