

**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

April 4, 2007

# **Immigration Officials Arrest 62 at Pork Plant**

REUTERS

CHICAGO (Reuters) - Federal immigration agents arrested 62 sanitation workers during a Wednesday morning raid at Cargill Inc.'s pork plant in Beardstown, Illinois, some on identity theft charges and others for being illegal immigrants, immigration officials said.

The arrests disrupted meat production at the plant for about three hours, but no Cargill employees were arrested, immigration and company officials said.

The raid was smaller in scope than one four months ago that temporarily shut down six Swift & Co. meat plants and prompted calls from the meat industry for changes in federal immigration laws to make it easier to hire immigrant workers.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said those arrested on Wednesday were sanitation workers employed by Chattanooga, Tennessee-based Quality Service Integrity Inc., which was hired by Cargill.

“The investigation, which is ongoing, began in January. The ICE investigation revealed that most of the QSI work force was composed of illegal aliens,” ICE said in statement released at a news conference.

QSI was cooperating with ICE officials, but had no other comment, said Bill White, QSI's director of human resources.

Some of those arrested were soon released to care for their children or for health reasons, ICE officials said.

“We cooperated with ICE by giving them access to wherever they needed to go,” Cargill spokesman Mark Klein said.

Cargill employs about 2,200 people at the plant, which can slaughter about 18,000 hogs a day, said Klein.

Immigration officials told a news conference in Chicago that 13 workers were arrested on charges of identity theft, and another 49 on immigration charges. Those arrested included the QSI manager at the plant and a QSI personnel administrator.

Cargill Inc., a privately held agribusiness conglomerate based in Minnesota, is the nation's second-largest beef producer and fourth-largest pork producer, according to industry estimates.

Beardstown, located about 200 miles southwest of Chicago, is a small river town of about 6,000 people, about a third of whom are Hispanics who were attracted by work at the Cargill plant.

“We welcome immigrants any time, but there's a right way to do it and a wrong way to do it. If people are illegal, we're not going to tolerate it,” Mayor Bob Walters told Reuters by telephone.

Immigrants make up a large percentage of workers at U.S. meat plants.

In December, hundreds of employees were detained during the raids at Swift & Co. plants in six states. The raids, which temporarily shut those plants, were part of an investigation into identity theft involving illegal immigrants.

The raids at Swift sparked calls from meat industry leaders for an overhaul of U.S. immigration policies to make it easier for meat companies to hire immigrants legally.

A large portion of meat industry workers are immigrants, mainly Hispanics, because of difficulties filling positions that involve fast-paced and dirty work.