

ICE announces more audits of hiring records

By [Tom Karst](#)

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The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has said it is expanding worksite audits of employers in a big way.

"U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement issued notices of inspection to 1,000 employers across the country today to alert those businesses that ICE will be inspecting their hiring records," **Ross Feinstein, public affairs officer for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said in an e-mail statement Feb. 18.**

The inspections, which Feinstein said will determine if employers audited are violating the law by hiring illegal workers, will touch on employers of all sizes and in every state.

"No one industry is being targeted nor is any one industry immune from scrutiny," he said.

ICE will not reveal names or locations of the businesses, he said.

Audits will include agricultural employers, said Frank Gasperini, executive vice president of the National Council of Agricultural Employers, Washington, D.C.

In fact, he said Feb. 18 that one agricultural firm, which he declined to disclose, had been served notice of an inspection.

ICE became aggressive with employer audits in July 2009, when it announced more 650 firms were being investigated. Another 1,000 notices were issued in November 2009, press accounts reveal, with 200 more in March and an additional 500 notices of inspection in September 2010.

"Agriculture makes such an easy target because we don't move around," Gasperini said. "We expect this to be very serious."

An enforcement-only approach to farm labor, including I-9 audits by ICE, could deprive agriculture of its work force, said Craig Regelbrugge, vice president of government relations for the American Nursery and Landscaping Association, Washington, D.C.

Gasperini said the U.S. needs a better guest worker program for agriculture to bridge the gap between stiffer immigration enforcement and the pressing need for legal workers.

"It is not physically possible for the H-2A program to supply enough workers for our farms," he said.

ICE employer audits have caused major disruptions for some agricultural employers, he said.

One well-publicized case was an I-9 audit in late 2009 of Brewster, Wash.-based Gebbers Farms.

That audit resulted in the dismissal of several hundred workers and an adverse effect on the local economy, Gasperini said.