

New York Times

Officials End Pilgrim's Pride Immigration Inquiry for 4.5MM

By Julia Preston

December 31, 2009

Federal authorities have agreed not to prosecute the Pilgrim's Pride Corporation, a major chicken processor, for hiring illegal immigrant workers, and the company has agreed to pay the federal government \$4.5 million over three years, said federal prosecutors for the Eastern District of Texas.

John M. Bales, the United States attorney for the district, said late Wednesday that he would end a two-year investigation of immigration violations at Pilgrim's Pride, which also emerged from bankruptcy this week. The payment was not described as a fine, and the company, which is based in Pittsburg, Tex., admitted no criminal or civil misconduct.

As part of the agreement, the company agreed to adopt more stringent hiring practices.

In December 2007, immigration agents arrested 25 illegal immigrants working at a Pilgrim's Pride plant in Mount Pleasant, Tex., and charged them with identity theft for using false Social Security numbers.

In April 2008, 338 illegal immigrants were arrested at five Pilgrim's Pride plants in five states, with the company cooperating with immigration agents to identify the workers. In the Eastern District alone, 38 immigrants were convicted of misuse of a Social Security number, Mr. Bales said.

Most immigrants arrested in the raids have served any prison sentences they faced and have been deported.

"This case demonstrates that the government and business, working together, can go a long way to resolving the issue of employment of illegal aliens," Mr. Bales said in a statement.