

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Another Greenhouse Part of Big ICE Raid

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A hydroponic tomato operation, along with several other agricultural businesses, restaurants and a grocery store, were raided by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers August 8. Some 133 workers were taken into custody. The raids took place in Nebraska and Minnesota. Some search warrants extended to Las Vegas.

But this wasn't simply a raid to round up illegal immigrants. Arrest warrants were issued for 17 employers and other individuals charged with exploiting illegal immigrant employees. The warrants allege exploitation of illegal immigrants "for profit, fraud, wire fraud and money laundering in Nebraska and Minnesota."

"Authorities suspect the illegal aliens who were knowingly hired as part of this alleged conspiracy were exploited (through) force, coercion or threat of arrest and/or deportation," said an ICE news release.

The release also alleges that the illegal immigrants were required to cash their paychecks at an illegal remittance business for a fee, have tax money deducted from their pay even though this money was never paid to the government and were coerced to remain quiet about this criminal activity.

"The whole investigation was initiated, basically, because we knew that these businesses were cheating these workers and cheating taxpayers and cheating their competition," said special agent-in-charge Tracy Cormier.

O'Neill Ventures in O'Neill, Nebraska, was the tomato greenhouse that was raided. ICE agents and Nebraska State Patrol took away two buses of workers. The action was part of a 15-month investigation. **GT**