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## Immigrants' Families Figuring Out What to Do After Federal Raids

By [JULIA PRESTON](#)

Immigrant families scrambled yesterday to find detained relatives, arrange care for children of deported parents and recover from the loss of work as a result of raids this week by [immigration](#) authorities at meat-packing plants in six states.

The raids, part of a federal operation against identity theft, had stunning effects on the surrounding towns, residents said. In all, 1,282 legal and illegal immigrants were arrested, and in most cases the plants, all operated by Swift & Company of Greeley, Colo., were the largest employer around.

"Many people are still very frightened," Mayor Luis Aguilar of Cactus, Tex., said.

In Cactus, 275 employees were arrested.

In Worthington, Minn., with 230 arrests, residents said dozens of immigrants had gone into hiding.

"I've never seen anything like it, the sadness, the emptiness, the fear," a schoolteacher, Barbara Kremer, said. Ms. Kremer said she had provided shelter in her house since the raid for 24 immigrants who were afraid to return to their homes.

The raids, by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, netted dozens of immigrants who were legal residents but did not have their papers with them at work. Others arrested were illegal who have to leave the country or face deportation.

Many have children or spouses who are legal residents or Americans, and they have to decide whether the families will stay here or return to their home countries.

Veronica Rodriguez Perez, 20, an American who is works on a production line at the Swift beef-processing plant in Greeley, Colo., said she had not been able to talk with her husband, a Guatemalan, since he was arrested on Tuesday. Mrs. Perez said immigration agents separated during the raid from her husband, Roberto Pérez García.

"They made him and myself seem like criminals," she said. "He tried to give me a kiss on the forehead, but they would not let us talk to each other."

Mr. Pérez worked in the slaughterhouse side of the plant, she said. They have an 11-month-old son who was born in Colorado. Mr. Pérez, who was in the United States illegally, had not applied for residency because of the legal costs, she said.

Many of the arrested immigrants were taken to Camp Dodge in Johnston, Iowa, a National Guard base. Others

were bussed to an immigration detention center in Atlanta for deportation proceedings.

The chief executive officer of Swift, Sam Rovit, said that production was slightly slowed at the plants, but that the losses in replacing the workers could be in the millions.

Swift executives said they had sought to work with immigration officials to pre-empt the raids. In March, the immigration agency subpoenaed the work documents of every Swift employee. After reviewing the papers, the agency retained them for many employees, including 665 at a plant in Marshalltown, Iowa, on suspicion that they were fake or stolen, Donald F. Wiseman, the Swift general counsel, said.

Swift began to interview its employees. About 400 left the company after the interviews, with many acknowledging that their documents were not legal, Mr. Wiseman said. He added that the immigration agency later ordered the company to stop the interviews.

On Nov. 28, Swift sought an injunction against the raids in Federal court in Amarillo, Tex. Judge Mary Lou Robinson denied the request.

Mr. Rovit said Swift, third largest meatpacker in the nation, paid good wages by industry standards, twice the minimum wage, with health benefits. With tight profit margins, he added, Swift would be hard-pressed to replace the workers for work, which is demanding and has historically attracted immigrants, including immigrants without proper documents.

"Nobody wants to have illegal immigrants," Mr. Rovit said.

He said a continued crackdown would bring "a shrinking in the industry, because there is not enough labor to go around."

Prosecutors in several states began filing criminal charges against accused suppliers of the illegal documents. In Salt Lake City, officials unsealed a complaint against Veronica Carrillo, a Mexican immigrant accused of selling real United States birth certificates to Swift employees.

*Martin Forstenzer contributed reporting from Greeley, Colo.*

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