

## **7 at plant accused of hiring illegals**

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### **Body**

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Seven employees of poultry processor George's Inc. were arrested Wednesday on federal charges of **hiring** illegal immigrants at a **plant** in southwestern Missouri that was raided by immigration authorities in May.

John F. Wood, U.S. attorney for the Western District of Missouri, said the indictments and arrests showed that no one was above the law when it comes to **hiring** illegal workers.

The seven defendants are all employees of a George's processing **plant** in Butterfield, about 60 miles southwest of Springfield. All seven were involved in **hiring** or supervising employees at the **plant**, Wood said.

"This is an active and ongoing investigation," Wood said at a news conference.

He declined to say if that investigation included whether people higher up in the privately owned company were suspected of knowing about the illegal **hiring**.

George's, based in Springdale, Ark., did not immediately respond to phone calls and e-mail requests for comment.

Immigration agents and police raided the Butterfield **plant** in May. They arrested 136 people - most of them from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador - on suspicion of being illegal immigrants.

Prosecutors said most of the defendants charged Wednesday were expected to be released on bail. None has yet had a hearing at which a plea could be entered.

Those named in the charges are Guadalupe Castro, 32, of Verona; Brad Vansandt, 48, and Dora Ruiz, 32, both of Monett; Jody Salinas, 29, and Billy Essley, 41, both of Cassville; Gary Creed, 31, of Washburn; and Hilda Gomez, 35, hometown unknown.

Wood said prosecutors would ask that Ruiz be held without bail because she is on probation for a drug conviction in New Mexico.

All seven were indicted by a federal grand jury on two counts each related to **hiring** and harboring illegal immigrants. Those charges are felonies that each carry a maximum 10 years in prison.

In addition, Castro, Gomez, Salinas and Ruiz were each charged with aiding and abetting aggravated identity theft for allegedly helping illegal immigrants use valid Social Security numbers from other people. Wood said that felony charge carried a maximum two-year sentence that must be served on top of any other term.

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