

Camilla poultry plant recruiter charged in immigration case

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Body

Sylvia Martinez's job was to find qualified workers for a poultry plant in South Georgia. But, federal investigators say, she also received money by helping illegal immigrants land jobs in the plant.
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Federal agents charged Martinez on Thursday with selling fake green cards and Social-Security cards while she was a recruiter at Cagle's-Keystone Foods plant in Camilla. They arrested plant employee Francisco Lopez on similar charges.

"This case is unusual --- if the allegations are true --- in that you have someone who was making hiring decisions for a major corporation who also may have been conspiring to make false documents," said W. Fred Alexander, deputy director for the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Atlanta.

He said Martinez, a U.S. citizen, and Lopez, an illegal Mexican immigrant, conspired to make and sell phony papers. He said Cagle's-Keystone cooperated with investigators.

Buddy Paracca, the plant's general manager, said allegations about Martinez and fake documents are "not completely accurate."

He said the plant checks identification cards, such as driver's licenses, to verify that applicants are U.S. citizens or legal immigrants.

Cagle's-Keystone employs 300 Hispanics out of its 2,700 workers, but the ratio typically is much higher in North Georgia plants.

Industry leaders "have said they would literally have to shut down shifts" without Hispanics, including some illegal immigrants, said Maritza Soto Keen, executive director of the Latin American Association in Atlanta.

"The only reason that undocumented workers are here is that employers employ them," she said.

Abit Massey, executive director of the Georgia Poultry Federation, said he knows of no other case in which authorities accused a poultry plant employee of selling fake documents to illegal immigrants.

"This is a total shock to me," he said.

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