

PRESS RELEASE

Four Defendants Charged via Superseding Indictment for Fraud and Exploitation-Related Federal Offenses involving Yakima and Benton County H-2A Workers

Monday, February 23, 2026

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Washington

YAKIMA, Washington – Four individuals from the Yakima and Tri-Cities area have been charged via Superseding Indictment by a federal grand jury for fraudulently obtaining temporary work visas (H-2A visas) and subsequently unlawfully transporting over 500 temporary foreign laborers over the United States/Mexico border and into the Eastern District of Washington.

Francisco Rodriguez Martel, his wife Esmeralda Rodriguez, and Erica Cisneros, all from the Tri-Cities area, and Giovanna Sierra Carrillo, of Yakima, were charged in a fifty-one count Superseding Indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Yakima, Washington, on February 11, 2026.

The Superseding Indictment alleges Rodriguez-Martel, Cisneros, and Carillo conspired to fraudulently obtain temporary work visas under the H-2A program by falsely representing to multiple federal agencies that approximately ten agricultural farms in Yakima and Benton Counties needed temporary foreign labor for crop seasons 2022, 2023, and 2024. The defendants operated their farm labor contract business under the name "Harvest Plus." Rodriguez-Martel, Cisneros, and Carillo submitted documentation falsely representing Harvest Plus as a farm labor contractor for various farms located in Sunnyside, Goldendale, Pasco, Wapato, Yakima, and Prescott, Washington. These representations were made on paperwork submitted to the United States Department of Labor, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the United States Department of State. By submitting fraudulent applications with bogus job locations, hours, and wages, and agreeing to provide food, approved housing, safety equipment, fair wages and hours (to include overtime), and coverage for injury or illness, the defendants successfully obtained hundreds of illegitimate temporary H-2A work visas.

The Superseding Indictment also alleges Rodriguez-Martel, Cisneros, and Carillo recruited and lured foreign laborers from Mexico with promises of legal employment at various farms in the Eastern District of Washington, which included adequate housing, food, paid travel and visas, and predictable locations and hours of work. Upon arriving in the Eastern District of Washington, many workers found themselves performing non-approved domestic labor, working overtime without pay, were forced to work under extreme heat conditions without access to clean water, and were exposed to chemical pesticide agents without proper protection. Moreover, some laborers found themselves in overcrowded and unapproved housing with no access to kitchen facilities. Additionally, Rodriguez-Martel imposed mandatory illegal housing and food fees.

The Superseding Indictment further alleges Rodriguez-Martel and Esmeralda Rodriguez threatened to call immigration authorities on, and Rodriguez-Martel threatened the physical safety of, the foreign laborers in the employ of Harvest Plus to ensure the foreign laborers did not alert the responsible Washington state agency about the illegal employment practices of the defendants.

Department of Labor Inspector General Anthony P. D'Esposito said, "The Office of Inspector General is unwavering in our commitment to protect the integrity of the Department of Labor's Foreign Labor Certification programs. When bad actors exploit vulnerable workers or attempt to game the system, we investigate, we expose, and we hold them accountable. At the same time, we safeguard the U.S. employers who follow the law and play by the rules. We will continue working with our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to ensure these programs serve legitimate labor needs — not criminal enterprises. Fraud will not be tolerated. Accountability is not optional."

"The importance of this case cannot be understated," said Pete Serrano, First Assistant United States Attorney. "When the United States Attorney's office receives credible information from investigating agencies that stand as the basis for immigration fraud, we will charge these cases. The United States Attorney's office will protect these vulnerable victims and the integrity of a vital federal programs, including the H-2A program which is critical to Eastern Washington's agricultural successes" stated Serrano.

The charges contained in this Superseding Indictment are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Courtney R. Pratten, Jeremy J. Kelley, and Tyler H.L. Tornabene. They were investigated by the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and the Department of State Diplomatic Security Service.

Contact

USAWAE.Media@usdoj.gov

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