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## TRUMP IMMIGRANT CRACKDOWN WORRIES FOOD AND RESTAURANT INDUSTRIES

*Farm groups and food processors fear worker shortages that could hobble harvesting and leave restaurants and food plants short-staffed*

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The U.S. food industry is girding for fallout from the Trump administration's move to tighten immigration enforcement, with farmers and agricultural groups preparing for possible deportations of workers that some fear could hobble harvesting and leave restaurants short-staffed.

Memos issued by the Trump administration on Tuesday said that millions of people living illegally in the U.S. are now subject to deportation, and called on local authorities to enforce immigration laws. The announcement set many in the food business on edge.

"We're preparing our members as best we can," said Jim Bogart, president of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, which represents produce growers.

Food companies and farmers have relied on immigrants for decades to do tough, low-paying jobs that U.S. citizens often avoid, from picking berries by hand to milking cows to slicing up hog carcasses.

Foreign-born workers make up about three-quarters of the roughly 1.1 million workers on U.S. farms, and nearly half aren't legally authorized to work, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. At least one-third of workers in U.S. meat plants are immigrants, along with about 8% of U.S. restaurant employees, according to industry estimates.

Labor-strapped American employers increasingly rely on immigrants – including those in the U.S. illegally – to counter the trend of an aging native-born population. If millions of illegal immigrants were deported, "you would have massive labor shortages," said University of Michigan labor economist Donald Grimes.

Department of Homeland Security officials said their limited resources mean they would focus on immigrants who pose a public-safety risk. But they also said immigrants aren't exempt from deportation just because they don't fall into a priority group.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids this month, which apprehended more than 680 undocumented immigrants, targeted criminals but also picked up some people who likely would have been passed over under Obama administration rules.

“We need clarity not just with these potential ICE raids, but immigration policy as a whole,” said Karl Smith, a senior vice president at the Produce Marketing Association, which represents 2,800 large food growers, sellers and distributors. “No one wants a disruption. It’s creating uncertainty.”

Eight million undocumented immigrants were working or looking for work in the U.S. in 2014, the most recent data available from the Pew Research Center. The figure, about 5% of the civilian workforce, exceeds the number of jobs added by U.S. employers the past three years. It also is just slightly larger than the number of unemployed people in the U.S., 7.6 million last month.

Undocumented workers are most concentrated in the agriculture and construction industries.

Kurt Bauer, chief executive of the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce business group, predicted the immigration crackdown could exacerbate a labor shortage for the state’s dairy farmers, which often depend on undocumented workers to milk cows – a job he said Americans are disinclined to take.

Harold McClarty, co-founder of HMC Farms in California’s Fresno County, estimated the crackdown could lead to millions of dollars in losses for his stone fruit and table-grape operation. “We fail to exist if we go into that kind of situation. You can’t operate with a half a crew, you can’t operate with a tractor with two tires,” he said.

The restaurant industry, which also relies heavily on foreign-born workers, has long used E-Verify, a federal worker-screening program that allows employers to check employees’ legal status online. But it is encouraging employers to be extra vigilant.

“We have let our franchisees know of the increased activity and used it as an opportunity to remind them...that all franchisees use E-Verify,” said a spokeswoman for Dunkin Brands Group Inc., the owner of Dunkin’ Donuts, which was an early adopter of E-Verify.