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## Employers alarmed by crackdown on entrants

**Say lack of immigrant labor would destroy their business**

**By Juliana Barbassa**

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Farmers and other employers who rely heavily on immigrant labor said Friday that they could be driven out of business by the Bush administration's plans to crack down on workers whose Social Security numbers do not match their names, and businesses that hire them.

Administration officials said the stepped-up enforcement would begin in 30 days.

"Everyone's very anxious," said Paul Schlegel, director of public policy for the American Farm Bureau Federation. "We're heading into the busiest time of the year for agriculture, so you're going to see a lot of worry from farmers and employers about how you deal with this."

The industry group, which represents 75 percent of U.S. farmers, estimates at least half the nation's 1 million farmworkers do not have valid Social Security numbers. Losing them would devastate the industry, particularly fruit and vegetable growers, who rely heavily on manual labor, farmers said.

Other businesses that count on large numbers of illegal workers include construction, janitorial and landscaping companies, and hotels and restaurants.

"We are concerned that the new regulations will result in employers in numerous industries having to let workers go, as the economy is facing an increasingly tight labor market," said John Gay of the National Restaurant Association.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said they were forced to beef up enforcement of existing laws after Congress failed to pass a comprehensive immigration-reform bill.

"We're going as far as we possibly can without Congress acting," a White House spokeswoman said.

Employers will now be required to fire employees unable to clear up problems with their Social Security numbers within 90 days after being notified. Employers who fail to comply could face criminal penalties.

Recognizing that the crackdown could hurt some industries, particularly agriculture, Gutierrez said the Labor Department will try to make existing temporary-worker programs easier to use and more efficient.

### **Bush administration plans to beef up enforcement**

The Bush administration plans these tactics to beef up immigration enforcement:

- Holding employers liable for employing workers notified of problems with their Social Security who have not resolved those problems in 90 days.
- Reducing the number of documents employers can accept to verify a worker's eligibility.
- Raising civil fines on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants by about 25 percent.
- Preventing illegal immigrants who have agreed to leave the country from remaining in the country through legal maneuvers by making them subject to deportation if arrested and fining them \$3,000.
- Directing the Labor Department to make changes in the H2A agricultural seasonal-worker program so it is easier for farmers to use, provides them workers on time and protects workers' rights.
- Correcting processing delays in the H2B program for hiring seasonal workers for the landscaping, hospitality and other industries.

Chertoff also said he will try to use the department's regulatory authority to raise fines on employers by about 25 percent. Current fines are so modest that some companies consider them a cost of doing business, the agency said.

"It'll just shut us down," said Manuel Cunha, a citrus grower who heads the Nisei Farmers League, a farming group in California's San Joaquin Valley, the nation's most productive region for fruits and vegetables. "It'll just be over if they start coming in here and busting employers. The food chain would fall apart."

Illegal immigrants often give made-up numbers when applying for jobs, though honest mistakes such as the misspelling of a name can also cause problems. Employers say it can take weeks to clear up discrepancies.

"This the stupidest thing our government could do," Cunha said. "They're worried about terrorists, but I've never heard of a farmworker walking across the Arizona desert with a nuke strapped across his back."

Bill Hammond, of Texas Employers for Immigration Reform and the Texas Association of Business, said enforcement would hurt his state's agricultural, hotel and restaurant industries.

"We are deeply disappointed in the administration's decision to punish the American economy because Congress has failed to act," said Hammond. His group is deemed a Republican ally.

Business operators with large numbers of immigrant employees are wondering how to bring their work force into compliance without interrupting production.

"Employers want to obey the law," said Mike Stuart, president of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association. "The question is whether they have the tools to continue operation and obey the law at the same time."

Conservative groups lauded the move, saying it would be welcomed by a population tired of watching illegal immigrants and their employers go unchallenged.

### **more, page A3**

- Arizona and other states may not be able to provide the support that Bush's plan requires
- Reaction from Arizona's congressional delegation.
- Highlights of the bill.

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- Extending from one year to three the duration of a visa for professional workers from Canada and Mexico to attract more such workers to the U.S.

- Spending more money to speed up background checks on immigrants.

- Requiring the Social Security administration and the Department of Homeland Security to devise a way to prevent undocumented workers from earning credit in the Social Security system for work they've done while in the country illegally.

- Expanding lists of organized gangs from other nations whose members are barred from automatic entry to the United States.

- Continuing to work on creating a system that will record the exit of foreigners from the country by way of air, land and sea ports.

- Phasing in requirements for U.S. citizens traveling to Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean to carry passports to re-enter the country at sea and land ports.

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