

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Florida Woman Pleads Guilty to Racketeering Conspiracy Involving the Forced Labor of Mexican Agricultural H-2A Workers

A woman in Florida pleaded guilty today to a federal racketeering conspiracy that victimized Mexican agricultural workers admitted into the United States under the H-2A temporary visa program. Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorney Roger B. Handberg for the Middle District of Florida made the announcement.

According to the plea agreement, Christina Gamez, 43, from March 2016 through August 2017, while working as a bookkeeper, manager, and supervisor for Los Villatoros Harvesting (LVH), a labor contracting company employing Mexican H-2A workers harvesting fruits and vegetables in Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, Georgia and North Carolina, conspired with LVH's owner and others to commit racketeering offenses, including subjecting LVH's H-2A workers to forced labor, harboring LVH's H-2A workers in the United States after their visas had expired for financial gain, and committing visa fraud and fraud in foreign labor contracting. Gamez admitted that she and her co-conspirators used coercive means to obtain thousands of hours of physically demanding agricultural labor from the victimized H-2A workers, all for de minimis pay. The coercive means used included confiscating the workers' passports; subjecting the workers to crowded, unsanitary and degrading living conditions; isolating the workers and limiting their ability to interact with anyone other than LVH employees; and subjecting the workers to debt manipulation. Gamez also admitted that, while working for LVH, she knowingly prepared and sent falsified records to federal investigators to conceal aspects of the criminal enterprise.

A date for Gamez's sentencing hearing has not yet been set. Gamez faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. A federal district judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. As part of her plea agreement, Gamez has agreed to pay more than \$9,000 in restitution to the victims.

This case was investigated by the Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force (including the FBI, Homeland Security Investigations and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office), with assistance from the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General and the Department of State Diplomatic Security Service. Assistant U.S. Attorney Frank Murray for the Middle District of Florida and Trial Attorneys Avner Shapiro, Maryam Zhuravitsky and Matthew Thiman of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division are prosecuting the case.

Topic(s):

Civil Rights

Component(s):

[Civil Rights Division](#)

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[USAO - Florida, Middle](#)

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