

# Feds Seek Prison Term for Ex-Slaughterhouse Manager

RYAN J. FOLEY, Associated Press

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (AP) — Federal prosecutors will seek a 6 ½-year prison term Friday for a former kosher slaughterhouse manager in Iowa who they say exploited immigrant workers for labor, money and sex.

Prosecutors planned to call several witnesses at a sentencing hearing for Hosam Amara to recount abuses that preceded a May 2008 immigration raid at the Agriprocessors, Inc. plant in which 389 workers were arrested.

Through graphic testimony, they're hoping to convince U.S. District Judge Linda Reade to sentence Amara to 78 months in prison, the high end of a range recommended under advisory sentencing guidelines. In a sentencing memo, U.S. Attorney Sean Berry urged Reade to punish Amara for his "financial and sexual exploitation of undocumented alien workers."

The massive raid devastated the northeastern Iowa city of Postville, where Agriprocessors was the largest employer. Most of the arrested workers spent five months in prison for possessing fraudulent identification documents then were deported to Guatemala and elsewhere.

Amara, the former manager of plant's poultry business, is the only Agriprocessors supervisor to be convicted of an immigration-related crime. He pleaded guilty last year to conspiring with other executives to harbor undocumented immigrants for profit.

Prosecutors say witnesses will explain how Amara recruited and employed immigrants, helped them to obtain false identification papers and tried to hide them on the payroll of a ghost company. Two days after the raid, Amara told hundreds of workers who had no permission to work in the U.S. but who had not been arrested to return to the job. He then fled to Israel to avoid investigators.

Former workers were expected to testify that Amara pressured female immigrants to have sex with him in exchange for better jobs, including a married woman whom he impregnated, and that he profited from a scheme in which he sold used cars to dozens of workers. One employee is expected to testify that workers with no legal permission to work in the U.S. gave \$500 bribes to Amara to get jobs, and that he treated them like "slaves" who were required to process up to 60 chickens per minute, court records show.

Known for stiff sentences, Reade has already sent former Agriprocessors CEO Sholom Rubashkin to prison for 27 years for bank fraud.

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With \$4,000 cash and encouragement from Rubashkin, Amara fled to Israel shortly after the raid. He was arrested there in 2011 and was extradited to the U.S. last year.

Amara's defense attorney, Clemens Erdahl, argued in a court filing that his client should get credit for the nearly three years he's spent incarcerated or under house arrest. He also released letters from a handful of former colleagues who praised Amara as a devout Muslim, a brilliant businessman and a married father of four who treated workers well.

The government's sentencing memo details how Agriprocessors' immigration problem mounted despite obvious red flags.

Agriprocessors turned to Hispanic immigrants with no permission to work in the U.S. as the Postville plant grew into the largest U.S. kosher slaughterhouse. Throughout the 2000s, the Social Security Administration repeatedly warned Agriprocessors that hundreds of workers were using Social Security numbers that were either invalid or assigned to others. By the time of the raid, the vast majority of its roughly 1,000 workers were illegally employed.

After being warned by a federal agent in 2007 about the widespread use of fraudulent documents, Agriprocessors human resources manager Elizabeth Billmeyer agreed to stop allowing workers to use resident alien cards as proof of identification. Those "pink cards" were no longer issued by the government and were often fraudulent.

Complaining that the change created a labor shortage, Amara and others continued to recruit immigrants they knew had no right to work in the U.S. but put them on the payroll of a separate company, Hunt Enterprises, without Billmeyer's knowledge. Amara encouraged some workers to travel to Minneapolis to get false documents from a company that made them, prosecutors say.

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