

Farm worker parents of six children die in car crash while fleeing ICE agents

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On Tuesday, a young couple died in a fatal car crash in Central Valley, California, while fleeing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

The couple, identified as 35-year-old Santo Hilario Garcia and 33-year-old Marcelina Garcia Profecto by the Delano police, were going out to look for jobs. Seeing the flashing emergency lights of the official vehicle behind them, the couple initially pulled over, but took off immediately on realizing that they were being stopped by ICE agents. Moments later, the couple's SUV veered onto a dirt shoulder, overturned and hit a power pole. Garcia and Profecto were declared dead at the scene.

ICE spokeswoman Lori K. Haley claimed that agents initially went to the couple's home because they thought it belonged to a Mexican citizen who had been "previously removed." Garcia apparently matched the "description of the man sought by ICE," which is why the officers followed him as he left in his vehicle.

Family members who gathered at the crash site the next day told reporters that the couple had been in the United States for 15 years and were farmworkers. They had six children ranging in age from 8 to 18 years old. The future of the children remains uncertain.

In her statement to the press, Jennie Pasquarella, director of Immigrants' Rights at the ACLU of Southern California, said her organization has received numerous reports from Kern Valley and other nearby locations of ICE using unmarked vehicles to stake out roads used by farmworkers and pulling over vehicles, leading to numerous unlawful arrests.

Pasquarella further described the potential dangers faced by the migrant workers: "As in this case, drivers and passengers stop, after being signaled to pull over, believing the officers to be police, but only come to learn after being approached, questioned, and arrested

that the officers are actually ICE. ... This incident demonstrates just how dangerous ICE's unlawful practices are to our communities. This horrible tragedy is a direct result of ICE's inhumane tactics and the fear it provokes in hardworking people who stand to lose everything if they are deported."

As reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, at least 26 farm workers in Kern County have been detained as a result of immigration raids just this month. While Delano police have yet to release full details of the accident, it appears that Garcia and Profecto were in the United States without the necessary documents.

While ICE has acknowledged that Garcia in fact was not the man they sought, the agency released information letting the public know that Garcia was a Mexican citizen who voluntarily returned to Mexico three times between 2008 and 2017, and that he was removed under the provisions of expedited removal in 2017. His criminal history included a 2014 driving under the influence conviction. Profecto, meanwhile, had no prior convictions or encounters with ICE.

Given the terror that ICE has been sowing among the largely immigrant farm-laborer community in the area, it is not surprising that the young couple took off in fear when they realized they had been stopped by immigration enforcement agents.

The tragic deaths of Garcia and Profecto are but the latest in the growing litany of horrors that are the outcome of the Trump administration's immigration policy in action. It is a gruesome irony that a working-class couple, who from all accounts led a law-abiding life focused on trying to provide for their family, met their deaths on the same day that Trump visited California to "pick the right one" among the border wall prototypes putatively to protect American citizens.

Tragedies such as this are occurring daily and with

increasing brutality toward immigrant workers, among the most highly exploited sections of society. These deaths also make clear that cosmetic attempts to humanize existing policies through means such as naming “sanctuary” cities or states, initiatives promoted by the Democratic Party, will not provide any relief to the working class.



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