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Oregon vineyard manager’s ICE detention sparks fear and uncertainty in wine industry

Community rallies as family and workers face lack of information and increased immigration enforcement in Willamette Valley

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In the early morning of June 12, Moises Sotelo, a respected vineyard manager in Oregon's Willamette Valley, was detained by federal immigration agents. Sotelo, who has lived and worked in the region for decades, was stopped just outside St. Michael's Episcopal Church as he left for work. According to his family and colleagues, unmarked vehicles followed him from his home before agents surrounded and arrested him. By the end of the day, Sotelo was in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility.

Sotelo's arrest has deeply affected Oregon's wine industry. He is known for his contributions to local vineyards and was recognized with the Vineyard Excellence Award by the Oregon Wine Board in 2020. Earlier this year, he started his own vineyard management business, employing several workers and supporting local wineries. His sudden detention has left his family, employees, and clients uncertain about the future.

Family members say they have struggled to get information from ICE about Sotelo's status or next steps. Alondra Sotelo-Garcia, his daughter, described seeing her father in chains after his arrest. She said all his personal belongings were taken from him during processing.

Anthony Van Nice, owner of a local vineyard and longtime friend of Sotelo, expressed frustration over the arrest and the broader treatment of immigrant workers. Van Nice first met Sotelo in the 1990s when both were starting out in the wine industry. He said that many in the community are worried about increased ICE activity targeting farm workers in Oregon and across the country.

Reports from other vineyard workers suggest that ICE agents have conducted recent raids without identifying themselves or providing information about charges. Victoria Reader, who works for Sotelo as a vineyard manager, recounted an incident on June 6 when another employee was detained by masked agents who refused to answer questions or show identification.

The impact of these raids is being felt throughout Yamhill County, where much of Oregon's wine production takes place. County Commissioner Bubba King noted that fear among workers is affecting local agriculture and business operations.

ICE issued a statement alleging that Sotelo entered the United States illegally in 2006 and has a criminal conviction for DUI in Newberg, Oregon. However, Sotelo's family maintains he arrived in the early 1990s, and local authorities say they found no record of DUI charges against him.

After his initial detention in Portland, Sotelo was transferred to an ICE processing center in Tacoma, Washington. By June 18, he had been moved again—this time more than 1,500 miles away to a facility in Florence, Arizona operated by Akima. Neither his family nor his attorneys were notified about these transfers. When asked if ICE is required to inform families or lawyers about detainee movements or status changes, an agency spokesperson confirmed that it is not obligated to do so.

The lack of communication has added to the distress felt by those close to Sotelo. Van Nice traveled to Tacoma hoping to visit him but learned only upon arrival that Sotelo had already been moved out of state.

Support for Sotelo has grown within Oregon's wine community. A GoFundMe campaign set up for his family has raised over $100,000 so far. Colleagues describe him as a mentor who helped many newcomers find their footing in the industry.

As concern spreads through Willamette Valley vineyards and beyond, many are questioning how many other workers may be caught up in similar situations without public attention or support. The case highlights ongoing tensions around immigration enforcement in American agriculture—a sector where undocumented labor remains common despite political debate over policy and practice.