



U.S. Department of Justice

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**For Immediate Release:
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Sep 3, 2009

Event: Guilty Plea

Defendant: B. Jay Rodriguez et al

THREE MEN PLEAD GUILTY IN DOG FIGHTING VENTURE

B. Jay Rodriguez, 28, of Adrian, Martin Phillips, 34, of Bad Axe, and Joshua Gates 25, of Blissfield pleaded guilty yesterday to charges of conspiracy to sponsor and promote an animal fighting venture, buying, selling, delivering or transporting animals for participation in an animal fighting venture, sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in a fighting venture, and for promoting an animal in a fighting venture, announced Terrence Berg, United States Attorney.

According to court records, the defendants were charged with engaging in a conspiracy to promote and engage in an animal fighting venture in which American Pit Bull Terriers were bred, sold, trained, and promoted for the purpose of engaging in dog fighting matches. The defendants are also charged with sponsoring dogs in fighting matches. On June 17, 2009, federal agents together with state and local law enforcement executed three simultaneous search warrants at the defendants' residences in Lenawee and Huron Counties. Officers seized a total of forty-nine (49) dogs in the raids, along with training equipment, veterinary supplies, and underground dog fighting publications. The United States Humane Society assisted in the execution of the search warrants.

United States Attorney Terrence Berg said, "Dogfighting is an underground criminal industry that causes suffering and violence to the animals that are forced to participate. Today's convictions hold these men accountable for their cruelty toward animals and will hopefully discourage others from engaging in this inhumane practice."

Sentencing for Phillips and Rodriguez is set for December 8, 2009. Gates will be sentenced on December 9, 2009. All defendants will appear before the Honorable David M. Lawson. The plea agreement also mandated that the defendants forfeit their interest in the seized dogs and have no future contact with any animals used participate in an animal fighting venture of any kind.

Berg praised the work of Special Agents Robert Bell and Jeffrey Nickols of the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as the efforts of Lenawee and Huron Counties' state and local law enforcement agencies. The USDA demonstrated professionalism and dedication in their aggressive and thorough investigation of this case.

Assistant United States Attorney Eaton Brown is prosecuting the case for the United States.