

For Immediate Release  
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**FEDERAL AGENTS DISMANTLE ANTHONY, N.M. DRUG TRAFFICKING RING**

***Pecan Farm Allegedly Used to Facilitate Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering Operation***

LAS CRUCES – The owners and operators of a pecan farm in Anthony, N.M., and their two sons were among nine individuals arrested yesterday on federal drug trafficking and money laundering charges. Eight were arrested on charges in a 24-count indictment that was unsealed yesterday afternoon, and another was arrested on a criminal complaint.

The individuals charged in the indictment are **Oscar L. Portillo, Sr.**, 53, and his wife **Sandra L. Portillo**, 51, part owners and operators of “Pettit Farms and Nursery,” a pecan farm and nursery (the pecan farm), and their sons, **Matthew Portillo**, 25, and **Oscar Portillo, Jr.**, 29. It also charges **Cesar Ramos**, 32, **Fernando A. Ramos**, 40, and **Ruben Ortiz-Rivera**, 46, of El Paso, Tex., and **Natasha N. Coronado**, 23, of Vinton, Tex. **April Garcia**, 35, a codes enforcement officer employed by the Horizon City (Texas) Police Department, is charged in a criminal complaint.

The defendants are scheduled for initial appearances in federal court in Las Cruces this morning.

The indictment was announced by U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales, Joseph M. Arabit, Special Agent in Charge of the El Paso Field Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Carol K.O. Lee, Special Agent in Charge of the Albuquerque Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Dawn Mertz, Special Agent in Charge of the Phoenix Division of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation (IRS). It is the result of a five-month investigation that was designated as part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) program. OCDETF is a nationwide Department of Justice program that

combines the resources and unique expertise of federal agencies, along with their local counterparts, in a coordinated attack against major drug trafficking and money laundering organizations.

According to the indictment, from September 2011 through January 2012, the defendants conspired to distribute cocaine and heroin. Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., and Sandra L. Portillo allegedly used the pecan farm as a place to store and sell drugs, and they and their sons allegedly sold drugs to an undercover agent on five separate occasions. Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., and Sandra L. Portillo allegedly laundered the proceeds from some of these drug deals by (i) asking the undercover agent pay for the drugs with money orders which they subsequently cashed and deposited into bank accounts in the name of the pecan farm, and (ii) providing the agent with invoices that falsely asserted that the agent purchased pecan trees. Matthew Portillo and Oscar Portillo, Jr., allegedly assisted their parents in distributing drugs and laundering drug proceeds.

According to the indictment, Cesar Ramos and Fernando Ramos and their subordinate, Ruben Ortiz-Rivera, were the source of drug supply for the Portillo family.

The indictment seeks forfeiture of property and proceeds derived from or involved in the defendants' illegal drug trafficking and financial crimes, including the pecan farm, and a money judgment in the amount of \$17,900, the amount of money allegedly derived from the defendants' drug sales to the undercover agent.

The criminal complaint charging April Garcia alleges that she conspired with others to possess cocaine and methamphetamine with intent to distribute, and to launder drug proceeds. If convicted on the drug conspiracy charge, Garcia faces a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment and a \$5,000,000 fine. If convicted on the money laundering conspiracy charge, Garcia faces a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment

and a \$250,000 fine.

Yesterday a team of federal, state and local law enforcement officers arrested the defendants and executed four search warrants, including one at the pecan farm and three others at residences in El Paso. While executing the search warrants, the officers seized approximately 450 grams of cocaine, a quantity of marijuana, five firearms (a rifle, a sawed off shotgun and three pistols), nine vehicles and a tractor.

U.S. Attorney Gonzales commended the investigative work that resulted in the indictment and said, “Drug dealers infect our neighborhoods and poison our communities, sometimes by using seemingly legitimate businesses as fronts for their operations. The indictment in this case is another positive step forward in improving the quality of life for people in New Mexico, and the arrests of these nine defendants demonstrates our unwavering commitment to root out drug dealers wherever they may be found.”

“This investigation targeted a southern New Mexico-based drug trafficking organization responsible for the transportation of shipments of cocaine and marijuana from Chihuahua, Mexico, to locations throughout the United States, said DEA Special Agent in Charge Arabit. “Organizations such as this one are essential to distribution networks of Mexican suppliers, and the arrests and seizures in this case will affect their ability to conduct business as usual. The successful enforcement actions in this case are the result of outstanding cooperation between federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities in this region.”

“I am extremely proud of the concerted effort, diligence and resolution of those involved with the successful investigations and multiple arrests of those who wish to bring harm to our community through the distribution of illegal drugs. Investigations such as this have a significant impact on the rural and urban metropolitan areas of New Mexico and West Texas,” said FBI

Special Agent in Charge Lee. “This OCDETF joint investigation, led by the DEA and the FBI’s Safe Streets Task Forces (in Las Cruces and Albuquerque), included the participation and coordination with multiple local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies with the collective goal of stopping criminal enterprises that profit from the illegal trade of dangerous narcotics and taking away any financial benefit they receive from their crimes.”

IRS Special Agent in Charge Mertz stated, "This is an important case – not only is an alleged narcotics organization exposed, but the government has identified portions of the proceeds garnered through this organization. The role of IRS Criminal Investigations in narcotics investigations is to follow the money and laundered proceeds so we can financially disrupt and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations. One of the government's most powerful weapons is the ability to seize through asset forfeiture the assets associated with narcotics-related crime. IRS Criminal Investigation is proud to provide its financial expertise as we work alongside our law enforcement partners to expose narcotics activities and bring criminals to justice."

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Renee L. Camacho and Sarah M. Davenport, and was investigated by DEA, FBI and IRS with support from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the New Mexico State Police, the Las Cruces Police Department, the El Paso County Sheriff’s Office, and the Las Cruces Metro Narcotics Task Force. Homeland Security Investigations, the U.S. Marshal’s Service, the U.S. Border Patrol, the Dona Ana County Sheriff’s Office, the Sunland Park Police Department, the New Mexico Department of Public Safety Motor Transportation Police Division, and the Hatch Police Department participated in yesterday’s law enforcement operation.

## Summary of the Indictment

Count 1 of the indictment charges all eight defendants with conspiracy to distribute cocaine and heroin. If convicted of this charge, each defendant faces a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment and a \$5,000,000 fine.

Count 2 charges certain defendants with maintaining a place for storing and distributing drugs. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$500,000 fine.

Counts 3, 5, 9 and 21 charge certain defendants with distributing cocaine and aiding and abetting the distribution of cocaine. A conviction on any one of these counts carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$1,000,000 fine.

Counts 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22 and 23 charge certain defendants with money laundering. A conviction on any one of these counts carries a maximum penalty of ten years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Count 11 charges certain defendants with conspiracy to launder money. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Count 15 charges certain defendants with distribution of heroin. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$1,000,000 fine.

Counts 17, 18, 19 and 20 charge certain defendants with using communication devices to further the commission of drug trafficking crimes. A conviction on any one of these counts carries a maximum penalty of four years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Count 24 charges certain defendants with possession of cocaine with intent to distribute. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$1,000,000 fine.

## Charges Against Individual Defendants

Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., is charged in Counts 1 through 16, and 21 through 24 of the indictment.

Matthew Portillo is charged in Counts 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 17, 18, 20 and 24 of the indictment.

Sandra L. Portillo is charged in Counts 1, 2, 10 through 14, and 18 of the indictment.

Oscar Portillo, Jr., is charged in Counts 1, 17, 22 and 23 of the indictment.

Cesar Ramos is charged in Counts 1, 3, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22 and 23 of the indictment.

Fernando Ramos is charged in Count 1 of the indictment.

Natasha N. Coronado is charged in Counts 1 and 20 of the indictment.

Ruben Ortiz-Rivera is charged in Counts 1 and 19 of the indictment.

Charges in indictments are only accusations. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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