



Department of Justice

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JURY CONVICTS TRUCK DRIVER WORKING FOR MEXICAN CARTEL OF DRUG CONSPIRACY CHARGES

Commercial transporter delivered nearly 1,000 pounds of marijuana to Atlanta

Atlanta, GA - A federal jury in Atlanta convicted Gilberto AVALOS-RIVERA, age 41, of Pharr, Texas, of drug conspiracy charges for his role in driving to Atlanta a tractor-trailer rig containing marijuana hidden in a cover load of papaya fruit. The jury reached its verdict after a four-day trial.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said, "Mexican cartels cannot survive without transporters, who bring drugs into the country and return the cash profits to Mexico. The jury's conviction of Mr. Avalos-Rivera in this case should serve as a warning to commercial truck drivers who are tempted to use their legitimate businesses to transport drugs."

Rodney Benson, Special Agent in Charge for the Drug Enforcement Administration's Atlanta Field Division, said: "Today's guilty verdict shows the extent the DEA and United States Attorney's Office will go to bring justice to those who endanger the public. As Mexican drug distributors continue to deploy resources to the Atlanta Metropolitan area in an effort to carry out their drug distribution activities, DEA and its multi-level law enforcement partners will continue to strike at the core and dismantle these organizations from top to bottom, to include their upper level management and drug transporters. This case was successfully investigated because of spirited law enforcement cooperation."

Fayette County Sheriff's Office Captain Jody Thomas said: "We continue to enjoy a positive working relationship with DEA in an effort to rid the community of drug dealers. This case is an example of our successful relationship."

According to United States Attorney Yates and the evidence presented in court: On October 18, 2009, AVALOS-RIVERA, a commercial truck driver based in Texas, drove his 18-wheel tractor trailer to a secluded multi-acre residence located at 230 Anglin Road in Griffin, Georgia. Drug traffickers associated with La Familia, a Mexican drug cartel based in Michoacan, Mexico, were using the location as a drug off-loading site. AVALOS-

RIVERA left the truck, which contained 911 pounds of marijuana hidden in a load of papaya fruit, at the residence to be unloaded.

The following day, on October 19, 2009, Henry County Police and Georgia State Patrol officers stopped two pick-up trucks after they left the residence, and discovered the trucks were transporting the marijuana. Agents from the David G. Wilhelm OCDETF-Atlanta Strike Force searched the residence and found paperwork with AVALOS-RIVERA's name on it as well as other evidence relating to cartel's activities. That same night, agents found AVALOS-RIVERA hiding in an Atlanta hotel, where he was awaiting cartel members to transport him back to Texas. AVALOS-RIVERA immediately admitted to driving the tractor-trailer rig and later said that he had been paid \$2,000 for doing so.

In the verdict returned today, the jury found AVALOS-RIVERA guilty of conspiring to distribute more than 100 kilograms of marijuana and delivering more than 100 kilograms of marijuana. He faces a statutory sentence range of 5 to 40 years in prison.

In addition to AVALOS-RIVERA, three other men have been charged with participating in this conspiracy:

- Roberto Huff, 44, of College Park, Georgia, who entered a guilty plea on February 25, 2010, to possessing with the intent to distribute more than 100 kilograms of marijuana, and who is awaiting sentencing;
- Oscar Morfin-Vargas, 29, of Ellenwood, Georgia, who is charged with drug and money laundering conspiracy charges, and who is scheduled to stand trial on October 18, 2010; and
- Enrique Morfin, of Mexico, who also is charged with drug and money laundering conspiracy charges, and who remains a fugitive.

The investigation of the case was led by DEA agents from the David G. Wilhelm OCDETF-Atlanta Strike Force, which consists of federal, state, and local drug officers and focuses on dismantling international drug organizations operating in the United States. The investigation also included participation from the Strike Force members: the United States Marshal's Service, the Fayette County Sheriff's Office, the Henry County Police Department, and the Georgia State Patrol.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Jeffrey W. Davis and G. Scott Hulsey.

For further information, please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for

the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.