



Department of Justice

Carlton S. Shier, IV
Acting United States Attorney
Eastern District of Kentucky

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CONTACT: Gabrielle Dudgeon
PHONE: (859) 685-4887
E-MAIL: gabrielle.dudgeon@usdoj.gov

Fleming County Magistrate Sentenced to 66 Months for Crop Insurance Fraud and Tax Fraud

FRANKFORT, Ky. – Christopher G. Hickerson, 47, a Fleming County Magistrate and farmer, was sentenced to 66 months in federal prison Wednesday, by U.S. District Judge Gregory Van Tatenhove, for conspiracy to commit crop insurance fraud and tax fraud.

The evidence presented established that, from 2009 until 2016, Hickerson filed false claims of loss on his Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (“MPCI”) policies. MPCI policies are federally sponsored crop insurance policies, which are funded through taxpayer money. In his plea agreement, Hickerson admitted to committing crop insurance fraud with the assistance of coconspirators Roger Wilson, former owner of Clay’s Tobacco Warehouse, and Debra Muse, former employee at Clay’s Tobacco Warehouse, by obtaining fake Clay’s Tobacco Warehouse sales receipts and grading reports that made it appear as though he produced and sold poor quality tobacco, and then submitting those on his claims of loss. Testimony during a sentencing hearing revealed that Hickerson employed other schemes to defraud the federal crop insurance program, including by placing crop insurance policies in his family member and friends’ names covering his own crop. As a result, Hickerson fraudulently caused a loss of nearly \$1 million to the taxpayer-funded insurance program.

Hickerson further admitted that he underreported his crop sales income in 2012, 2013, and 2015. This caused a second loss to the federal government – this time to the IRS – of more than \$150,000 in unpaid taxes.

Under federal law, Hickerson must serve 85 percent of his sentence. Upon his release from prison, he will be under the supervision of the United States Probation Office for a period of three years. Hickerson must also pay restitution that will be determined later by the Court.

Carlton S. Shier, IV, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky; Jason M. Williams, Acting Special Agent in Charge, United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General; Edward J. Gray, Acting Special Agent in Charge, FBI, Louisville Field Division; Bryant Jackson, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation; and Juan Garrett, Director, Kentucky Department of Insurance, Fraud Investigation Division, jointly announced the sentence.

The investigation was conducted by the USDA, FBI, IRS, and the Kentucky Department of Insurance. The United States was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kathryn Anderson and Erin Roth.

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