



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release

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**FLORIDA LABOR CAMP OWNER
SENTENCED ON FEDERAL CHARGES**

Jacksonville, FL - Today the Honorable Timothy J. Corrigan, U.S. District Judge, sentenced Ronald Robert Evans, Sr., age 60, to 30 years' imprisonment on charges of running a criminal enterprise that distributed crack cocaine; conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine; trafficking in untaxed contraband cigarettes; violating the Clean Water Act, violating the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Protection Act (two counts), and structuring cash transactions to avoid financial reporting requirements (50 counts); and witness tampering. Judge Corrigan continued the sentencing of Evans' wife, Jequita Dumbar Evans, age 45, until February 7, 2007 at 9:30 a.m. She was found guilty on charges of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine and structuring cash transactions to avoid financial reporting requirements (48 counts).

The pair was convicted after a ten-day jury trial on August 26, 2006. Evidence presented at trial showed that Evans, Sr. owned and, with his co-defendants, operated two labor camps for migrant and seasonal agricultural workers – one in East Palatka, Florida, and one in Newton Grove, North Carolina.

The evidence at trial showed that the defendants followed a business model designed to extract the greatest economic benefit at the cheapest possible cost from some homeless people. For many years, the defendants recruited African Americans, mostly men, from homeless shelters and the surrounding streets across the Southeast (Miami, Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville, New Orleans, Birmingham, Winston-Salem and other cities). The defendants charged the laborers \$50 per week for room and board, and put them to work in the fields for wages at or near minimum wage. At the end of every weekday, after dinner, the defendants gave the workers the opportunity to purchase on credit and at inflated prices, crack cocaine and untaxed generic-quality beer and cigarettes at a "company store" operating at the camp. Records were kept of the laborers' "purchases," and the defendants deducted the purchases from the laborers' weekly pay envelopes. "Advances" of crack cocaine were also available on payday in the workers' pay envelopes. A very large majority of the laborers became perpetually indebted to the Evanses. The evidence at trial showed that after making the deductions for the crack, beer, and cigarettes, the Evanses were paying the workers on average about 30 cents on the dollar.

As a result of this business model, the need arose for ready access to substantial amounts of cash to acquire "crack" on a regular basis. The defendants obtained the money by cashing checks written by their farmer clients. Because federal law requires large cash transactions to be reported by financial institutions, the defendants instructed the farmers to structure the payments in amounts less than \$10,000 to evade the reporting requirements. After Evans, Sr. was indicted, he obstructed justice by persuading one farmer to lie on his behalf to investigating IRS agents and to deny that the structuring took place.

With respect to the Clean Water Act violation, Cow Creek, a primary tributary of the St. Johns River, flows along the southern border of the Evanses' labor camp in East Palatka. Evans, Sr. directed that a large PVC pipe be connected to the labor camp's heavily used septic tanks. The pipe continuously carried raw, untreated human excrement underground for some distance and then deposited it directly into Cow Creek. The result was severe contamination of the creek, which flows, after about a mile, directly into the St. Johns River.

Five co-defendants pled guilty in this case. Three were sentenced today. Emma Mae Johnson pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine and was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. Nathaniel Davenport pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine and was sentenced to 63 months' imprisonment. Gilbert Labeaud pled guilty to trafficking in untaxed contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to two years' probation. Johnson and Davenport received substantial sentence reductions based upon a number of factors that included cooperation with law enforcement and other factors that the government suggested should be considered by the judge at sentencing. Ronald Robert Evans, Jr. pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine. His sentence was continued to February 7, 2007 at 9:30 a.m. Eddie Lee Williams pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine was not sentenced today due to health issues.

United States Attorney Paul I. Perez stated, "My office will continue to investigate and prosecute labor camp owners and operators who take unlawful advantage of the disadvantaged. I want to encourage those who may know of or witness this type of behavior to report it to local, state or federal law enforcement."

“The defendants ran their labor ‘camp’ as a ‘house of horrors’ in which they not only took economic advantage of some of the least fortunate members of society, but also created -- and exposed them to -- an environmental wasteland of raw sewage and contaminated water,” said Granta Y. Nakayama, EPA’s Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance. “They deserve the severe sentences they received today, and it serves as a clear warning to anyone who would act so cruelly and irresponsibly to make an illegal buck.”

“This case is significant,” said Michael E. Yasofsky, Jr, Special Agent in Charge, IRS Criminal Investigation Tampa Field Office. “It involves individuals who have dealt in drugs, human bondage, environmental crimes and other egregious offenses. For their own financial gain, these criminals have violated our nation’s laws and have brought untold misery to those who help to harvest our agricultural bounty. This prosecution is also important because it underscores the investigative efficiency of combining the efforts of many law-enforcement agencies. IRS-CI Special Agents are the experts at unraveling complex financial transactions and we are proud of our role in dismantling this criminal organization.”

Gordon S. Heddell, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor, stated: “Today’s sentencing demonstrates the government’s resolve in investigating and prosecuting labor standard violations. The OIG will continue to work collaboratively with other law enforcement agencies to safeguard the rights of workers.”

This case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor- Office of Inspector General, the Environmental Protection Agency Criminal Investigation Division, IRS Criminal Investigations, the Putnam County Sheriff's Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John J. Sciortino of the Jacksonville Division of the United States Attorney's Office and Susan French of the United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Criminal Section.