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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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# **TUCSON COUPLE PLEADS GUILTY TO WIRE FRAUD, TAX FRAUD AND MONEY LAUNDERING IN FOOD DIVERSION SCHEME**

**TUCSON, ARIZONA** -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced today that **EZEQUIEL and LIZA RODRIGUEZ**, husband and wife, have each pleaded separately to criminal charges resulting from their part in a scheme aimed at embezzling proceeds from the sale of food products from Super Kmart. Ezequiel Rodriguez pleaded guilty to money laundering, wire fraud, and filing a false tax income return. Liza Rodriguez pleaded guilty unlawfully structuring a currency transaction and filing a false income tax return.

In 1995, Ezequiel Rodriguez was an employee of the Super Kmart Center store located at 1800 W. Valencia in Tucson, Arizona. His responsibilities included ordering merchandise from food manufacturers and brokers for sale at the store.

Ezequiel Rodriguez devised a scheme to defraud Super Kmart by ordering food product from food manufacturers and distributors on behalf of Super Kmart and selling that food product to Plateau Sales, a food broker in Denver, Colorado. Rodriguez kept the money paid by Plateau Sales rather than paying it to Super Kmart.

On August 8, 1995, Lisa Rodriguez, using the name Liza Figueroa, established a bank account with First Interstate Bank in Tucson under the name of Co-Op Sales, a fictitious company. Ezequiel Rodriguez directed Plateau Sales to wire payment for the food product to Co-Op Sales' Tucson bank account rather than to Super Kmart's bank account. Consequently, Super Kmart was legally responsible for food product ordered by co-defendant Ezequiel Rodriguez, but never received payment from Plateau Sales. Ezequiel Rodriguez arranged at least seven such fraudulent purchases between August 24, 1995 and September 29, 1995 and caused Plateau to wire a total of at least \$212,534 to the Co-Op Sales bank account. Super Kmart was obligated to pay approximately \$281,000 for the food product.

Ezequiel Rodriguez resigned from his position with Super Kmart sometime in October, 1995. He and his wife moved to McAllen, Texas. On or about February 12, 1996, Ezequiel Rodriguez and Liza Rodriguez signed and filed with the IRS a 1995 Form 1040 Individual Income tax return and affirmed, under penalty of perjury, that the return was true, correct and complete. That return reported wages, tips and other compensation in the amount of \$39,393. The return was false when subscribed to by the Rodriguez's as they knew at the time that the return did not report the additional \$218,131 which they received as income in 1995 as a result of the scheme to defraud Super Kmart.

Wire fraud carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. Filing a false return carries a maximum penalty of three years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. Money laundering carries a maximum penalty of twenty years in prison, a \$500,000 fine, or both. Currency structuring carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

Sentencing before U. S. District Judge Zapata has been scheduled for July 12, 2001.

This case was investigated by special agents of the Tucson office IRS Criminal Investigation, and prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office in Tucson.

CASE NUMBER: CR 00-1037-TUC RELEASE #2001-037