



**PRESS RELEASE**

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**For Immediate Release**

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**EIGHT DEFENDANTS CHARGED WITH PARTICIPATION IN  
ANTHONY, N.M., DRUG TRAFFICKING RING PLEAD GUILTY**

*Ninth Defendant Pleads Guilty to Money Laundering Offense*

ALBUQUERQUE – On Jan. 25, 2012, the owners and operators of a pecan farm in Anthony, N.M., their two sons and four others were arrested on a 24-count indictment alleging federal drug trafficking and money laundering offenses. As of this morning, all eight defendants charged in that case have entered guilty pleas in federal court in Las Cruces, announced U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales. A ninth defendant, who also was arrested on Jan. 25, 2012, but separately charged, also has entered a guilty plea.

The indictment charged Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., 54, and his wife Sandra L. Portillo, 52, 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., 30. Also charged were Cesar Ramos, 32, Fernando A. Ramos, 40, and Ruben Ortiz-Rivera, 47, of El Paso, Tex., and Natasha N. Coronado, 23, of Vinton, Tex.

According to the indictment and as confirmed by the defendants during their plea hearings, the eight defendants conspired to distribute cocaine and heroin in Dona Ana County, N.M., from Sept. 2011 through Jan. 2012. Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., and Sandra L. Portillo used the pecan farm as a place to store and sell drugs, and the Portillos and their sons sold drugs to an undercover agent on five separate occasions. The Portillos 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. Cesar Ramos and Fernando Ramos and their subordinate, Ruben Ortiz-Rivera, were the sources of drug supply for the Portillo family.

Count 1 of the indictment charged all eight defendants with conspiracy to distribute cocaine and heroin. Count 2 charged certain defendants with maintaining a place for storing and distributing drugs. Counts 3, 5, 9 and 21 charged certain defendants with distributing cocaine and aiding and abetting the distribution of cocaine. Counts 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22 and 23 charged certain defendants with money laundering. Count 11 charged certain defendants with

conspiracy to launder money. Count 15 charged certain defendants with distribution of heroin. Counts 17, 18, 19 and 20 charged certain defendants with using communication devices to further the commission of drug trafficking crimes. Count 24 charged certain defendants with possession of cocaine with intent to distribute.

The indictment also sought 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.

Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., was charged in Counts 1 through 16, and 21 through 24 of the indictment. On Aug. 16, 2012, Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., pled guilty to each of these counts. Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., also agreed to the forfeiture provisions in the indictment. At sentencing, Oscar L. Portillo, Sr., faces imprisonment for not less than five years nor more than 40 years.

Matthew Portillo was charged in Counts 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 17, 18, 20 and 24 of the indictment. On Aug. 18, 2012, Matthew Portillo pled guilty to each of these counts. Matthew Portillo also agreed to the forfeiture provisions in the indictment. At sentencing, Matthew Portillo faces imprisonment for not less than five years nor more than 40 years.

Sandra L. Portillo was charged in Counts 1, 2, 10 through 14, and 18 of the indictment. This morning, Sandra L. Portillo pled guilty to each of these counts. Sandra L. Portillo also agreed to the forfeiture provisions in the indictment. At sentencing, Sandra L. Portillo faces a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment.

Oscar Portillo, Jr., was charged in Counts 1, 17, 22 and 23 of the indictment. On May 22, 2012, Oscar Portillo, Jr., pled guilty to Count 23 of the indictment. At sentencing, Oscar Portillo, Jr., faces a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment. Under the terms of his plea agreement, Counts 1, 17 and 22 will be dismissed as to Oscar Portillo, Jr., after he is sentenced.

Cesar Ramos was charged in Counts 1, 3, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22 and 23 of the indictment. On Aug. 15, 2012, Cesar Ramos pled guilty to each of these counts. Under the terms of his plea agreement, Cesar Ramos, a Mexican national, will be sentenced to a ten-year term of imprisonment. He will be deported after he completes his prison sentence.

Fernando Ramos was charged in Count 1 of the indictment. This morning, Fernando Ramos pled guilty to that count. At sentencing, Fernando Ramos faces imprisonment for not less than five years nor more than 40 years.

Natasha N. Coronado was charged in Counts 1 and 20 of the indictment. On May 11, 2012, Natasha N. Coronado pled guilty to those two counts. At sentencing, Natasha N. Coronado faces a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment.

Ruben Ortiz-Rivera was charged in Counts 1 and 19 of the indictment. On May 10, 2012, Ruben Ortiz-Rivera pled guilty to those two counts. At sentencing, Ruben Ortiz-Rivera faces imprisonment for not less than five years nor more than 40 years. Ruben Ortiz-Rivera, a Mexican national, will be deported after he completes his prison sentence.

All eight defendants are in federal custody pending their sentencing hearings, which have yet to be scheduled.

On May 23, 2012, April Garcia, 36, a codes enforcement officer employed by the Horizon City (Texas) Police Department, who was charged with money laundering in a criminal complaint, pled guilty to a one-count information charging her with conspiracy to launder money. At sentencing, April Garcia faces a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment. She remains on conditions of release under pretrial supervision pending her sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

The nine defendants were charged as a 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.

The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Renee L. Camacho and Sarah M. Davenport, and were investigated by DEA, FBI and IRS-Criminal Investigations, with support from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & 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.

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