

Authorities team up to take down big Tulare County drug ring

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The Fresno Bee April 14, 2014 Updated 18 hours ago

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/04/14/3877442/california-ag-harris-announces.html?sp=/99/217/&ihp=1>

California Attorney General Kamala D. Harris announced Monday that authorities have taken down much of a Tulare County-based drug-trafficking ring.

Speaking at a news conference in Fresno, Harris said authorities arrested 11 people and seized 56 pounds of methamphetamine, four kilograms of cocaine, 942 marijuana plants, one vehicle and nearly \$269,000 in cash during a lengthy investigation led by agents of the state Department of Justice task force in the Central Valley.

The task force with the help of other law enforcement agencies dismantled the alleged drug-distribution network called the Magana organization, named after suspected ringleader Jose Magana. The organization had nationwide influence, but conducted much of its work in Tulare County, Harris said.

"Transnational drug traffickers aren't troubled by the details of law enforcement jurisdictions or government borders, and neither should our enforcement efforts," Harris said.

She said the task force worked closely with local, state and federal law enforcement officials in the Central Valley to disrupt the Magana ring.

"Our success shows the pressing need for more collaboration and funding to fight transnational drug trafficking in California," she said.

Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward, Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux and Kings County Sheriff Dave Robinson were among the local law enforcement officials joining Harris at the news conference.

The investigation began last summer when law enforcement officials suspected Magana of marijuana trafficking. Harris said they learned that his organization allegedly had a drug-distributing business stretching to the Eastern seaboard and raking in big piles of cash.

Five people -- Magana, Manuel Munoz, Juan Parra, John DeWayne Young and Ana Valero -- were arrested in Tulare County at various times during a four-month period. Erwin Alva, Rosemary Alvarez, Ernesto Carrillo and Christopher Pellegrin were arrested in March in Riverside County. The nine are being held in Tulare County jail and prosecuted by Ward's

office. The charges they face include transportation and sale of a controlled substance and prohibited possession of ammunition.

Two people -- Gerardo Campos-Cuin and Angel Pedraza-Cervantes -- were arrested two months ago in Jonesboro, Ark. They are charged with one count of felony possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine. They are in jail in Arkansas.

Harris declined to go into detail on how the Magana organization allegedly set up shop, acquired product, created a distribution network spanning 3,000 miles and gathered its cash. She wouldn't speculate on whether the organization has ties to Mexico. She said it's obvious that transnational drug-trafficking is a scourge to America.

Harris emphasized two points:

Drug traffickers are organized into complex and secretive webs of production and sales, made all the more powerful by their immense wealth. The only effective response is by an alliance of law enforcement agencies even better equipped and funded, she said.

Toward that end, Harris said, she will ask the state Legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown to begin restoring the funds taken from her task force when budget woes hit California hard three years ago.

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