



Department of Justice

**United States Attorney Melinda Haag
Northern District of California**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 3, 2015

HUMBOLDT COUNTY MARIJUANA FARMER SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON PLUS 35 YEARS FOR MURDERING IMMIGRANT WORKER AND RELATED CRIMES

SAN FRANCISCO— Mikal X. Wilde was sentenced today to life in prison plus 35 years for murder and related drug trafficking charges, announced U.S. Attorney Melinda Haag and Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent in Charge David J. Johnson. The charges stemmed from the defendant's murder of Mario Roberto Juarez-Madrid and the shooting of Pedro Fernando Lopez-Paz on August 25, 2010, on the defendant's marijuana farm in Humboldt County, California.

Wilde, 33, of Kneeland, Calif., was found guilty on March 2, 2015, of six felonies including marijuana conspiracy, manufacturing and possessing marijuana with the intent to distribute, murder during a narcotics offense, use and possession of a firearm in connection with a narcotics offense and crime of violence, and use of a firearm resulting in first degree premeditated murder. Evidence at trial showed that Wilde began a large marijuana grow with more than 1500 plants on over 800 acres of mountain property in Kneeland, California – close to Eureka – during the summer of 2010. In the course of his marijuana cultivation operation, Wilde hired three workers to water and care for the plants, including Mr. Juarez-Madrid and Mr. Lopez-Paz, both from Guatemala. During August of 2010, Wilde provided the workers with firearms to protect against robbery of the marijuana grow. In late August, the workers became unhappy and wanted to leave with payment for the work they had already performed after Wilde altered their work conditions. Rather than paying the workers, Wilde took firearms away from them, and on August 25, 2010, returned to the property armed, and shot them. Wilde shot Mr. Lopez-Paz in the face, but he survived, hiding in the woods all night until he found help the following morning. Wilde shot Mr. Juarez-Madrid three times and hunted him down. The final shot was a contact wound to the back of Mr. Juarez-Madrid's head. The third worker, Christopher Bigelow, also fled into the woods and hid until he was found by a jogger the following morning. Wilde

was indicted for Using a Firearm to Commit First Degree Murder, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 924(j); Murder in the Course of a Narcotics Offense, in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 848(e)(1)(A); Conspiracy to Commit Marijuana Offenses, in violation of 21 U.S.C. §§ 846 and 841; Marijuana Offenses, in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841; and two counts of Using a Firearm During a Crime of Violence or Narcotics Trafficking Offense, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 924(c). The jury found the defendant guilty of a premeditated first degree murder, in addition to the other charges listed above.

According to the government's filings, Wilde hired immigrants "to work on his marijuana grow in the belief that they were expendable, not in a position to complain, and that they might not be missed if they disappeared forever into the woods of Humboldt County. When he could not pay them, he murdered one and tried to murder the other. The defendant preyed on their status and viewed them as free labor that could not stand up to him." In contending the only appropriate sentence for defendant's crimes included life in prison, the government argued,

. . . the defendant undoubtedly committed the premeditated, heinous, and cruel murder of Mr. Juarez Madrid by pursuing him and shooting him repeatedly from behind. Then the defendant finished Mr. Juarez Madrid off execution style by pushing the gun against the back of the victim's head and firing into his head. This conduct is sufficient to earn him a life sentence alone. But in this case, the murder is further aggravated by the fact that the defendant also tried to murder Mr. Lopez Paz by shooting him in the face. Only good fortune kept this from being a double murder – what Wilde clearly intended to commit.

Wilde has been in federal custody since March 12, 2012 and will begin serving his sentence immediately.

The sentence was handed down by the Honorable Edward M. Chen, U.S. District Judge. Judge Chen also sentenced Wilde to pay \$50,000 in restitution to his victims and to pay a \$600 special assessment.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Kimberly Hopkins and William Frentzen, paralegal specialist Kevin Costello, and legal techs Lance Libatique, Ponly Tu, Daniel Charlier-Smith, and Marina Ponomarchuk. The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Francisco Division and Sacramento Division; Humboldt County Sheriff's Office; Humboldt County District Attorney's Office; United States Marshals Service; California Highway Patrol; CalFire; and Redding Police Department.

Further Information:

Case #: 12 CR 0144 EMC

A copy of this press release may be found on the U.S. Attorney's Office's website at www.usdoj.gov/usao/can.

Electronic court filings and further procedural and docket information are available at <https://ecf.cand.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/login.pl>.

Judges' calendars with schedules for upcoming court hearings can be viewed on the court's website at www.cand.uscourts.gov.

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