

United States Department of Justice

**For Immediate Release**

**April 26, 2010 United States Attorney's Office  
Eastern District of California**

## **Marijuana Growers Convicted of Drug and Firearms Charges**

United States Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner announced that late Friday afternoon a federal jury convicted defendants Jose Alfredo Zepeda, 20, of East Palo Alto, and Clemente Ferrias Arroyo, 63, of Morgan Hill, of conspiring to manufacture at least 1,000 marijuana plants, manufacturing at least 1,000 marijuana plants, and possessing of a firearm in furtherance of drug trafficking crimes.

This case is the product of an investigation by the Bureau of Land Management, Lassen County Sheriff's Department, Lassen County District Attorney's Office, the Susanville Police Department, North State Marijuana Investigation Team, Nevada Department of Public Safety and Probation, U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, California Highway Patrol, Shasta County Sheriff's Department, California Department of Justice's Bureau of Investigation and Bureau of Forensic Services, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The charges stem from the investigation of a large outdoor marijuana garden on United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land by two BLM rangers, two Lassen County Sheriff's officers, and a Susanville Police Department officer. On June 16, 2009, the law enforcement officers encountered three suspected marijuana growers. Suspect Juan Carlos Herrera-Chavez engaged the officers in a gun battle with an AK-47 rifle, wounded the two Lassen County Sheriff's officers, and was later killed by the officers' return gunfire. The two other suspects, Zepeda and Arroyo, were arrested after the gun battle. Fortunately, both Lassen County Sheriff's officers survived their wounds.

The evidence at trial revealed that Herrera-Chavez, his brother-in-law, Zepeda, and Arroyo started the marijuana garden in May 2009. Herrera-Chavez carried an AK-47 semiautomatic rifle, Zepeda carried a SKS semi-automatic rifle, and Arroyo carried a Smith & Wesson 9 mm semi-automatic pistol to protect the marijuana growing operation.

Sentencing is scheduled for both defendants on July 20, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. As a result of the convictions on the marijuana charges, each defendant faces a sentence of 10 years to life in prison, a \$ 4,000,000 fine, and five years to life of supervised release. The conviction on the charge of possession of a firearm in furtherance of drug trafficking crimes carries an additional mandatory consecutive five years to life sentence, a \$250,000 fine, and five years of supervised release.