



U. S. Department of Justice

George E. B. Holding

United States Attorney

Eastern District of North Carolina

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
TUESDAY - June 22, 2010

ANOTHER PLEADS GUILTY IN CROP INSURANCE FRAUD

RALEIGH - United States Attorney George E.B. Holding announced that in federal court today **CHRISTOPHER ROBERT WIGGINS**, 37, of LaGrange, North Carolina, pled guilty before United States District Judge James C. Dever, III, to conspiring to make false statements, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371, which carries a maximum penalty of up to five years imprisonment followed by up to three years' supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000.

A Criminal Information was filed on May 25, 2010.

During the course of the investigation, law enforcement officers determined that \$1,385,001.29, in tobacco checks were cashed between August, 2007, and October, 2007, at co-conspirator Fernan Sanchez's grocery store in Warsaw, North Carolina. The checks were issued by Universal Leaf North America, a tobacco merchant and processor in Nashville, North Carolina, and were made payable to various nominee names. The checks were brought to Sanchez by **WIGGINS**. It is alleged that **WIGGINS** knowingly helped farmers hide tobacco so they could collect insurance monies on false crop claims. It is estimated that **WIGGINS** may have

facilitated the sale of over \$3,800,000 worth of hidden tobacco.

Sentencing has been set for October 4, 2010.

Investigation of this case was conducted by the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations, the United States Department of Agriculture - Office of Inspector General, and Risk Management Agency - Special Investigations Branch. Assistant United States Attorney Banumathi Rangarajan represented the government.

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