



Department of Justice

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Fleming County Farmer Indicted **For Crop Insurance Fraud**

LEXINGTON, Ky. – A Flemingsburg man was indicted today for engaging in crop insurance fraud.

A federal grand jury in Lexington returned a ten-count indictment charging 45-year-old Christopher G. Hickerson with multiple counts of making false statements to influence the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (“FCIC”) and companies the FCIC reinsures, and two counts of committing a conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States.

The indictment alleges that as early as 2009, Hickerson, an agricultural producer of tobacco, winter wheat, and soybeans in Fleming County, hid his tobacco production from insurance companies, in order to claim damage to his crop sufficient to trigger crop insurance indemnity payments or generate larger indemnity payments, which are funded by the federal government through the FCIC. The indictment also charges Hickerson with two counts of conspiracy to commit crop insurance fraud with the help of others. The first conspiracy count alleges that Hickerson worked with others to obtain false quality adjustments on tobacco presented to graders as belonging to Hickerson, when in fact the tobacco belonged to others, in order to inflate his claim of loss. The second count alleges that Hickerson obtained crop insurance policies in others’ names, in order to take advantage of their new producer status. A new producer may receive a higher guarantee for their crop insurance than an individual who has a history of claiming losses.

Robert M. Duncan, Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky; Karen Citizen-Wilcox, Special Agent in Charge, United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General; Amy Hess, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Christopher Altemus, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation; and Dwayne Depp, Director, Kentucky Department of Insurance Fraud Investigation Division, jointly announced the indictment.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General, United States Department of Agriculture Risk Management Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal

Investigation, and Kentucky Department of Insurance. The indictment was presented to the grand jury by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kathryn M. Anderson and Erin M. Roth.

A date for Hickerson to appear in court has not yet been scheduled. For each charge of making false statements to the FCIC, Hickerson faces up to 30 years in prison and a fine of \$1,000,000. For the conspiracy to violate federal law charges, Hickerson faces up to 5 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. However, any sentence following a conviction would be imposed by the Court, after its consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and the federal statutes.

Any indictment is an accusation only. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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