

Drug dealer with grows in El Dorado, Placer going to prison

A Fresno man who controlled marijuana grows in El Dorado and Placer counties was sentenced April 15 to 17 1/2 years in federal prison for drug crimes.

Uriel Ochoa-Espindola, 44, according to court documents, was the leader of a massive marijuana manufacturing operation and an interstate drug distribution ring. He and his partners grew tens-of-thousands of marijuana plants in three counties and shipped their product across the country with the aid of commercial truckers. Espindola's operation was based near Delhi, but he controlled marijuana grows in El Dorado County, Tehama County, and Placer County.

According to court documents, investigators seized three handguns and nearly 11,000 marijuana plants at the El Dorado County grow site. They seized nearly 17,500 marijuana plants at a grow site in Placer County, and nearly 2,000 marijuana plants at the grow site in Tehama County.

According to court documents, Espindola was "one of the largest marijuana traffickers in Northern California." He, his lieutenants, and his workers used firearms to further that operation. In addition to the weapons found in the El Dorado County grow site and a shotgun found at Espindola's home, Ramirez-Cardinez, told one of the undercover officers that he brought a .22-caliber rifle to the Placer County grow site. Investigators ultimately found five other firearms at Ramirez-Cardinez' house when he was arrested. Earlier, Ramirez-Cardinez gave one of the undercover officers an AK-47 rifle. The officer was supposed to pay for the weapon later.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report