PRESS RELEASE

Santa Maria Labor Recruiter Sentenced to One Year in Prison for Lying to Government, Exploiting Farmworkers in Visa Fraud Scheme

Monday, August 31, 2026

For Immediate Release
U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California

LOS ANGELES – A Santa Barbara County man was sentenced today to 12 months and one day in federal prison for illegally collecting tens of thousands of dollars in fees from Mexican nationals in exchange for visas permitting them to be employed as farmworkers in the United States, then paying them at a reduced rate for their work.

Jorge Vasquez, 65, of Santa Maria, was sentenced by United States District Judge John F. Walter, who also ordered him to pay $165,157 in restitution.

Vasquez pleaded guilty on June 24 to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud.

The H-2A visa program allows U.S.-based agricultural employers to hire temporary foreign workers when they cannot find sufficient domestic labor. Labor contractors recruiting these workers are responsible for their recruitment, transportation, and housing, and are prohibited from charging workers for government approvals, required equipment, transportation, or housing.

According to his plea agreement, Vasquez recruited foreign workers on H-2A visas to work at two entities he controlled – Cuyama Valley Farms LLC and JJB Farm LLC. Despite being prohibited from charging these workers fees, Vasquez charged farmworkers between $8,000 and $15,000 for their H-2A visas. In total, Vasquez and his co-conspirators fraudulently recruited 162 foreign workers for H-2A visas.

Vasquez and his co-conspirators then mailed applications for the H-2A visas to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). As part of the applications, Vasquez falsely represented, among other things, that they did not seek or receive, or would not seek or receive, payments from prospective H-2A workers for visa fees or living expenses.

They also represented that the H-2A workers would be paid a certain hourly rate, $19.50 for workers of JJB and $19.97 for workers of Cuyama.

Based on these representations, USCIS granted H-2A visas to workers for Vasquez's companies. These material representations were false because Vasquez charged the H-2A workers thousands of dollars for the H-2A visas and paid the workers at a reduced rate of pay.

For example, in May 2025, Vasquez charged a worker $8,500 in exchange for an H-2A visa to work at JJB Farm. That same month, he charged another worker $7,500 in exchange for an H2A visa to work at JJB Farm. In July 2025, Vasquez charged another worker $5,000 in exchange for an H-2A visa to work at JJB Farm.

In addition, Vasquez paid the H-2A workers at JJB $16.50 an hour – approximately $3.25 per hour less than what was represented to the government. For Cuyama, he paid H-2A workers approximately $16.00 – approximately $3.50 per hour less than what was represented to the government.

The United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, the United States Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service, and Homeland Security Investigations investigated this matter with assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division, California Employment Development Department and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services – Fraud Detection National Security (FDNS).

Assistant United States Attorney Neil Thakor of the Public Corruption and Civil Rights Section prosecuted this case.

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