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Eastern District of North Carolina

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

LaGrange Farmer Sentenced for Crop Insurance Fraud, Fraudulent Federal Crop Disaster Claims, Aggravated Identity Theft and Conspiracy to Commit Money Laundering

RALEIGH – United States Attorney Robert J. Higdon, Jr. announced that in federal court today, Chief United States District Judge James C. Dever III sentenced **JAMES TRUMAN WIGGINS, JR.**, 68, of LaGrange, North Carolina to 25 months of imprisonment to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. In addition the court ordered **WIGGINS** to pay restitution in the amount of \$5,669,891.00 and he is excluded from participating in any federal crop insurance programs for 5 years. The court also ordered forfeiture in the amount of \$5,600,433.00.

WIGGINS previously pleaded guilty to a Criminal Information charging him with conspiracy to commit various offenses against the United States, false statements to the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, material false statements to the Farm Service Agency, aggravated identity theft, and conspiracy to commit money laundering.

According to the Criminal Information, **WIGGINS** and other persons worked together to defraud the United States of America, through the filing of false federal crop insurance claims and false federal crop disaster relief claims, to structure transactions to evade reporting requirements, and to engage in various financial transactions to conceal the fraud. The conspirators owned and rented farmland in Lenoir, Wayne, and Greene Counties, and produced, among other crops, tobacco, corn, wheat, and soybeans. The conspirators hid some or all of their tobacco and/or grain productions by selling it in nominee names or for cash to a co-conspiring tobacco warehouseman and grain dealers. The conspirators profited under the scheme because they were paid twice for each pound of tobacco or bushel of grain:

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once through the false crop insurance claim, and also through the sale of the hidden crop. **WIGGINS** used nominee names, as well as a stolen identity, to conceal the sale of the crops. **WIGGINS** also submitted the false production data in connection with his federal crop disaster claim, thereby getting disaster relief monies to which he was not entitled. At one point, **WIGGINS** created a fictitious entity, fabricated sale bills, and submitted those records to his insurance company in order to obtain better coverage for his crops.

Between 2007 and 2011, **WIGGINS** and his conspirators collectively filed false claims in excess of \$5.6 million. The conspirators, among other things, paid farming expenses and outstanding loan balances with the proceeds from their criminal conduct.

Mr. Higdon commented: "Put very simply, this defendant stole more than \$5 million from the taxpayers of this State and this Country. This type of crime is what undermines the solvency of our federal programs and deprives those who need the funds of that support. I want to commend the investigators who have pursued these cases for so long. Their effort to protect the public's money is key to the success of programs like the Federal Crop Insurance Program."

"Today's sentencing is a direct result of the excellent partnership the IRS, USDA and the U.S. Attorney's office has in combating violations of Federal law. With both law enforcement and financial investigation expertise, our agents are uniquely qualified to investigate not only tax crimes but all other related financial crimes. The sentence Wiggins received is a testament to the investigative team's hard work and commitment and should serve as a deterrent to those who might contemplate similar fraudulent actions," said Matthew D. Line, Special Agent in Charge of the IRS, Criminal Investigation, Charlotte Field Office.

The charges in this case stem from the on-going, multi-target crop insurance fraud investigation in the Eastern District of North Carolina. To date, the office has prosecuted 48 other farmers, agents, and/or adjusters for similar criminal conduct.

Investigation of this case was conducted by the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations; the United States Department of Agriculture - Office of Inspector General, Investigations; and the United States Department of Agriculture - Risk Management Agency, Special Investigations Branch. Assistant United States Attorney Banumathi Rangarajan is handling the prosecution on behalf to the Eastern District of North Carolina.

Component(s):

USAO - North Carolina, Eastern

Updated May 30, 2018



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