ERIK NASARENKO
VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
NEWS RELEASE

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Santa Paula Farm Labor Contractor Pleads Guilty to Workers' Compensation Insurance Fraud

VENTURA, Calif. – Ventura County District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that Juana Patricia Barajas (DOB 08/01/71), of Santa Paula, pled guilty on November 16, 2026, to two felony counts of workers' compensation insurance fraud, one felony count of grand theft, and two misdemeanor counts of failing to secure required workers' compensation insurance for employees of her business, Barajas Farm Labor Contracting. Barajas also admitted special allegations for fraudulent conduct that involved the taking of more than $100,000.

Barajas underreported employee payroll information to workers' compensation insurance carriers and operated her farm labor contracting business without legally required insurance coverage for portions of 2021 through 2023. Barajas first obtained a workers' compensation insurance policy through the State Compensation Insurance Fund (State Fund) on January 11, 2020. While employing up to ten workers performing agricultural labor, including avocado picking, Barajas repeatedly reported zero employees and zero payroll to State Fund.

In mid-2021, State Fund learned that Barajas Farm Labor Contracting did have employees after two workers suffered significant injuries in an ATV crash while working at a ranch. Investigators discovered payroll records, banking records, and payroll company documents reflecting substantially higher employee payroll than was reported to the insurer. Investigators found the unreported payroll resulted in more than $82,000 in losses to State Fund. This resulted in the cancellation of the State Fund policy.

From September 17, 2021, through July 23, 2022, Barajas operated without workers' compensation insurance coverage while continuing to provide farm labor services in Ventura County. During that time, Barajas provided a false certificate of insurance to a Fillmore ranch owner representing that coverage remained active. After the ranch owner discovered the policy had been canceled, Barajas issued a refund payment referencing "WC & Liability Ins."

The investigation also found that Barajas later obtained a workers' compensation policy through biBerk Business Insurance beginning July 23, 2022. Barajas underreported payroll and failed to disclose prior workplace accidents during the application process. The underreported payroll resulted in more than $32,000 in unpaid insurance premiums owed to biBerk Business Insurance.

The case was investigated by the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Bureau of Investigation, with assistance from State Fund and biBerk Business Insurance special investigations personnel. Senior Deputy District Attorney Joann Roth, a member of the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Workers' Compensation Unit, prosecuted the case.

"Workers' compensation insurance fraud hurts both employees and law-abiding businesses," Ms. Roth said. "Barajas cheated two insurance carriers out of more than $114,000, driving up costs for businesses and leaving workers without the protections they deserve. Our office will continue to aggressively prosecute those who exploit the system. During International Fraud Awareness Week, we remind employers and employees that insurance fraud has real consequences."

Barajas is scheduled to be sentenced on December 18, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in courtroom 12 of the Ventura County Superior Court. She remains out of custody on her own recognizance and faces up to eight years, eight months in state prison.

Case: 2023003416
Defendant Information:
Juana Patricia Barajas (DOB 08/01/71)
Santa Paula

Charges:

- IC 11880(a) – Insurance Fraud
- (2 counts) LC 3700.5 – Failure to secure payment of compensation
- PC 487(a) – Grand theft
- IC 11760(a) – Workers' compensation fraud

Special allegations:

- PC 186.11(a)(1) – Excessive loss over $100,000

CRC 4.421(a)(9) – The crime involved an attempted and actual taking or damage of great monetary value