



Fresno County Sheriff's Office

Margaret Mims, Sheriff

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News Release

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Hemp Farms are on the Rise in Fresno County and Crooks are Mistaking Plants for Marijuana

A new trend in Fresno County has farmers using land to grow legal industrial hemp. However, would-be thieves are targeting these plants, thinking it is marijuana. Three such cases have been reported in the last two weeks.

To the naked eye, it is difficult to distinguish a hemp plant from a marijuana plant. Not only do they look the same in both the juvenile and adult stages, they smell the same and have flowering buds. It's likely these are the reasons the Fresno County Sheriff's Office has been recently been receiving an increased number of reports for hemp thefts. It is proving to be dangerous too because thieves are not only looking to steal what they believe to be drugs, they are often arming themselves with guns.

Two such cases happened at a hemp farm located near the intersection of E. American and S. Leonard Avenues in Del Rey. Around 7:30 pm on September 27th, deputies were dispatched to a call where the property owner approached a couple of people who were loading hemp into their vehicle. One of the suspects pointed a gun at the victim and then drove away. Deputies searched the area, but could not find them. Around 7:00 pm on October 4th, a group of 15 to 20 people went to the property to steal plants. The property owner saw one of the suspects possessing a gun. They fled the area by the time deputies arrived.

Around 7:00 am on October 7th, deputies detained two men trying to steal hemp plants from a field on S. Willow Ave., just south of E. Mountain View Ave. in Selma. They were found to be in possession of approximately 25 plants, valued at \$5,000. Frank Carrillo, 39, of Fresno was booked into the Fresno County Jail on a felony charge of grand theft. Abraham Garza, 51, of Fresno was booked into

the Fresno County Jail on a felony charge of grand theft. Garza also faces a misdemeanor charge for possession of methamphetamine.

The Department of Agriculture is the agency in charge of regulating hemp farms. It keeps a record of all licensed industrial hemp facilities. Along with a license, growers are required to have proper signage posted on the property. Many growers elect to post “No Trespassing” signs. Additionally, the sign informs the public that the field contains hemp plants, not marijuana, which do not contain a significant amount of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Hemp only contains approximately 0.3% THC, meaning it will not get you high.