



ERIK NASARENKO
VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
NEWS RELEASE



Follow us @VenturaCountyDA
DA.VenturaCounty.gov

Contact: Joey Buttitta
Title: Communications Manager/PIO
Phone: (805) 767-3400
Email: Joey.Buttitta@venturacounty.gov

Approved: SW
Date: June 8, 2026
Release No.: 26-073

**Santa Paula Farm Labor Contractor Held to Answer for
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, has been held to answer on all charges, following a preliminary hearing, related to workers' compensation insurance fraud, grand theft, and operating without required workers' compensation insurance coverage while running Barajas Farm Labor Contracting. Barajas is charged with two counts of workers' compensation insurance fraud, two counts of failure to secure workers' compensation insurance, and one count of grand theft. The charges stem from allegations that 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.

According to the investigation, Barajas first obtained a workers' compensation insurance policy through the State Compensation Insurance Fund (State Fund) on January 11, 2020. Investigators allege that while employing up to ten workers performing agricultural labor, including avocado picking, Barajas repeatedly reported zero employees and zero payroll to State Fund. The policy remained active until September 17, 2021, when it was canceled for nonpayment.

An investigation conducted by the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Bureau of Investigation found payroll records, banking records, and payroll company documents reflecting substantially higher employee payroll than was reported to the insurer. Investigators allege the unreported payroll resulted in more than \$82,000 in losses to State Fund.

In mid-2021, State Fund became aware Barajas Farm Labor Contracting did have employees after two workers suffered significant injuries in an ATV crash while working at a ranch job. Following the incident, the State Fund policy was canceled.

Prosecutors further allege that 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 allegedly 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 allegedly 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, but allegedly underreported payroll and failed to disclose prior workplace accidents during the application process. Investigators allege 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.

Barajas has pled not guilty and her next scheduled court date is June 25, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. in courtroom 12 of the Ventura County Superior Court. She remains out of custody on her own recognizance.

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