

# Agents seize couple, plants at pot farm

By Ken McLaughlin  
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Federal drug agents on Thursday raided a nationally known cooperative that grows medicinal marijuana in Santa Cruz County, arresting a married couple that founded the organization a decade ago.

Valerie and Michael Corral were arrested at their home in the hills near Davenport on federal charges of intent to distribute marijuana and conspiracy. But by the end of the day, the couple were released from custody in San Jose after the U.S. Attorney's Office declined to file charges against them.

It was unclear late Thursday whether the couple would ever be charged, a source in the U.S. Attorney's Office said.

Agents said they seized more than 100 marijuana plants, a shotgun and three rifles in the early morning raid. As word filtered out, AIDS patients and other members of the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana — better known as WAMM — who rely on marijuana to relieve pain, began to gather at a locked gate that leads to the farm.

When about a dozen U.S. Drug Enforcement Agen-

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cy agents realized they couldn't leave without confronting the group of more than 30 people, the agents called the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office. The department, which knew nothing in advance about the raid and has worked closely with the Corrals to make sure the farm operated within state laws, sent a patrol car about 2 p.m.

Sgt. Terry Moore helped arrange passage for the agents after WAMM member Daniel Rodrigues talked to Valerie Corral, 49, on a cell phone. Corral told Rodrigues to let the agents leave.

The agents then left in a half-dozen SUVs and some U-Haul trucks containing the confiscated marijuana.

"Shame on you!" several members of the group jeered as the agents drove by.

"I hope you rot in hell," one WAMM member shouted.

Valerie Corral received national attention for her role in helping to draft California's Proposition 215, the 1996 measure that permits patients and their caregivers to grow their own pot for medicinal purposes. She and her husband have complied fully with the measure, said sheriff's spokesman Kim Allyn.

The collective was conceived by Valerie Corral after she discovered that marijuana helped suppress epileptic seizures stemming from a head injury suffered in a car accident three decades ago.

"To their credit, Valerie and Michael Corral held true and strict to the guidelines," Allyn said. "I think how Valerie told the group to move from the roadway today shows what kind of person she is."

Thursday's raid was the latest battle in a war pitting local police and sheriff's deputies against federal authorities after the passage of Proposition 215 — which U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft maintains violates federal drug laws.

In May, the U.S. Supreme Court made it impossible to



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Jean Hanamoto smokes what she says is marijuana for medicinal purposes. In background is a U.S. agent at entrance to raided farm.

provide medicinal marijuana to seriously ill patients without running afoul of U.S. laws, issuing a broad ruling that jeopardized the future of medicinal pot programs in California and other states. In an 8-0 opinion, the justices rejected a federal appeals court's earlier decision that carved out a "medical necessity" exception to drug laws.

DEA agents have recently cracked down on several pot distribution clubs in California — clubs that had received the blessing of local law enforcement agencies. Earlier this year, agents seized hundreds of plants from a San Francisco club and arrested one of its suppliers, pot guru Ed Rosenthal.

Thursday's raid was surprising, though, since the cooperative has worked so closely with sheriff's deputies. "We're trying to do the right thing, but this puts us between a rock and a hard place," Allyn said.

After the U.S. attorney made the decision not to file charges on Thursday, a DEA representative could not be reached for comment.

After the DEA agents left, about 50 members of the cooperative and the media examined what was left at the farm, which sits on a ridge overlooking the Pacific Ocean about three miles north of Davenport.

After seeing the once-flourishing, one-acre garden with a sign saying "Love Grows Here," several WAMM members wept openly and cursed the agents who had wiped out the pot farm.

"This is a nightmare," said Diana Dodson, a WAMM board member who uses cannabis to counteract the side effects of the drugs she takes for AIDS. "I'm numb. I'm still in shock."

Marijuana, she said, "keeps me walking."

WAMM provides medicinal marijuana for more than 230 patients, most of them suffering from AIDS, cancer and neurological diseases such as epilepsy. The waiting list for terminal patients is a year long, Dodson said.

The cooperative is unique because patients who are well enough share chores of planting, weeding, watering and harvesting the plants, said Dale Gieringer, California coordinator of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

"I think the federal government may have bitten off more than they can chew on this one," he said.

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