

Former Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Farmer and Seven Others Charged with Violating Kentucky Ethics Laws; Farmer Indicted by Federal Grand Jury

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Richard "Richie" Farmer, the former Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture from 2004 to 2011, has been charged with 42 counts of violating state ethics laws. The Executive Branch Ethics Commission's ten-month investigation resulted in the largest number of ethics charges ever filed against one person in Kentucky history. The charges against Mr. Farmer range from pocketing excess cigars ordered for a state conference to hiring his mistress and forcing department managers to falsify her timesheets. Although many of the charges focus on activities within the agency, some of the allegedly unlawful conduct involves private sector businesses.

One example of alleged unethical gift-giving involving Mr. Farmer took place when he reallocated tickets contractually given to the Agriculture Department for a basketball tournament and gave them to his extended family. Other alleged violations included charges of unethical solicitation in 2008 in connection with the Kentucky-hosted Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture (SASDA) Conference. According to the indictment, Mr. Farmer directed department employees to buy excess gifts such as firearms, carry cases and knives meant as gifts for visiting Agriculture Commissioners and Mr. Farmer kept the extra gifts for himself. In addition, Mr. Farmer purportedly directed Department staff to purchase excess food, candy, alcohol and other items and to give the extras to his wife. In another matter involving the SASDA Conference, Mr. Farmer allegedly sought out donations for the conference from businesses that the Department of Agriculture regulates or has business

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relationships with, and from entities that are represented by groups that the department regulates. Farmer allegedly used his position to have a “Kentucky Proud” vendor at the SASDA conference create wooden hats and wooden bowls for attending state commissioners, promising the hat maker special treatment in the future. In another instance unrelated to the SASDA Conference, Farmer is said to have used his influence with a private company to have an all-terrain vehicle gifted to himself and his father in exchange for the promise of grant money from the Agriculture Department.

On a second front, Mr. Farmer has been indicted by a federal grand jury for allegedly misusing property and funds. The charges include four counts of misappropriating property and money and one count of soliciting property to influence Agriculture Department business. The counts carry a maximum sentence of ten years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. It is estimated that Farmer misappropriated \$450,000 in federal funds.