

## Massive marijuana bust in Iron County

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A multi-million dollar marijuana operation has been shut down in Southern Utah. Iron County narcotics investigators say it's Utah's largest marijuana growing operation.

Detectives have discovered massive marijuana gardens in Iron, Washington, and Garfield counties. The latest "grow," as they call it, is in the Little Creek Mountains in Iron County. It's a one-acre garden about 10 miles east of Paragonah.

Detectives seized 3,000 to 5,000 plants, some as tall as eight feet high. Narcotics investigators say the street value of the Little Creek bust ranges somewhere between \$5 million and \$10 million.



What's equally startling is where the plants were found. Detectives discovered them in rugged, steep terrain. It took a helicopter to bring the marijuana plants off the mountain. KSL cameras were rolling as the chopper brought down load after load.

Iron County authorities say an illegal immigrant named Ignacio Rodriguez is behind several of these operations. He is in the Iron County jail and could face federal drug and firearms charges. Detectives say he had a residence in Cedar City but was running the operations to distribute pot to northern California.

According to Iron County authorities, Rodriguez hired illegal immigrants to plant the marijuana and to harvest the crops. Workers would hike into the rural areas with a laundry list of supplies to set up an advanced operation. It included pipes, drip systems, plastic sheeting and car batteries to charge phones. Detectives say they had a drying and bagging system, as well. They would then haul the pot off the mountain on foot. Investigators believe the marijuana was then distributed to northern California.

Iron County investigators say similar operations have been found in Garfield and Washington counties. They believe they're all connected.

Mike, an undercover narcotics agent with Iron County, said, "It appears he's [Rodriguez] running the show for grow operations in Iron and Garfield counties. We can also place him at a grow site in Washington County."

Investigators say these busts are the culmination of a year-long investigation involving the Iron, Washington and Garfield County sheriffs offices.

Authorities in northern California have been cracking down on pot growing operations for years. Detectives think that's forced drug operators into rural Utah.

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