



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY
Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona

News Release

Timothy Jeffries, Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 3, 2015

MEDIA CONTACT
Tasya Peterson
602-542-5204
TasyaPeterson@azdes.gov

Food Stamp Fraud Investigation Leads to Arrest of Valley Business Owners

Couple suspected of fraud in excess of \$250k

PHOENIX – The Department of Economic Security today announced the investigation and arrests of two individuals who are suspected of defrauding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) of at least \$250,000. The individuals are also alleged to have allowed non-eligible SNAP items to be purchased using SNAP benefits. A multi-agency task force served search warrants at several locations throughout the Valley early Wednesday that led to arrest of shop owners Aamir Sheikh and Shahbano Sheikh, to end an eight month investigation.

“The Arizona Department of Economic Security is vigilant about ensuring those who need assistance receive it,” said Director Tim Jeffries. “When individuals choose to cheat the system for their own personal gain, it takes away assistance from those are in dire need. We are bringing down the hammer of justice on those who defraud the system.”

The owners of businesses located in Mesa and Phoenix are alleged to have committed several crimes associated with SNAP fraud. Initial charges include fraudulent schemes and artifices, unlawful use of food stamps, money laundering, computer tampering, theft, and related offenses.

The investigation was led by the Trafficking Detection Unit within the Arizona Department of Economic Security – Office of the Inspector General (DES OIG), in coordination with the United States Department of Agriculture - Office of the Inspector General (USDA OIG), Phoenix and Mesa Police Departments and the Arizona Attorney General's Office.

SNAP cardholders are permitted to use benefits only for eligible food items. By law, SNAP benefits cannot be exchanged or redeemed for cash. In a typical criminal transaction, the seller receives a portion of the value of the card in cash and the buyer, removes the benefits from the card through sham transactions.

Final charges will be determined by the state grand jury in conjunction with the Arizona Attorney General's Office.

###