

MADISON, WIS.

Ex-energy program boss sentenced for selling pot

■ Former Ramsey Action manager gets 4-year term

GARY DAWSON STAFF WRITER

The former manager of Ramsey Action Program's energy conservation program has been sentenced to four years and three months in federal prison and ordered to forfeit \$50,000 for selling large amounts of marijuana grown on a Wisconsin pig farm.

Paul Vielhaber, 51, of Lakeland, Minn., was fired after a jury convicted him last November in U.S. District Court in Madison. The judge, Judge Barbara Crabb or-

dered him to forfeit a 1993 Jeep Cherokee and serve four years of supervised release when he gets out of prison.

This month, Vielhaber's stepdaughter and co-defendant, Nicole Gardner, 27, of Lakeland, also received four years and three months in prison, four years of supervised release and a \$25,000 forfeiture.

The judge's final forfeiture orders for both defendants were less than the \$95,000 a jury earlier ordered Vielhaber to forfeit and the \$65,500 jurors assessed Gardner. They both could have received maximum sentences of 40 years in prison and \$4 million in fines.

During the trial last year, prosecutors presented evidence that

Vielhaber bought high-grade marijuana from 1993 to 1998 for \$2,800 a pound from pig farmer Gary Roth of Viroqua, Wis., in Vernon County southeast of LaCrosse. He was accused of transporting the marijuana to the Twin Cities area with the jeep.

Witnesses said Gardner bought much of the marijuana for \$2,500 a pound and sold it to her ex-boyfriend, Joe Hagen, for \$4,000 to \$4,500 a pound.

Hagen, accused of distributing the drug, was sentenced in November to 12 years and 11 months in prison and ordered to forfeit \$256,000. Roth is serving a 10-year sentence and agreed to forfeit \$908,000 of drug proceeds. Roth said he sold 670 pounds of mari-

juaana to Vielhaber over a six-year period.

Drug agents seized 4,200 marijuana plants and 37 pounds of harvested marijuana in a raid on the Roth farm in December 1998. The marijuana was grown in a large indoor garden in a pig barn.

Charges against the defendants were a result of a joint investigation by Wisconsin state narcotics enforcement officers, the Washington County, Minn. Drug Task Force and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

Gary Dawson, who covers western Wisconsin, can be reached at gdawson@glbc.com; or free at (907) 730-3971 or at (715) 891-1808.