

3 illegal animal slaughter farms raided, shutdown in Loxahatchee

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LOXAHATCHEE, Fla. (WSVN) -- The Animal Recovery Mission raided three illegal animal slaughter farms who were allegedly involved in the slaughter of horses and the illegal sale of meat for human consumption.

ARM initiated the raids early Tuesday morning in Palm Beach County and the greater Wellington area. The raid was the largest tactical strike on extreme animal cruelty operations in United States history. "It's one of the worst, certainly, really in the history of the United States," said ARM founder Richard Couto. "What they're doing to the animals, including horses and other farm animals, are just killing them in such ghastly manners. It's something that even something our investigators haven't seen before."

The undercover investigations, entitled "Operation: Rancho Garcia," "Operation: G.A. Paso Fino" and "Operation Medina Farm," revealed violent acts of animal cruelty. Undercover footage captured the illegal slaughters, as well as criminal acts against animals in the form of inhumane handling, dragging, beating, gutting, boiling, skinning and hoisting of animals while they were still alive. "Just the most horrific acts to do to an animal you could imagine," said Couto.

The farms were found in Loxahatchee. Jorge Garcia, owner of Rancho Garcia, is allegedly a well known animal killer, butcher and leader of horse meat supply in the area. Investigators said the meat Garcia sold has been linked to black market horse meat trade in Miami. He also reportedly used a section of his property to run a puppy mill, where he would breed and sell dogs.

The owners of the G.A. Paso Fino farm, Orlando Guzman and Edgar Bica, were also selling the meat to others throughout South Florida, said Couto. "The Palm Beach area has a true link to the illegal horse meat trade in Miami and throughout the state of Florida," noted Couto. "Horse killers were coming up through Miami, butchering horses here and then taking much of the meat to Miami for sale and vice-versa, so it really was a racket. An organized crime ring that was occurring out of the properties in Palm Beach, right next to Wellington, Florida." A total of six people were arrested.

Approximately 750 animals were seized, including goats, pigs, cattle, dogs, cats, roosters that were used for cock fights and several species of birds.

The animals are in the process of being placed in the custody of ARM. "Basically, the animals that are left that haven't been butchers, are being corralled, medically treated by our veterinarians, and then they're going to be transported to ARM's new division and also to Animal Services in Palm Beach, which have a great property for farm animals," said Couto. "A lot of the animals in front of us were dying of starvation, dying of disease, being beaten."

Couto continued, "We don't want misdemeanor crimes. We don't want these people getting out of jail the next morning. We want them going to prison, which is exactly where these people are going."

ARM is a Miami-based, nonprofit organization dedicated to investigating and shutting down illegal and extreme animal cruelty operations.