

750 animals seized, six arrested in raids of alleged slaughter farms

Animals being placed in the care of Animal Recovery Mission

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LOXAHATCHEE, Fla. — Six people were arrested and approximately 750 animals were seized from alleged slaughter farms in Palm Beach County, authorities said.

The farms were raided Tuesday by workers with the Animal Recovery Mission and Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

People at the farms are accused of slaughtering horses in an underground operation and illegally selling meat for human consumption, officials said.

"The horse meat trade, we now know, is up and running in Palm Beach County," said Richard Couto, CEO of ARM.

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

ARM members said they infiltrated farms, gaining the operators' trust and conducting undercover surveillance.

ARM supplied undercover video of animals they said were illegally slaughtered. Deputies said they will use the video as evidence in the cases.



"The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office acted quicker, more efficiently than any other law enforcement we've ever worked with nationally or internationally," Couto said.

He said they discovered about 20 horses being illegally slaughtered for their meat every week. "Horses were coming from the Wellington show horse area, coming from thoroughbred race tracks. They were coming from Craigslist," Couto said.

The three farms, all in Loxahatchee, were labeled as Operation: Rancho Garcia at 15703 Orange Blvd., Operation: G.A. Paso Fino at 14873 Collecting Canal Road, and Operation: Medina Farm at 2151 C Road.

Operation: Rancho Garcia was considered the leader of horse meat supply in the Loxahatchee and greater Wellington areas.

Operation: G.A. Paso Fino has operated for decades, allegedly breeding and slaughtering horses for meat. ARM also provided evidence of animal cruelty to chickens, pigs and goats slaughtered by employees.

Paso Fino is also accused of operating a puppy mill in which puppies were kept in small cages with no water, and allegedly bred cockfighting roosters for animal fights throughout Palm Beach County.

ARM also obtained evidence of extreme acts of animal cruelty at Operation: Medina Farm. All three farms are being permanently shut down by authorities.

"All types of really dark corners these guys are in, as far as animal cruelty goes," Couto said. The animals were placed in Animal Recovery Mission's care, the release said.

ARM aided in passing The Good Horse Slaughter Act, which states that it is a third-degree felony for any person to buy, sell, transport, kill a horse or possess horse meat for human consumption within the state of Florida.

Arrested were the following individuals: Edgar Bica, 49; Edgar Bica, 84; Jorge Garcia, 48; Rafael Ramirez, 47; Monieram Rathibhan, 58; Jose Reyes, 38.