



## Authorities Raid Alleged Slaughterhouse Of Horror In SW Dade

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MIAMI (CBSMiami) – In Southwest Miami-Dade a legion of law enforcement descended on an illegal slaughterhouse Thursday. It was a slaughterhouse of horror, investigators say.

Farm owner Ricardo Vargas, 45, and his live-in girlfriend, Mayelin Rodriguez, 41, are charged with multiple counts of felony animal cruelty at their operation on Southwest 136th Street at 194th Avenue.

“The horrific nature of the crimes even surprised our undercover investigators,” said Richard Couto of the organization Animal Recovery Mission (ARM).

Miami Dade police SWAT teams entered the property after ARM infiltrated the slaughterhouse operation 7 months ago and videotaped torturous abuses of animals.

Couto said the two arrested presided over an operation that saw animals shot with non-lethal caliber guns, gutted while still alive, and dragged by their mouths with gaffer hooks to a cauldron of boiling water. Undercover videos reportedly show squealing animals being thrown into the pots of water and boiled alive.

Investigators allege that some animals were diseased, and customers consumed tainted meat. Cooked meat was also sold, meat that was cooked in filthy ovens in a shed.

Illegal slaughterhouses are not confined to Miami-Dade County.

“These are spread out in our communities like a hand of cards in every county,” Couto said.

Just two months ago, after an ARM investigation, authorities raided three operations in Palm Beach County. At those farms horses, goats and pigs were literally skinned alive, according to investigators.

ARM uses a variety of techniques, including drones and Google Earth to look for buildings and other facilities common to illegal slaughter operations.

ARM has only a few paid staff members and relies on a host of volunteers.

“I’m an animal lover. I think that anybody who knows that this is going on should help,” said volunteer Brandon Saballas.

The raid on the slaughterhouse Thursday was timed to coincide with the Christmas holidays.

“Our goal is to send a strong message to the community that illegal slaughterhouses and animal cruelty will not be tolerated,” said Couto.

The strong message comes as South Floridians prepare for Noche Buena, Christmas Eve, when thousands of families feast on whole-roast pigs.

Couto said those who buy their holiday pigs from illegal slaughterhouses are supporting horrible abuses.

Multiple police agencies, and Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle’s office, dissipated in Thursday’s raid.

Couto said animal rights advocates are extremely grateful to have the strong support of law-enforcement as they combat farmyard horrors.