



Animals found sick, malnourished seized from Davie property

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Davie Monday evening after they were found sick and malnourished, and officials said this wasn't the first time they've had to respond to that location.

The nonprofit rescue group Animal Recovery Mission, led by Richard Couto, alerted police weeks ago about the deplorable conditions of the more than two dozen ponies, goats, piglets and other animals living off of Southwest 39th Street in Davie.

Couto said an anonymous tip led the group to the property, and he was deeply disturbed by what he found. "For a pony even to show remnants of a bone in his body, it's extremely hard to do this," he said as he showed the animal's clearly visible ribcage to a 7News crew. "This isn't like a regular horse. This is long-term neglect here."

Investigators said Alvaro Ramirez, the animals' owner, has had several chances to prove he's a responsible caretaker. "That hasn't happened," said Couto. "On numerous occasions, our investigators have been out, and there's been no food and no water."

Ramirez, who runs a petting zoo, was initially told to improve the animals' conditions, and he said he complied. "You can see, you can see, look," he said as he showed 7News bags of food. "I don't know why they take the horses."

"He did go out and bought food ... but was the proper food in the bowls of the animals, or was it just for show?"

Crews removed the animals under the supervision of Davie Police. Ramirez claimed he's done nothing wrong. When a reporter said the horses don't look healthy, Ramirez replied, "It does."

When told about Couto's claims that the animals were discovered without water, Ramirez said, "They lie."

As volunteers herded the animals into transport trucks, things got heated, and officers led Ramirez away in handcuffs. "He's trying to keep these animals because they make him money, OK?" said Couto. "That's the only reason why he has them. He does not care about their health or about their well-being."

Ramirez was arrested because of the altercation with officers, but he has not been charged with animal cruelty. However, police said they will hand over the information they compiled at the property to the State Attorney's Office for further investigation to determine whether he will face additional charges.