

ANIMAL CRUELTY

Hundreds of sick animals found at South Dade slaughter farm



An illegal slaughter house in South Miami-Dade was raided Friday. More than 500 animals, including ponies, geese, chickens, and rams were found in bad condition. Two men were charged with animal cruelty.

BY ELINOR J. BRECHER

Five hundred animals — including a miniature horse, ram, ewe, rabbits and kittens — many of them sick, malnourished and living alongside dead pen-mates, were found when rescuers raided an illegal slaughter farm in South Miami-Dade on Friday.

It was the second raid in eight days, after animal cruelty investigators secretly taped animals being tortured before being butchered. Those tapes were given as evidence to the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office.

Miami-Dade Agricultural Patrol officers arrested Leonardo Dumenigo, 62, and Yainiel Proenza, 30, at the farm, on Krome Avenue just north of SW 184th Street, charging each with three felony counts of animal cruelty. Dumenigo lives in the 8300 block of SW 45th Street, Miami. Proenza lives on Northwest Fifth Avenue in Homestead.

Dumenigo and Proenza, who are being held at the Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center in lieu of \$15,000 bond, are father and son, according to Richard Couto, founder of Animal Recovery Mission, whose operatives secretly videotaped illegal butchery at the farm on May 31.

The taped incident shows the two men inhumanely killing a goat and two rabbits for meat in a facility lacking U.S. Department of Agriculture approval.

According to the arrest warrants, the men hung the goat upside down, then “sawed” at its neck with a metal blade as it “was visibly struggling and thrashing in an attempt to get away.”

Dumenigo then forcibly sprayed water into the goat’s face — in effect water boarding it — as the animal struggled, upside down and bleeding from the neck.

“The struggling continued for an additional approximately four minutes while the goat continued to thrash about,” the arrest warrant reads. “Eventually, the goat ceased to move and was butchered.”

The warrants also detail grisly attacks on the rabbits with “a long metal blade,” and prolonged “struggling and thrashing” before butchering.

As police led Dumenigo and Proenza away, veterinarians rushed in to set up a triage table. Rescuers followed with cages, crates, fresh hay, feed and clean water.

Along with the miniature horse, ram and ewe, rescuers found goats, fighting roosters, chickens, turkeys, seven slider turtles, scores of pigeons, at least one bobwhite quail, and a young male American bulldog.

They also found dead animals, including a turtle in a fetid tub with live turtles, and several young chickens in a feed sack.

An Animal Recovery Mission volunteer, thinking the sack contained feed, opened it, finding one barely living chicken among the maggot-infested carcasses.

Jessica Cline, interim director of Miami’s Pelican Harbor Seabird Station, which sent three workers to the site, humanely euthanized it. It was her group’s first on-site participation in a raid, which included the South Florida Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Rooster Rescue.

“They asked us because we know birds,” Cline said. “We’ll take some of the baby pigeons and geese.”

Dr. Heidi Thomas, a Fort Lauderdale large-animal veterinarian, examined many of the animals and found respiratory infections, diarrhea, dehydration and malnutrition. She administered antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs.

Det. Mario Fernandez of the Agricultural Patrol found knives, bolt cutters and a machete in a box-like alcove behind the animal cages, abutting a shack containing dirty sofas and a filthy kitchen.

Tacked to a kitchen wall he found what appeared to be an order list for \$830 worth of animals, plus a \$50 delivery charge.

Fernandez said the suspects told him they knew of the previous week's raid, at VIP Animal Sales, Krome Avenue and Southwest 257th Street, and "were aware that police were coming" to the area.

"But they were surprised that they were next," Fernandez said. "They denied any slaughter was going on."

Also on hand during Friday's raid: a Miami-Dade Code Enforcement officer who compiled a lengthy list of violations.

The incident seemed like a rerun of the VIP raid, during which police served warrants also based on Animal Recovery Mission undercover videos.

Of four suspects arrested in the VIP raid, two, Daniel Lombana, 36, and Jesus Navarro, 51, remain in custody. Andre P. Martinez, 45, and Juan M. Bazan, 51, bonded out of jail.

Agricultural Patrol Lt. Sheree Di Bernardo said that although the raids can't stop all illegal slaughter in the area, "we're getting a handle on it. We want to put them out of business."

She praised Animal Recovery Mission for collecting the evidence and veteran prosecutor Susan Dannelly for "working tirelessly putting the warrants together."

Dannelly, who prosecuted the notorious "Baby Lollipops" case, which sent a mother to Death Row for the 1990 murder of her son, said that helpless animals deserve the same compassion as helpless humans.

"All the work is worth it because I perceive my job as speaking for people who have no voice, no power, no ability to fight to protect themselves, and animals are even more helpless, totally at the mercy of everyone they encounter."

She said through cruelty prosecutors, "we hope to educate people about how wrong it is. It's a life."