



# 9,000 Animals Rescued From 'Worst Torture Operation' In The U.S.

By Stephen Messenger March 17, 2015



More than 9,000 animals have been rescued from a life of unimaginable pain and suffering after a raid on what investigators called "the worst torture operation in existence in the United States" — an illegal slaughterhouse in Florida operating under the name Coco Farms.

Richard "Kudo" Couto, founder of the group Animal Recovery Mission (ARM), was instrumental in uncovering the truth behind the secret facility. Coco Farms had a license to sell live animals, but it didn't take long before Couto and his team came face-to-face with the sickening truth behind the operation.

"We went in as customers and basically befriended them. We slowly create relationships with them until they would do their regular activities on the property in front of us, until they felt comfortable enough to start killing animals," he told The Dodo.



Couto says he was shocked at the brutality he witnessed.

"They were boiling animals alive. They were drowning animals in boiling water. They were skinning animals alive — and I'm talking about completely skinning animals while they were alive. They hung goats upside down, stabbed them in the throats, and then twisted their heads completely off while they were still alive. I've never seen anything like the ongoing at this property," he said.





Couto says the farm's small staff seemed to prefer these torturous methods of death over more humane ones, describing them as "real violent guys" who would "rather boil an animal alive, or go after it with an axe or sledge hammer." He estimates that around 300 animals, including horses, were being brutally killed at the farm every day, and had been for the past 45 years in secret.

"We are finding out now that they were huge advertisers in Asian papers locally," he said. "They probably did 40 to 50 percent of their business with Asian restaurants in the area, selling meat to them illegally. They slipped through the system because it was legal for them to have animals on site."

The thousands of animals on the farm who had yet to be slaughtered hardly had it better off. Couto describes chickens crammed into tiny cages, covered in the blood of others killed in front of them. Some of the larger animals, fenced off in the rear of the property, were so starved that they had been forced to eat animals who had just died.



Thankfully, hope was on the way for these thousands of animals. After months of gathering evidence, ARM coordinated with state law enforcement agencies to close Coco Farms for good. Last week, along with more than 100 officers from the Miami-Dade Police Department, they raided the property and arrested the owner and staff.

They are now in the process of saving as many of the more than 9,000 animals as they can.





"This is probably the largest raid on an illegal slaughterhouse in the history of the U.S.," said Couto. "We're on our fourth or fifth day of treating the animals, bringing their systems up to speed with proper food and nutrition and water."

Several hundred animals were found to be so sickly that they had to be humanely euthanized, but for thousands others, a better life awaits.



"These animals are leaving one of the worst properties in the world — not in the United States — the world," Couto said. "Now we're taking them out and moving them to some of the best sanctuaries in the United States. They will live the best lives possible. It's really the worst to the best."

The farm's operators, 69-year-old Gregorio Santa Ana and 35-year-old Jose Armando Solis, have had their assets seized and are being held on numerous animal cruelty charges.



Though it may be the biggest bust of its kind so far, Coco Farms is not alone. According to Couto, there are likely thousands of animals awaiting rescue in facilities like it around the state, reaping profits from meat sales while skirting legal oversight.

"We have a hundred farms that we're just waiting for the manpower to stop right now," he said. "There are probably over 500 of these farms in the state of Florida. There are certainly small farms like this found throughout the country, but in Florida, it is a full blown industry. It is millions and millions of dollars. This is organized crime."