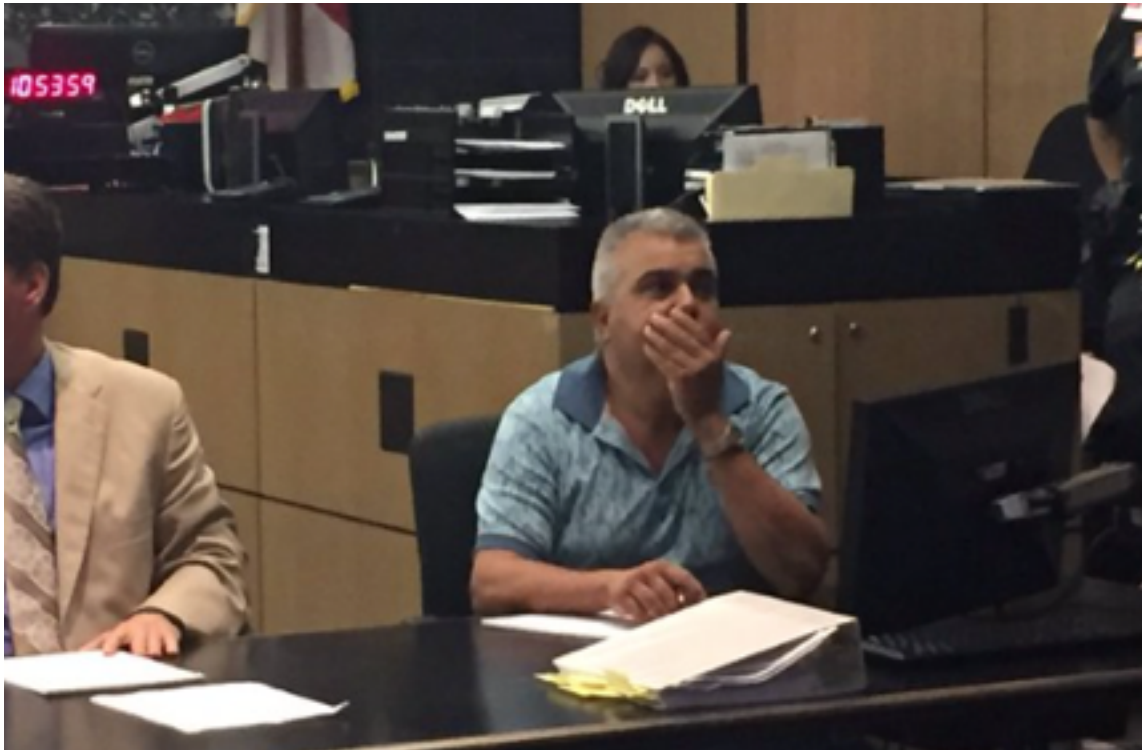


Jurors deliberating cruelty case against slaughterhouse owner

BY CHUCK WEBER TUESDAY, MARCH 29TH 2016



WEST PALM BEACH (CBS12) — Jurors began deliberating the animal cruelty case against a Loxahatchee slaughterhouse owner, late Tuesday afternoon.

Jorge Garcia is the first defendant to go on trial, since the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office raided three animal slaughterhouses, including Garcia's, in the Loxahatchee Acreage.

"We started this operation, undercover, almost 12 months ago now, so (it's good) to see it come full circle," said Richard Couto of the private group Animal Recovery Mission, or ARM.

One of ARM's undercover volunteers was the trial's first witness. At Garcia's farm, Rancho Garcia, the woman posed as a buyer of goat meat.

Her undercover videos, viewed by jurors, allegedly caught Garcia and his workers inhumanely killing two goats-- slitting their throats while still alive, without properly desensitizing the animals, as required by state law.

But Garcia's attorney, Andrew Stine, told jurors cutting an animal's carotid artery is a legal form of killing an animal for its meat.

Stine also pointed out there were no police officers involved in the undercover operation.

"One of Palm Beach County's residents being prosecuted, by who? ARM?" Stine asked. "It's what we work for, it's what we dedicate our lives to, and we just want some justice for the animals of Palm Beach County," said Couto, of ARM.

Garcia's attorney, Stine, called no witnesses.

Jurors started deliberating after 5:30. The judge reported panelists had chosen a foreperson, and asked for a replay of the video. Jurors will resume deliberations Wednesday morning.

Three of the nine slaughterhouse defendants have taken plea deals, and only one got jail time.

If convicted, Garcia faces a maximum of 10 years in prison, but based on sentencing guidelines, could end up with only probation, or little time behind bars.