

## Video evidence allowed in Loxahatchee animal slaughter case

By Daphne Duret - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer  
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A former Loxatachee farm owner charged with illegally slaughtering goats and a cow while also illegally possessing horse meat could go to trial as early as March 28 after a judge Wednesday denied his request to throw out video evidence in the case.

Jorge Luis Garcia, 48, and Rafael Ramirez, 50, had unsuccessfully tried through their attorneys in a hearing to get Circuit Judge Samantha Schosberg Feuer to throw out recordings that a nonprofit investigation group shot of Garcia's Loxahatchee farm last year.

The videos, recorded by a member of Animal Recovery Mission, show a goat and other animals being slaughtered. On the witness stand, the worker said she and another man posed as customers and got Garcia, Ramirez and others to sell them illegally slaughtered animals.

In her investigation, the worker said, she watched Garcia personally slaughter a goat by shooting it several times, chasing it for half an hour with other workers and then stabbing it repeatedly after someone was able to lasso it into the slaughterhouse. She said she also watched Garcia “sadistically” stomp on a duck’s neck while laughing.

ARM investigators said they also purchased horse meat from members of the operation and believe they slaughtered horses on the property as well. But no one was charged with the slaughter of a horse and prosecutors have said they have no evidence Garcia, Ramirez or the three other men arrested on animal cruelty charges with them were slaughtering horses.

Garcia’s attorney, Andrew Stine, told Feuer that the recordings ran afoul of Florida law, which requires all parties to consent to being recorded in conversations and meetings where there is an expectation of privacy. Allowing the evidence in, Stine said, would set a bad precedent in local courts.

“We’ve got to stop this behavior,” Stine told Feuer. “You can understand how far this can get.”

Assistant State Attorney Judith Arco, on the other hand, argued that there was no expectation of privacy in the case. Garcia and others advertised the farm as a business open to the public, Arco said, and crowds of 25 or more people gathered to watch the animal slaughters captured on video.

Afterwards, ARM founder Richard “Kudo” Couto said members of his team know the laws. He compared recording at Garcia’s farm to recording video “at Home Depot or Target.”

“Without these recording case would have fell flat,” Couto said. “But now the people of Palm Beach County can be assured that they’ll be found guilty.”

Stine said Garcia’s Loxahatchee property has since gone into foreclosure, and he now lives in Margate. Feuer tentatively set Garcia’s case to go to trial March 28, but it may start after that because Ramirez’s case has been postponed and Arco said she wants both men to stand trial together.

The three other men arrested in connection with the case took pleas in November.

Edgar Bica, 49, was sentenced to five months in the Palm Beach County jail and given credit for the 25 days he had already spent behind bars. Feuer also ordered him to spend a year on house arrest and another two years on probation.

His 83-year-old father, Edegar Bica, also pleaded guilty to a charge of animal cruelty and killing animals by non-humane methods. Adjudication was withheld and he was placed on probation for 18 months. Rodobaldo Diaz, 47, of West Palm Beach, who also worked at G.A. Paso Fino Farm, pleaded guilty to two counts of animal cruelty, adjudication was withheld and he was placed on probation for three years.