

Jury convicts Loxahatchee farm owner of animal cruelty in slaughter of goats

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Jorge Garcia is the first defendant to go on trial since the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office raided three animal slaughterhouses in the Loxahatchee area this past fall. Garcia is charged with felony animal cruelty. (WPEC-Ch.12)

A Palm Beach County jury on Wednesday convicted a Loxahatchee farm owner of four animal cruelty charges concerning the slaughter of two goats on his property last summer.

After about three hours of deliberations, the panel of four women and two men decided Jorge Luis Garcia, 48, owner of Rancho Garcia farm, is guilty of the inhumane killing of the animals. The convictions were all misdemeanors, after the jury decided not to find Garcia guilty on two felony counts.

Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Samantha Schosberg Feuer said she will sentence Garcia on April 26. She ordered Garcia to be held in Palm Beach County Jail until he learns his fate.

Before the trial started Tuesday, Garcia turned down an offer from prosecutors to plead guilty in exchange for a sentence of five years' probation, including six months in jail. Now he faces up to two years and four months in prison for the convictions — two counts of animal cruelty and two counts of killing animals by non-humane methods.

"I am very, very satisfied with the verdict," Assistant State Attorney Judy Arco said. The case hinged largely on videos of the slaughter secretly recorded by an animal rights group that had targeted Garcia and then turned the evidence over to law enforcement.

Slaughter of Loxahatchee goats inhumane, prosecutor argues in farm owner's trial
Prosecutors argued Garcia allowed both goats to suffer by being strung upside down alive before their throats were sliced with a knife and bled out.

While Garcia declined to testify, his lawyer said the undercover videos don't prove the goats suffered, and the intrusion on private property violated Garcia's rights.

"It's humane," defense attorney Andrew Stine said during his closing argument in his description of the goat slaughter. "I can't think of anything sharper than a knife. What else was he supposed to use? ... The goat died immediately."

After the verdict, Stine said he respected the jury's findings but would file an appeal.

The Miami-based Animal Recovery Mission, whose representatives shot the videos, accused Garcia of allowing the brutal torture of animals for years.

On Monday, one of Garcia's co-defendants, Jose Guadalupe Pena, 36, pleaded guilty to one count of animal cruelty and one count of killing animals by non-humane methods. He was sentenced to one day in jail and given credit for serving that time.

A case is still pending against another co-defendant, Rafael Ramirez, 50, described as "the butcher" by Stine. His next court date is May 17. Ramirez faces the same charges as Garcia, along with one count of unlawful possession or sale of horse meat.

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