

Man accepts plea deal for operating illegal slaughterhouse

Gregorio Santa Ana, 70, arrested of animal cruelty charges last year

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MIAMI - One of four men accused of operating an illegal slaughterhouse in northwest Miami-Dade County accepted a plea deal on Tuesday.

Gregorio Santa Ana, 70, appeared in court, where he pleaded guilty to animal cruelty charges in exchange for avoiding any further jail time. He was instead sentenced to five years of probation.

"This was a plea of convenience and a plea of his best interest. He is a 70-year-old man who is in poor health and just wanted to get this resolved," his attorney, Robert Barrar, said.

Henry Parra-Oporta, Armando Solis and Ruben Rodriguez were also charged in March of last year in what police called at the time the largest animal rescue in the country.

Miami-Dade police said the arrests were the result of a five-month investigation. Authorities said 9,500 animals were found on the property, known as Coco Farms, some of which were starved, deprived of water and slaughtered in vicious ways.

More than 3,000 animals were discovered in such poor conditions that they had to be euthanized by veterinarians at the scene, police said.

The rescued animals were placed into the custody of the Animal Rescue Mission, where they received nutritional and medical assistance.

Police said many dead animals were also found throughout the property. Tuesday's outcome warranted mixed emotions from those in court.

"ARM is never happy with a plea deal on an animal cruelty case, especially such as the Santa Ana case," Richard Couto from the Animal Recovery Mission said. Couto said Santa Ana never actually killed an animal, but he was the director of the farm and orchestrated the operations.

The 200-acre property was demolished last year because investigators said they were worried that someone would move back in and continue operations. As part of the plea deal, Santa Ana will no longer be able to have access to animals or run a business.

Two others accepted plea deals in the case, and Parra-Oporta is awaiting trial.