

Ex-Loxahatchee farm owner gets one year in jail in goat slaughter case

Jorge Garcia was sentenced to a year in jail plus a year of probation for the illegal slaughter of two goats on his property.

Marc Freeman Contact Reporter



[Jury convicts Loxahatchee farm owner of animal cruelty in slaughter of goats](#)

After hearing community complaints for years about animals being tortured, a South Florida animal rights group decided to go undercover last summer at three Loxahatchee farms.

Under a blazing sun, investigators posing as meat-seeking customers shot secret videos of what would later be described in court as inhumane slaughter.

Those efforts led to Tuesday's tough punishment for one former rancher: a year in jail plus a year of probation for the illegal slaughter of two goats on his property.

While sentencing Jorge Luis Garcia, 48, on four misdemeanor animal cruelty charges, **Palm Beach County** Circuit Judge Samantha Schosberg Feuer pointed to testimony of how numerous farm animals, not just the slaughtered goats, were "tortured, brutalized and lived in squalor."

"Conditions at the Garcia farm were deplorable," the judge said.

Last month, a jury found Garcia guilty in a case based on the undercover investigative efforts of Animal Recovery Mission of Miami. The videos prompted law enforcement officers to raid Rancho Garcia and two other Loxahatchee farms Oct. 13. Eight men, including Garcia, were arrested.

Founder Richard "Kudo" Couto testified Tuesday that Garcia deserved to be jailed because his farm was "just a filthy, disgusting place" where it was "almost like they enjoyed the torture of animals."

County animal control officer Jennifer Batchelor told the judge that Garcia's farm has been a nuisance for more than 10 years. She said she was speaking for "all the animals that have no voice who have been suffering at the hands of Jorge Garcia."

Schosberg Feuer ordered Garcia to complete a 10-hour training course on the humane treatment of animals, and submit to random inspections of his property by **Palm Beach County** animal control officers.

Garcia also must not come in contact with animals or work at a slaughterhouse during his punishment for two counts of animal cruelty and two counts of killing animals by non-humane methods.

At the trial, Assistant State Attorneys Judy Arco and Jo Wilensky argued Garcia allowed both goats to suffer pain by being strung upside down before their throats were sliced at the Garcia property, 15703 Orange Blvd. The jury watched color videos of the slaughter from Garcia's farm Aug. 22 and Sept. 12.

While Garcia declined to testify, defense attorney Andrew Stine argued the videos don't prove the goats suffered, and he said the intrusion on private

property violated Garcia's rights. The judge denied the defense's request to keep the videos out of the trial.

Garcia is appealing the convictions on the basis that the videos of the goat slaughter are illegal, Stine said, calling Animal Recovery Mission a "rogue group." The defense insisted to the jury that the goats were killed humanely.

Because of the pending appeal, Garcia, a father of 13-year-old twin boys, declined to comment before receiving his punishment. But in a pre-sentencing investigative report, Garcia said there was a "conspiracy" against him.

Before the trial, Garcia rejected an offer from prosecutors to plead guilty in exchange for a sentence of five years' probation, including six months in jail. At that time he faced two felony counts, but the jury opted to convict on lesser charges.

Stine requested a 30-day jail sentence with credit for already having served that time since the verdict, plus 11 months' probation based in **Broward County** because Garcia would live in his parents' house in Margate. The farm has been foreclosed and the property is being sold.

After prosecutors requested the jail term among the other conditions, Stine called the recommendation "vindictive" because it exceeded the plea offer and the jury did not convict on the felonies.

Prosecutor Arco said regardless of Garcia's punishment, she doesn't expect him to begin treating animals any better.

"He will not change because he does not think he did anything wrong," she said.

Schosberg Feuer said she saw no reason to give Garcia a second chance because his criminal history includes a 2005 felony animal cruelty conviction and sentence of three years' probation.

"Clearly Mr. Garcia didn't take that second chance seriously," she said, noting that he "blatantly" continued the activity. "There are reasons why laws against animal cruelty are in place."

Couto told reporters he was pleased with the sentence and praised the efforts of law enforcement and prosecutors in a "precedent-setting case" that saved more animals from brutal treatment.

A case is pending against a co-defendant, Rafael Ramirez, 50, described as the farm's "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.

Couto's investigators reported finding horse meat filets at Rancho Garcia, and Couto has accused the business of supplying horse meat to customers across South Florida. But prosecutors said they found no evidence of horses being slaughtered on the property.

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