

Undercover video documents graphic abuse at second Okeechobee dairy farm

Animal Recovery Mission embedded worker at Burnham Dairy for three months

Terri Parker, Updated: 10:37 PM EST Nov 16, 2017



OKEECHOBEE, Fla. —

Calling it one of the worst cases of long-running animal abuse he's ever investigated, Animal Recovery Mission founder Richard Couto released graphic undercover video of cows being hit, prodded, and lying in muck at Burnham Dairy.

Couto said workers and managers at Burnham Dairy each day hit cows with wet, knotted towels, belts with buckles and steel rods to get them into the milking stations.

The video shows cows lying in deep muck in pens, as well as piles of dead and decomposing cows.

Couto alleged that calves were separated from their mothers on the day of their birth, and then when they refused a bottle, were force fed by untrained workers who injured them by shoving steel tubes down their throats. He said the calves were inexplicably kept in pens with dead cows.

“What in the world are they thinking putting live dairy calves, female dairy calves with diseased, dead animals?” asked Couto.

The video release comes one week after A.R.M. released similar video of alleged abuse at Larson Dairy Farm, also in Okeechobee.

The Okeechobee Sheriff’s Office is investigating the alleged abuse, and Publix immediately issued a statement saying they were suspending purchasing any milk from Larson Dairy.

Couto said the abuse at the much smaller Burnham Dairy was worse, because all of the cows were hit and living in muck, manure and urine and penned in cages with no shelter from the sun or rain.

Video shows some of the cows falling on a slick ramp as workers prodded them with rods and flicking belts.

Couto said he turned over 1,000 hours of undercover video and other evidence to state and local agencies that inspect dairies, but wondered why none of those inspectors had noticed the unsanitary conditions and treatment of the cows before.

“This is torture,” said Couto.

He is calling for authorities to revoke the Burnham Dairy’s license and shut it down forever.

He also is requesting that Randy Burnham, the owner of the dairy, be charged with a third-degree felony, since he owns the abused cows.

Randy and Douglas Burnham, of Burnham Farms released the following statement:

"We are appalled to see those images. While some of them reflect our struggle in the face of historic severe weather in Florida, we also can't deny that others reflect a failure of our farm policies and management. We are taking immediate action regarding our employees. At the same time, we are working with animal care experts in our industry to change our on-farm practices because we need to do better by our customers, our community, and most of all, our animals." Publix also issued a statement about today's allegations saying:

"We learned late last week that an undercover video was recorded at Burnham Farms depicting deplorable conditions and animal abuse. As of November 10, Publix made an immediate decision to suspend receiving raw milk from Burnham Farms. Publix is committed to animal welfare and we expect our suppliers to uphold the same standards."