

Second dairy farm in Okeechobee facing accusations of animal cruelty

by Gary Detman, WPEC Thursday, November 16th 2017



OKEECHOBEE, Fla. (WPEC) — A second dairy farm in Okeechobee County is facing accusations of animal cruelty and has since been placed on probationary status by Southeast Milk.

The Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) released new video Thursday. The group says its undercover investigators shot the video at Burnham Farms on NE 54th Trail in Okeechobee in August. ARM wrote in a news release the video shows "extensive and widespread abuse and neglect of dairy cows on the farm." ARM wants criminal charges brought against the owner of the farm, the location boss, dairy farm workers and their supervisors.

“It is a torturous, torturous operation in every level possible. In every area possible. In every division possible for this dairy,” said ARM founder Richard Couto.

ARM claims in the video you can see piles of dead calves, and skeletal remains on the farm.

They claim the video also shows calves being force fed.

"The workers in the calf areas were taking three foot rods, steel rods, and jamming these rods, untrained workers, not veterinarians, jamming these rods down the throats of newborn calves and force feeding them," said Couto.

Randy and Douglas Burnham of Burnham farms issued this statement: We were 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.

CBS12 spoke with the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office about the accusations. Spokeswoman Michele Bell said the sheriff's office has not received any complaints on Burnham Farms.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection told CBS12 it received a complaint about the farm on Nov. 2. The complaint referenced deceased cows left decomposing in standing water among living cows; deceased cows left decomposing on property near moving water; deceased cows out in open being eaten by predators; and ground water to public possibly affected by feces and decomposing bodies.

Inspectors went out on Nov. 13 and called the matter closed, saying Burnham Farm "properly disposed of all bovine carcasses at the facility after being informed of the complaint."

https://www.scribd.com/document/364632522/DEP-Investigation-into-Burnham-Farm#from_embed

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is also investigating the matter. Commissioner Adam H. Putnam released a statement:

Cruelty to animals has no place in agricultural practices. The welfare of animals in agriculture is a vital part of farmers and ranchers' responsibility to be good stewards of all of God's creatures.

Last week ARM released [video](#) it claimed showed the abuse of cows at the Larson Dairy Farm earlier this year. ARM called for changes in the dairy industry and boycotts. Publix, in response, suspended raw milk deliveries from the farm until there's assurances to the safety and well-being of the animals. The sheriff's office said there could be [criminal charges](#) in the Larson case.

Publix said on Twitter it's suspending raw milk deliveries from Burnham Farms.

G @GinaRClark

@Publix We are watching with extreme scrutiny to see which dairy you select to replace this one. We demand regular unannounced inspections. These people are despicable and should be prosecuted for animal cruelty!

<https://>

twitter.com/orlandosentinel

[/status/931227918180773888](https://twitter.com/orlandosentinel/status/931227918180773888)

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Publix



@Publix

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... 1/2

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Southeast Milk put Burnham Dairy Farm on a probationary status Thursday morning as a result of the new investigation.

"Working in collaboration with national animal care experts, we immediately initiated our own review to assess the validity of the report of mistreatment," wrote CEO Jim Sleper. "Animal abuse of any kind is never tolerated at SMI. While some of the conditions depicted at Burnham Dairy reflect our farming community's struggle to deal with the aftermath of the historic Hurricane Irma, others clearly show a breakdown in the adherence to our SMI protocols, as well as our broader dairy community standards. Our organization has a zero-tolerance policy for animal abuse, which mirrors the expectations of proper animal care outlined in the National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Animal Care program, the dairy industry's comprehensive animal care program. Any employee of a farm marketing its milk through SMI who is found to have violated our animal care guidelines, as well as any employee who witnessed abuse and failed to report it, should be terminated. SMI is working with the FARM program, which has activated its official protocol for Willful Mistreatment requiring an inspection by an outside 3rd-party auditor. The program placed Burnham Dairy Farm on probationary status, pending the completion of any and all corrective actions deemed necessary by the third-party auditor and the FARM Program. These actions demonstrate SMI's ongoing commitment to the proper care and responsible treatment of our member farms' animals. Animal care and well-being is paramount to our operations at SMI and its dairy farmer owners and we will work with our member dairies to do better, for our customers, our community and our cows."

The National Milk Producers Federation issued this statement on the Burnham matter:

The National Milk Producers Federation and its National Dairy FARM™ (Farmers Assuring Responsible Management) Program were notified by Southeast Milk (SMI) on Nov. 15, 2017, of allegations of improper animal care practices on one of its member farms in Okeechobee, Fla. The FARM Program takes seriously all allegations of animal abuse or mistreatment. Animal abuse of any kind is never tolerated.

Following notification from SMI, a dairy cooperative participating in the FARM Program, the FARM Program staff began gathering and reviewing evidence relating to reports of animal abuse and neglect on the dairy farm. The sole

source of the abuse allegations is a video and photo documentation created by animal activist organization Animal Recovery Mission.

The FARM Program, following activation of its official protocol on Willful Mistreatment, launched a thorough investigation, including mandating that a third-party audit be conducted on the farm. We have placed Burnham Dairy Farm on probationary status, pending the completion of all corrective actions deemed necessary by the auditors.

The National Dairy FARM Program, available to all producers, establishes an on-farm animal well-being program and third-party verification system that demonstrates farmers' commitment to the highest standards of animal care. Today, 98 percent of the domestic milk supply is enrolled in FARM.