



WPTV

Animal Recovery Mission claims it found animal abuse at Larson Dairy Farm in Okeechobee County

Publix suspending raw milk deliveries from farm

WPTV Webteam

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An animal welfare organization says it went undercover at one of the largest dairy farms in Florida and believes it has uncovered terrible abuse of cows at the Larson Dairy Farm in Okeechobee County.

It has prompted Publix to suspend raw milk from the farm. (See statement below).

Animal Recovery Mission went public with its findings because it wants both law enforcement and the public to put pressure on the farm to stop the alleged abuse immediately.

The group released a five-minute video which starts with the herding of cows into large pens in preparation for milking.

On the video there are men pushing the cows and one is seen even kicking them into the pen.

Another man is on video slapping the cow. WPTV has not independently verified the video.

In the video, you can see men using construction rebar to stab and punch the cows repeatedly.

"A similar piece was used at Larson Dairy to brutalize, stab and beat the animals on a daily basis on an hourly basis; this was very readily available at the dairy barn," said Animal Recovery Mission founder and investigator Richard 'Kudo' Couto.

During the news conference, ARM was asked whether anyone from the group signed anything saying they couldn't shoot video. They said they signed no such paperwork.

Before they went public with the tape they say they showed it to the state attorney.

Larson Dairy Farms released the following statement Thursday afternoon:

The statement below from Jacob Larson, owner of Larson Dairy Inc., is in response to the release today of video taken on his farm.

"We are deeply saddened and appalled by the actions witnessed in this video, which first came to our attention this morning. The unusual use of force is simply unacceptable on our dairy or on any other farm.

We have strict protocols involving animal care and clearly the behavior shown in this video goes against everything we stand for and will not be tolerated. The employee involved and featured in the video has been terminated. Further

corrective action will be taken if necessary as we continue to analyze the video and conduct an on-farm investigation.

We are equally concerned about the manner in which this video was brought to our attention. Had the “undercover” employee brought this to our attention when it occurred we may have been able to prevent it earlier.

Dairy farmers have the utmost responsibility to compassionately care for our animals and this is not an adequate reflection of how we do that on a daily basis.”

Okeechobee County Sheriff Noel E. Stephen said he hasn't seen the video just still images.

Sheriff Stephen said that he has known the Larson family for years and he says they would never allow abusive behavior. He said a criminal investigation is now underway focusing on three people.

Late Thursday afternoon Publix released the following statement:

***“We were recently made aware of the undercover video taken at Larson Dairy, Inc. Like you, we are disturbed by the images and shocked by the cruelty shown toward the animals. We immediately followed up with the CEO of Southeast Milk Incorporated (SMI) Cooperative, of which Larson Dairy, Inc. is a member. We have advised SMI that we are suspending raw milk deliveries from that farm. We have also been in contact with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and they have advised us they will be visiting Larson Dairy, Inc. as quickly as possible to ensure the safety and well-being of the animals.*”**

At Publix, we care about and are committed to animal welfare and are focused on working with suppliers who share the same goals. We also appreciate the trust our customers place in us to do the right thing, and we work hard to live up to that responsibility”.

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RELATED: [Link to ARM video.](#) **WARNING some may find the video disturbing.**

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RELATED: Larson Dairy Farm responds to abuse allegations

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