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Three accused of cruelty to animals at slaughterhouse

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Palm Beach County sheriff's detectives arrested three people on charges they were operating an illegal slaughterhouse in Loxahatchee. (WPEC-CBS12)

Palm Beach County sheriff's deputies on Thursday arrested three men as part of an investigation into an illegal slaughterhouse.

The Sheriff's Office said the group Animal Recovery Mission, a Miami Beach-based nonprofit that investigates

animal cruelty, helped with a six-month investigation into illegal slaughtering and animal cruelty.

Richard Couto, founder of Animal Recovery Mission, said during an afternoon news conference that his undercover staffers witnessed the slaughter of livestock at the farm and compared the butchering of animals that included cattle, sheep, goats, chickens, roosters and ducks to “torture.”

The farm situated in Loxahatchee Groves, in the 15700 block of 43rd Road North, was shut down, and local, state and federal agencies participated in the investigation, a spokeswoman for the Sheriff’s Office said.

Law enforcement and the Palm Beach County prosecutors did not release information Thursday to back up Couto’s allegations, including that meat from the farm was delivered to shipyards, boat yards and restaurants.

Animals still alive at the farm were taken by Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control, according to Couto. Taken into custody were Ricardo Cabrera, 57, of Loxahatchee, Chico Allen Cabrera, 29, of Lake Worth, and Roberto Llorente, 65, with no listed city of residence. Charges to be filed include felony cruelty to animals; conspiracy to commit felony cruelty to animals; killing animals with inhumane methods; conspiracy to commit killing animals with inhumane methods and cruelty to animals.

Specific charges were not described for each arrestee. Just before 8 a.m., the Sheriff's Office carried out a search warrant at the property.

This was the latest of several animal abuse-related arrests that resulted from ARM's efforts. It typically obtains incriminating video by sending in people undercover to facilities.

It's not the first time ARM has done undercover stings in the Loxahatchee area. Its videos led to eight men being arrested in 2015. All eight men arrested in law enforcement raids of three Loxahatchee farms have since had their cases resolved.

And last year, the group released undercover videos from Florida dairy country that drew worldwide outrage. The footage showed images of cows being punched and burned. In that case, six dairy workers were arrested on animal cruelty charges.