

ANIMALS

An Undercover Investigation Exposed Horrible Animal Abuse at a Coca Cola-Affiliated Dairy Farm

Activists filmed several instances of abuse at Fair Oaks Farms in Indiana.

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Image credit: Roberto Machado Noa | Getty Images

The images in the video are downright disturbing: Men punching, pushing, throwing and dragging calves. Calves forced fed from bottles and beaten with them when they don't drink. One is stomped on its head. Calves separated from their mothers soon after their birth. Calves left to die in 100-plus degree weather. Calves burned and beaten with branding irons. Dead calves stacked in piles and hidden from public view. Calves crowded in trucks, then secretly sent to be slaughtered for meat.

Another video revealed dairy cows being beaten if they refused to enter a milking carousel, becoming caught in the machinery and screaming for their calves.



These scenes played out at Fair Oaks Farms facilities in Indiana. The operation supplies dairy to milk brand Fairlife, a subsidiary of Coca-Cola. The videos, filmed over the course of August to November 2018 and released starting last week, are the result of an undercover investigation conducted by [Animal Recovery Mission](#) (ARM). A [shorter video of the abuse](#) has received 7.8 million views to date.

Fallout was swift. Fairlife [said that it will discontinue](#) the use of milk from the farm, adding it only made up 5 percent of its supply, and will audit the rest of its farms. Coca-Cola, [in a statement](#), said it will immediately conduct its own investigations into Fairlife's dairy suppliers "to ensure they uphold the highest standards of animal welfare." However, several retailers, including Jewel-Osco, have already pulled Fairlife products from their shelves. A [class action lawsuit](#) has been filed against the company.

Meanwhile, three of the four men shown in the videos committing the abuse had already been fired by Fair Oaks Farms before the videos became public, the farm's co-founder, Mike McCloskey (he also co-founded Fairlife), [said in a video](#). A fourth was fired after the release of the videos. One of the men has been [arrested](#), while the other two are at large as of Thursday. The three are charged with the beating of a vertebrate animal, a class A misdemeanor. Another person, a contractor, has been barred from the farm's premises.

McCloskey, once a contender for President Donald Trump's agriculture secretary, has promised changes at his farm, including installing security cameras in animal areas and hiring a full-time animal welfare specialist. Whether these changes are enough to stem public anger remains to be seen.

Coca-Cola launched Fairlife products in 2015 as a "premium" line of milk. One of the company's selling points for the product was "the traceability of its 'grass to glass' production chain," according to [Buzzfeed](#). The bottles prominently feature the image of a cow's face.

The case also highlights the role of so-called ag-gag laws, which criminalize hidden camera investigations on farms. Indiana had proposed such a law in 2013, but it was [struck down](#) due to First Amendment concerns.