

Chicago Tribune

# 2-year-old animal abuse video goes viral again, renewing calls to boycott Fairlife, though brand has cut ties with dairy farm

**Robert Channick, Chicago Tribune**  
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A 2-year-old video of alleged animal abuse at a northwest Indiana dairy farm has gone viral again, generating a new wave of social media outrage and renewed calls to boycott Fairlife, a Chicago-based premium milk brand.

Shot in 2018 by an undercover activist group investigator at Fair Oaks Farms, then the massive flagship dairy of Fairlife, the four-minute video depicts workers throwing, dragging, kicking and hitting newborn calves.

Reaction was fast and furious when the video was released in June 2019. A dozen [Chicago-area grocers pulled Fairlife from their shelves](#) amid

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Fairlife, which is owned by Coca-Cola, quickly cut ties with the dairy farm after the video first went viral. Time passed, and the product found its way back onto store shelves. But somebody shared the video recently on Facebook and it caught fire again, putting Fairlife and Fair Oaks back on the hot seat.

“The video circulating is from two years ago at one of our former supplying farms,” Lisa Lecas, a Fairlife spokeswoman, said in an email Thursday. “We immediately stopped accepting milk from them after learning about the incident and don’t accept milk from them today.”

Dozens of new signatures are popping up on a 2-year-old [Change.org](#) petition calling on retailers to drop Fairlife for using Fair Oaks as a supplier, and thousands are sharing the video.

Nearly 50,000 people read a 2-year-old [Chicago Tribune story](#) on the alleged animal abuse at Fair Oaks over the last two days.

“One of my friends on Facebook shared it. And I watched the video,” said Diane Mason, a reader from Melbourne, Florida, who reached out to the Tribune by email Thursday. “Then I searched for news on this and was surprised it was from 2019. ”

Fairlife was launched in 2012 as a partnership between Coca-Cola, which distributes its



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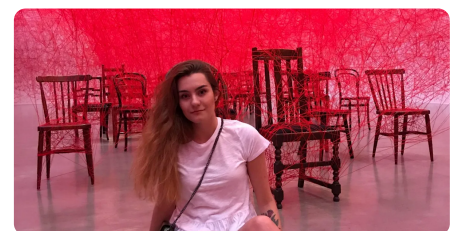
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traditional milk. It also generally costs more.

In January 2020, Coca-Cola bought out its partners to take full ownership of Fairlife.

Fairlife has invested more than \$8 million over the past two years into animal welfare programs and oversight at its supplying farms, Lecas said. Fair Oaks, she said, is no longer in their supply chain.

Fair Oaks, a sprawling dairy farm, was launched in 2004 by Mike and Sue McCloskey, who are also co-founders of Select Milk. The farm, which promotes itself as an agritourism destination for families and school groups, has documented steps it has taken to improve animal treatment since the video was released.

“We have taken vigilant, unwavering steps to actively monitor all human-animal interaction 24 hours a day by installing cameras throughout our farms, and bolstered these efforts with hiring an on-site animal welfare expert and conducting regular third-party audits to confirm our monitoring practices, to ensure we haven’t overlooked anything,” Fair Oaks said in an emailed statement Thursday. “We are proud to report that we have not had another incident on our farm.”

The alleged abuse dates back to August 2018, when Animal Recovery Mission, a nonprofit animal welfare group based in Miami, planted an investigator as an undercover calf care employee at the Indiana farm. The group released the video documenting the alleged animal abuse nearly a year later. It has since received millions of views on a variety of social media platforms.

In the video, calves are stomped in the head, kicked, dragged by the tail and ears, hit in the face



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were fired and a truck driver who worked for a third-party vendor was banned from the farm. Criminal charges were filed against at least three of the workers.

Richard Couto, 50, founder of Animal Recovery Mission, said the actions depicted at Fair Oaks shocked even their seasoned animal abuse investigators.

“Fair Oaks Farms was the worst abuse towards newborn babies that I have ever seen,” Couto said Thursday.

The organization also noticed a surge of interest this week in its nearly 3-year-old Fair Oaks investigation. Couto supported the renewed calls for boycotting Fairlife, but said his target is much bigger — the dairy industry at large.

Couto’s organization has investigated alleged abuse at 25 dairy farms in the U.S., including a 2017 investigation at a Florida dairy farm associated with Dean Foods, which filed for bankruptcy in 2019.

While Fairlife has cut ties with Fair Oaks, Couto said eliminating one supplier doesn’t eliminate the problem.

“It’s not the farm, it’s the industry,” Couto said. “The abuse in the dairy industry is systematic.”

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