



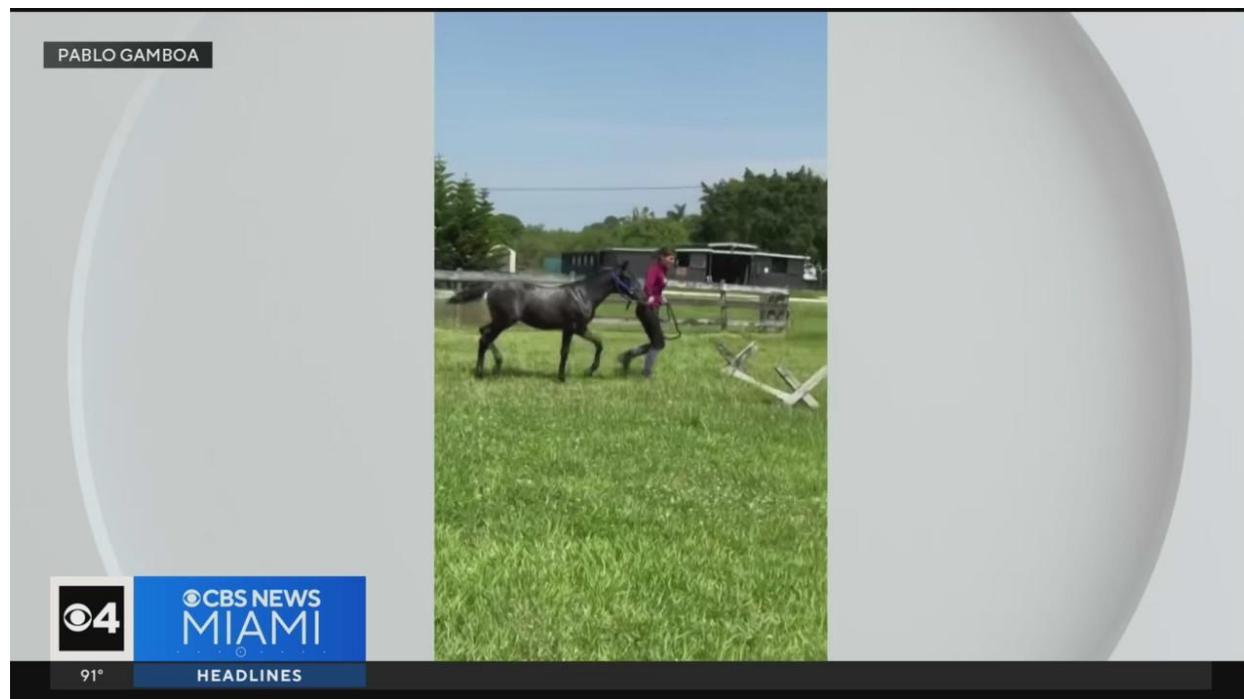
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LOCAL NEWS

## \$25K reward offered in theft of horses taken from Southwest Ranches

BY PETER D'OENCH

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DAVIE - A reward of \$25,000 is being offered for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for stealing two horses in Southwest Ranches.

The reward is being offered by the Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) which fears the horses, Milagro (9-month filly) and Venus (2-year-old filly), will be butchered for the illegal black market horse meat trade.

Richard Couto, the Founder of ARM, told CBS News Miami's Peter D'Oench, "The price of its hide is much greater than alive. Horse meat is so lucrative in South Florida. We have been doing this for 15 years and I don't think we have ever recovered a stolen horses.

"We have recovered carcasses with all of their edible meat harvested off their backs and that meat is part of the black market that we have in South Florida.

We have 10 undercover operations where we are trying to purchase horse meat. Most horse meat is butchered on Friday with horse meat deliveries on the weekends.”

"I will tell you that the horses were not loaded on personal transports. They were mostly likely walked to a nearby property where they were butchered there. Money talks and that is why we are offering this reward. To find out more go to Animal Recovery Mission.Org and fill out forms or contact the Davie Police Department.”

Mariel Cascata, the owner of Milagro, told D'Oench that she is heartbroken.

"We are feeling sad," she said. "This was my little baby, my 5th child. I have 4 children and this was my 5th child. This was my baby. This is so emotional. I am so worried about her. I need her to be brought home. Please return Milagro return to our home. We need her home.”

Cascata's 11-year-old son Matias said, "I feel bad and I feel sad. I hope she will be ok. She is a family member. I hope nothing happens to her.”

Pablo Gamboa owns the World Class Equestrian Center at 5600 S.W. 178th Ave. where the horses were stolen from. "We have 28 horses here being boarded and we have been here 20 years and this has never happened before. It is terrible. These are like pets and part of the family. We have horses here that do show jumping. And this so terrible thinking of what happened. If you bring them back we will not press charges. This is devastating for us.

A Detective with Davie Police told CBS News Miami that they are actively working this case and that anyone with information should call them or Broward Crime Stoppers at (954) 493-TIPS (8477).

The horses were taken Friday, August 11th, from Gamboa's property in the secluded Rolling Oaks area.

According to ARM, the horses were led through a fence at the back of the property sometime between 2 a.m. and 4 a .m. on Friday. A rope was used to life a wire up by the fence because the wire is electrified.

Gamboa said "They broke through the fence and walked the horses out to the road. We followed the tracks out to the road but we could not find anything after that.”

Gamboa said there are security and surveillance cameras on the property but no cameras in the area where the horses were stolen.

The property is near the World Class Equestrian Centre. ARM said in a statement that the theft has "cast a shadow of fear for the safety of both the residents and their beloved animals in this prominent horse community."

The theft follows the slaughter of two other horses, War and Sammy after their remains were found dumped along a canal earlier this year in Homestead, another renowned horse slaughter hot spot.

In 2010, the Good Horse Slaughter Act was passed. It makes buying, selling, transporting, and killing of a horse for human consumption, and possessing horse meat, a felony in Florida. Those convicted may face a minimum of one-year imprisonment and a \$3,500 fine.