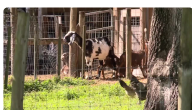


Illegal slaughterhouse raided in St. Lucie County, sheriff's office says

Undercover video shows 'violent, criminal acts against animals,' organization claims



A farm on Godwin Road in Fort Pierce was teeming with law enforcement and Animal Recovery Mission during a raid at a slaughterhouse as about 150 animals, including chickens, pigs, cattle and goats, were rescued.





By: [Matt Papaycik](#) , [Meghan McRoberts](#)

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY, Fla. — Multiple law enforcement agencies on Wednesday raided what the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office said is an illegal slaughterhouse.

Animal Recovery Mission, an animal rights organization, said the sheriff's office, along with county, state and federal agencies, are involved in the investigation at 200 Godwin Road, west of Fort Pierce.



Meghan McRoberts/WPTV

A St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office vehicle is seen at 200 Godwin Road, west of Fort Pierce, on Feb. 14, 2024.

ARM said Wednesday's raid is the result of a six-month undercover investigation, during which the organization said it shot video of "violent,

criminal acts against animals."

The organization said the footage showed "goats hoisted upside down" with "their throats slashed and skinned alive," as well as "alert and reactive pigs pinned down and stabbed in the heart multiple times," and "evidence consistent with animal fighting and training operations."



A variety of animals — including dogs, cats, pigs, goats, sheep, cows and birds — were rescued from the property and were being taken to ARM's undisclosed sanctuary location, where they will be rehabilitated and cared for, the organization said.

They won't be separated from their mom. They'll never be sold or butchered.

There will be plenty of room to roam.

"There's windchimes and windbells on the property for them," ARM sanctuary founder Richard Couto told WPTV anchor Meghan McRoberts. "There's no screaming and yelling. No animals (are) being abused here. The sound that they're typically used to no longer exists for them. It's the good part of the job."

He said the care for some animals will also include behavioral therapies.

"We don't put any down," Couto said. "So over time they'll start to adjust with the other animals and they'll do fine."

The new crew joins several hundred animals already there, including some rescued during investigations into neglect or abuse.

"It's a system that is one of a kind in the world that we've developed here and it works," he said.

The nonprofit will take on the cost with donations and support because they never turn animals away.



Meghan McRoberts/WPTV

A sign reads "eggs chicken duck" on a property located at 200 Godwin Road, west of Fort Pierce, on Feb. 14,

The St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office said multiple people have been arrested in connection with the investigation.

"We are grateful to the sheriff's office for their rapid response in investigating these allegations and welcome the opportunity to collaborate in any way that ensures the welfare of animals in this community is prioritized and crimes against animals are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," Couto said in a news release.

WATCH: ARM founder Richard Couto and St. Lucie County Sheriff Keith Pearson discuss raid

