



Florida's illegal horse meat trade: Undercover video shows racehorse butchered on camera

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FOX 13 investigates black market horse meat

Genevieve Curtis reports

BROOKSVILLE, Fla. - A disturbing case involving the alleged [illegal slaughter of horses](#) for meat happening in our own backyard. Animal activists tell FOX 13 they want law enforcement to shut down the farm where at least one horse has been butchered.

FOX 13 has been investigating the black market horse meat trade in Florida for months and has obtained exclusive video, centered around a case in Hernando County.

Horse meat cannot be legally sold or purchased in the U.S. without USDA inspection, and congress banned the USDA from inspecting horse meat, which makes it illegal.

In Florida, a state law makes merely possessing it illegal.

Horse meat has been historically prevalent on the black market in south Florida, where some cultures consider it a delicacy, driving the demand for it.



Pictured: Freedom at the sanctuary.

Law enforcement, lawmakers and animal activists working undercover tell FOX 13 the illegal horse meat trade is now all over the state, including one unregulated and unlicensed farm they discovered in Hernando County.

Activist Richard Couto, who goes by 'Kudo,' founded Animal Recovery Mission more than 15 years ago. It started with his first rescued horse, Freedom, who he saved from an illegal slaughterhouse in Miami more than 15 years ago.

Freedom inspired Kudo's life mission to shut down illegal slaughterhouses and the black-market horse meat trade.

Kudo's organization, Animal Recovery Mission or 'ARM,' goes undercover to investigate animal abuse violations all over the country.

ARM turns their findings over to local law enforcement, to make arrests and raid the properties.



Pictured: Freedom before being rescued.

Since 2009, Kudo said ARM's operations have shut down 224 what they call 'illegal slaughterhouses' in Florida, resulting in hundreds of arrests.

ARM refers to 'illegal slaughterhouses' as farms or locations, operating without any licensing, regulation or oversight and killing [animals](#) in violation of the Humane Slaughter Act.

He's especially focused on stopping illegal horse slaughter and the illegal horse meat trade.

"The illegal horse slaughter network in the state of Florida is a multimillion-dollar industry, is organized crime," said Kudo. "These people are extremely dangerous, and they need to be stopped."

Kudo said his latest undercover operation is his hardest to date, despite alerting law enforcement, he said, the unlicensed farm is still operating.



"Which is why I picked up the phone and called you," said Kudo to FOX 13's Genevieve Curtis.

Out in Hernando County, down a windy road in [Brooksville](#), is a location 'ARM' first started investigating back in 2022.

ARM provided undercover video from different meat buys to FOX 13.

ARM investigators posing as customers, purchased pig, chicken or goat meat, wrapped in plastic bags from the unlicensed farm. The video shows animals being tortured and killed.

ARM INVESTIGATIONS



Pictured: Funny Biz.

"These animals are being killed with hammers with two by fours, they're being stabbed to death. They're being boiled alive. Boiling water is being poured on them alive. The neglect of the animals on site that are just living there waiting for slaughter is horrific," said Kudo.

Kudo said he asked about horse meat and that's when things escalated.

Enter, Funny Biz, a racehorse who once raced at Gulfstream Park in Miami in 2019. Kudo's undercover cameras captured video of her at the Brooksville property in November 2023.

In the video, workers lead her to the tree as another man, armed with a rifle, gets in position to shoot as Funny Biz tries to get away.

"When she started to lick her lips she knew what was around the corner for her, she was panicking for a reason," said Kudo.

ARM INVESTIGATIONS



What happens next, is the butchering of Funny Biz on camera.

Tattoo markings on her upper lip confirmed she is a registered racehorse, something Kudo didn't know until she was killed, and he flipped up her upper lip.

"I saw the numbers, and, you know, my heart sank a bit," he said.

Kudo said the butcher sold him pieces of Funny Biz for \$2,000 based on the price per pound, he estimates the group is making up to \$10,000 per horse.

Under Florida Law, selling and possessing horse meat is a felony, killing a registered horse carries an even higher penalty.



Pictured: Richard Cuoto, who goes by "Kudo."

Kudo said he believes this is the first documented case in history of a racehorse killed and butchered on camera.

Law enforcement sources who investigate these crimes tell FOX 13 they agree.

"Horses from the thoroughbred racing world have never been video to live video killed, butchered, packaged in their meat. Sold in history of this country. This is the first time this has ever, ever happened. Which is why this is such an incredibly strong case," said Kudo.

Which is why he expected the Hernando County Sheriff's Office would move quickly on the case.

But he said, that's not what happened.

ARM INVESTIGATIONS



Pictured: Funny Biz.

"This property could have been raided in the latter part of December 2023," he said.

FOX 13 first reached out to the Hernando County Sheriff's Office in June about this case.

The agency told us it could not comment on a pending investigation.

A few days later, an agency spokesperson said, "The case is under review by the state attorneys' office."

The sheriff's office also told us it hoped to have more information by the end of June.

FOX 13 reached to the FDLE, the Florida Department of AG and the state attorney's office. No one would comment on this case.



One person has been arrested on a misdemeanor animal cruelty charge.

Then on Tuesday, as the story was set to air, the Hernando County Sheriff's Office confirmed it arrested one person who works at the farm on a misdemeanor animal cruelty charge for the inhumane killing of a pig.

The arrest affidavit shows the case initiated on June 24, well after FOX 13 started asking questions about the horse meat and slaughter of Funny Biz.

In a new statement, right before our story was set to air, the sheriffs office told us there are two additional open and active investigations.

They said they are now working with the FDLE, the Florida Department of Agriculture the state attorney's office and other state agencies.

Kudo said the owner of the unlicensed farm, the person who shot Funny Biz, has not faced charges.

In the nearly eight months since he first shared the case with law enforcement, Kudo worries about how many other horses have met the same fate as Funny Biz.

"It's, it's a frightening thing to think about," he said.



Two weeks ago, FOX 13 could see numerous animals at the Brooksville farm, including a horse.

They're animals Kudo wanted to rescue.

Just like Freedom, he wishes Funny Biz was in the pasture at his sanctuary, too.

"You watched her get slaughtered in the hopes that that evidence would be enough to get this operation shut down, and at the moment that evidence is not enough to get that operation shut down," said Genevieve Curtis.

"You got it," said Kudo.

"So where we stand today, for you it must feel like she died in vein?" Curtis asked.

"So far yea, and I'm hoping that changes. I thought her life was going to change the lives of hundreds if not millions of animals. I'm still hopeful that will happen, I'm just not certain anymore," said Kudo.



Congressman Vern Buchanan of Brandon is working on a bill that explicitly and permanently bans horse slaughter in the U.S.

In a statement, he said, "The slaughter of horses for human consumption is a barbaric practice that has absolutely no place in America. This latest and

gruesome crime that took place in our own backyard... is precisely why Congress needs to pass the SAFE Act, my bipartisan legislation to permanently ban horse slaughter."

We asked the USDA if it's assisting law enforcement in regards to this investigation in Brooksville, the agency couldn't comment.

But in regard to the sale of horse meat in Florida an FSIS spokesperson told us:

"Food Safety and Inspection Service is unable to speculate on the scope of the illegal horsemeat trade.

FSIS cooperates with the appropriate authorities at the state and local levels in the investigation of complaints related to the illegal slaughter and sale of horses and/or horsemeat."

They added that its inspectors do not have law enforcement capabilities.

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