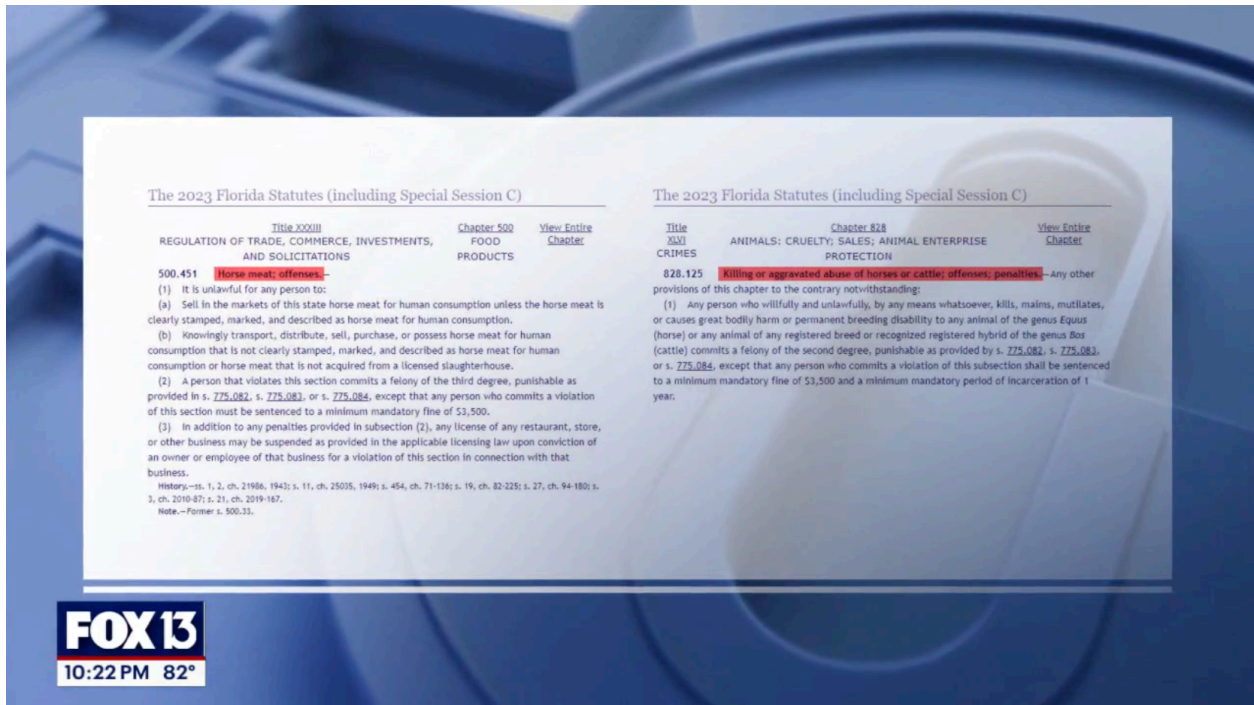


Horse meat trade: Activists call for arrests after former racehorse slaughtered at Brooksville unlicensed farm

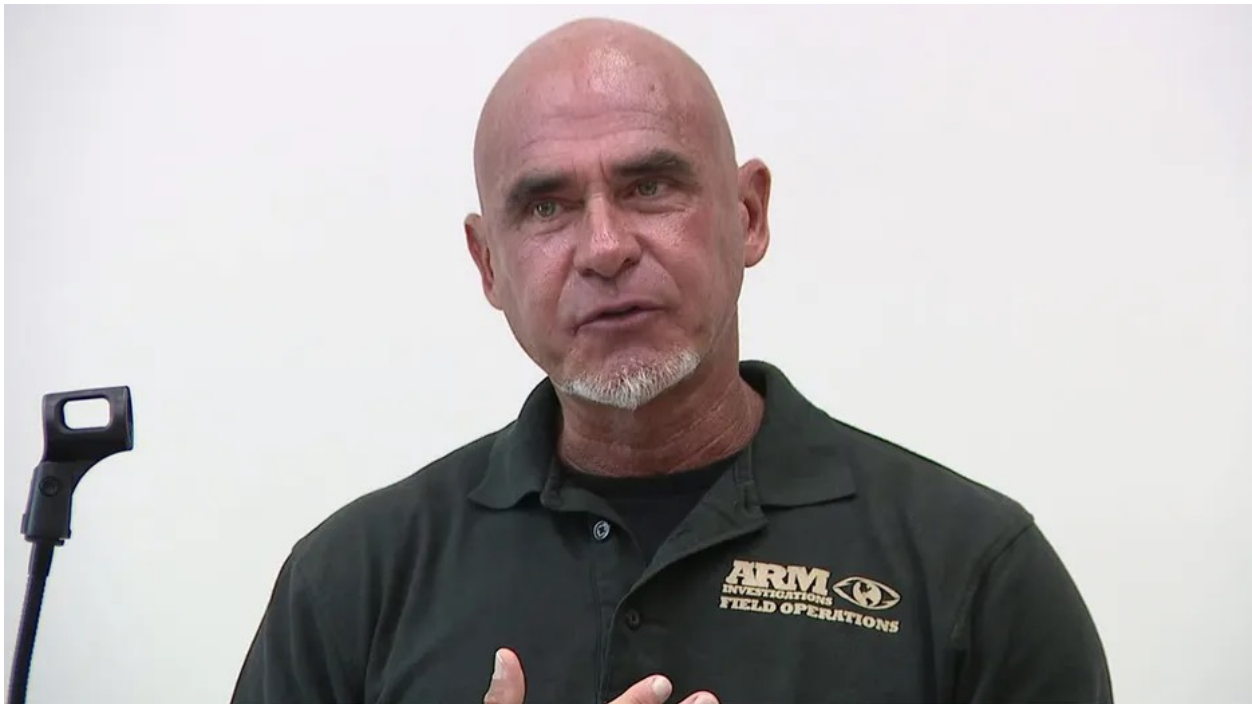
By Genevieve Curtis
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BROOKSVILLE, Fla. - Animal rights activists are calling on the Hernando County Sheriff's Office to shut down a farm in Brooksville seen selling horse meat on camera.

FOX 13 obtained exclusive video of a former racehorse being butchered and first broke this story Tuesday night. On Wednesday, the Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) held a press conference calling for charges.

We've been investigating the black-market horse meat trade in Florida for months. And today, animal activists went public with their findings, calling for arrests to be made at an unlicensed farm in Brooksville.



Pictured: Richard Couto, who goes by Kudo, speaking at Wednesday's press conference.

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"I wanted a happy ending. I wanted arrests to be made, the property to be closed forever," said animal rights activist Richard Couto, who goes by Kudo, who made it clear he did not want to be in Tampa holding a press conference on Wednesday.

He said he had no other choice but to go public with a case after he said law enforcement had been slow to act. ARM began investigating an unlicensed slaughterhouse in Brooksville in 2022.

In April, ARM first shared undercover video with FOX 13 of a former racehorse named Funny Biz being shot and butchered on camera. It shows the owners of the farm selling pieces of her to Kudo for \$2,000.

Previous coverage: FOX 13 investigates black market horse meat

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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 and killing a registered horse a felony.

"This has never been done. 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," said Kudo.

ARM, first turned their case over to the Hernando County Sheriff's Office in November 2023. The farm remains open today.



Based on Kudo's undercover video from a visit to the unlicensed farm in May, the sheriff's office did arrest one worker on animal cruelty charges for the inhumane killing of a pig at the beginning of July.

ARM has a long history of working with law enforcement. Kudo said in 15 years, this is only the third time out of 225 illegal slaughterhouse investigations where they've gone public with their findings, before law enforcement raided the property.

"Hernando County Sheriff's Office went in, made one misdemeanor arrest, and left all of the animals with the evidence that they have? That is unconscionable and should be illegal. They should be held accountable by the media, by the constituents of Hernando County and by anyone and everyone that loves horses and animals," said Kudo.



So far, there have not been any charges related to the horse meat.

In a statement Tuesday, the sheriff's office told FOX13:

"There are two additional open/active investigations. Due to the complexity of these cases, we have been

working closely with the FDLE, the Department of Agriculture, the State Attorney's Office as well as multitude of other state agencies."

Because of the patchwork of agencies that have jurisdiction in these types of cases, ARM said a statewide task force is necessary to stop the illegal horse meat trade.



"We need one unit that is trained on our cases, law enforcement wise, on a statewide system, where we can bring these cases to," said Kudo.

Congressman Vern Buchanan is working to pass the SAFE Act in Washington D.C., which would explicitly

and permanently ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption in America.

ARM said this operation is called "Operation Barker," because it was funded by Bob Barker's estate. The late game show host was a fierce animal rights advocate.

ARM said Barker left a generous donation to ARM in his will to continue trying to save animals, even after his passing.