

Horse meat trade: Hernando County sheriff, state attorney respond to criticism from activists

By Genevieve Curtis

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The Hernando County Sheriff and the State Attorney are responding to claims they haven't moved fast enough to shut down an illegal slaughter house where a former racehorse was butchered earlier this year.

BROOKSVILLE, Fla. - Hernando County Sheriff Al Nienhuis and State Attorney Bill Gladson are responding to claims that they haven't moved fast enough to shut down an illegal slaughterhouse where a former race horse was butchered last year.

FOX 13 first broke the story earlier this week after investigating the case since the beginning of May.

Animal activists went public with their findings from the unlicensed farm on Wednesday.



Pictured: Funny Biz.

The sheriff and the state attorney say they vehemently disagree with some of the statements that have been made publicly by animal activists. They say the case is under review and it takes time and the proper collection of evidence to bring charges.

"I love animals and I don't want to see an animal abused any more than anyone else and I'm certainly not going to let that occur in the course of our investigation," said Nienhuis.



Animal activists accused the Sheriff's office of being slow to act. The Animal Recovery Mission run by Richard 'Kudo' Couto first brought the case to the Hernando County Sheriff's office in December 2023.

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Kudo gave them undercover video of a former racehorse named Funny Biz being killed and butchered on camera, with her meat being sold, which is a felony in the state of Florida.

"The horse in that video, probably the most emotional, one of the most emotional parts of the video and it is emotional and it is horrific, but we have to be able to prove it occurred in Hernando County. Sometimes the Constitution can be frustrating," said Nienhuis.

Kudo shared video of other animals being tortured and killed and their meat also being sold in plastic bags at the unlicensed farm in Brooksville.



This week, the sheriff's office confirmed to FOX 13 they have two open and active investigations.

Gladson said his animal cruelty task force takes these crimes very seriously.

"I'm all about prosecuting people who hurt animals 100%, but I'm going to do it by the law and I'm going to follow the Constitution," said Gladson. "There's evidence and then there's admissible evidence."

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During the press conference, the sheriff said they aren't certain that the horse was killed in Hernando County and that it might have been in **Hillsborough County**, but did not elaborate on why they believe that.

Neither could tell us why other charges haven't been brought related to the farm selling meats without any inspection or regulation. The sheriff says they need evidence that is admissible in court.

"Nobody wants to make a case quicker than I do," said the sheriff.



Pictured: Funny Biz.

FOX 13 asked for an interview on this issue with the Sheriff on June 5. We were told the case was under investigation.

On June 6, we asked if there were any upcoming law enforcement operations because we would be open to discussing the timing of when we'd air the story, as to not jeopardize a case that was under investigation.

On July 11, State Attorney Bill Gladson said the case was still under review and that he would not comment on it.



On Thursday, they complained the animal activists going public with the case could hinder their investigation.

"Any hopes of doing anything in an undercover capacity probably now are, would be difficult at best and probably has zero chance in reality of us doing that," said Gladson.

The sheriff did not say if they had any planned or why those had not already been done in the eight months since receiving the videos.



Pictured: Funny Biz.

Earlier this month, the sheriff's office arrested a worker at the farm for the inhumane killing of a pig. In the report, Sheriff's investigators cited Kudo's undercover video as evidence in that case.

We asked why his undercover video could be used in the pig case and not the horse case.

"That's a good question. I think it's important that now that that case has landed in our lap for a filing decision, that we not comment on the specifics," said Gladson.

We then asked if Kudo was facing any charges.

"I won't go so far as to say that, I will say that anytime someone appears to have committed a crime and it comes to the sheriff's attention, there are eyes that are watching," Gladson said.