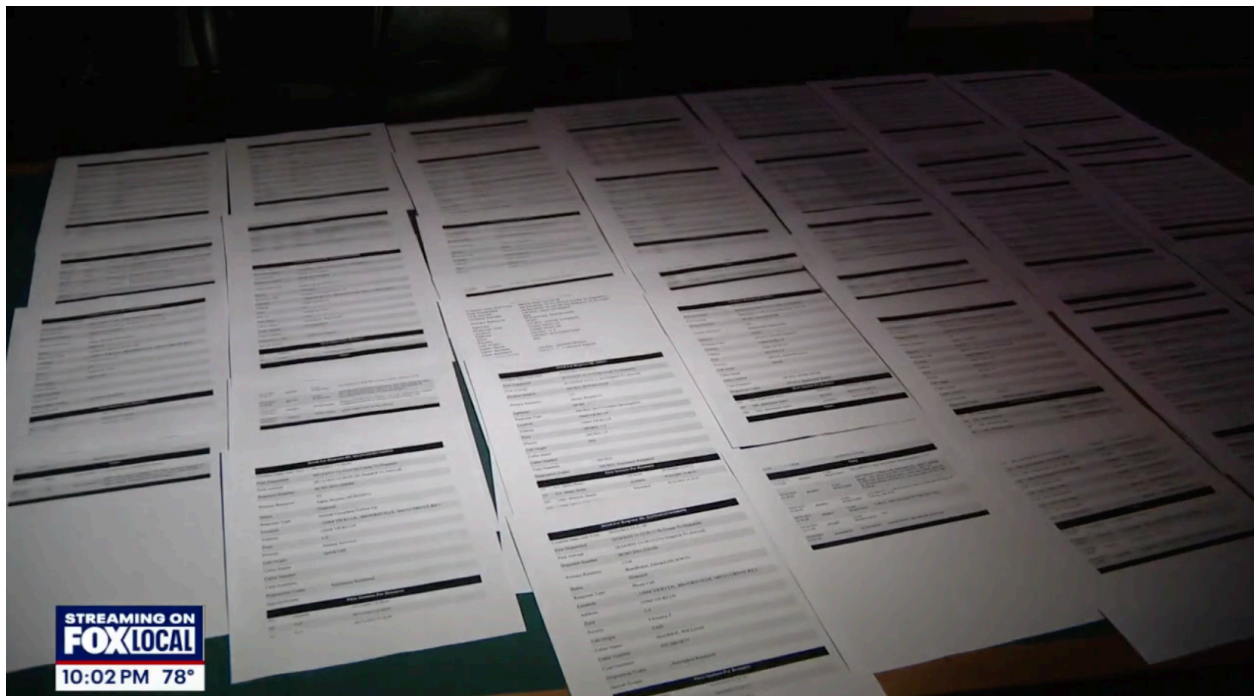


# Dozens of complaints uncovered about illegal slaughterhouse under investigation for killing former racehorse

By Genevieve Curtis

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## Horse slaughter investigation: Past complaints

FOX 13's Genevieve Curtis uncovered a list of complaints dating back to 2022 surrounding a Hernando County farm that's now at the center of a horse meat investigation. That farm stayed in operation until our report in July.

**BROOKSVILLE, Fla.** - Neighbors called, strangers complained, and a community tried to alert authorities to animal abuse happening at a Hernando County farm.

Still, an apparent unlicensed slaughterhouse kept killing animals. That farm in Brooksville is where animal activists say a former racehorse was killed and her meat sold. The Hernando County Sheriff's Office said that case is open and ongoing.

The sheriff's office told FOX 13 it responded to 30 calls for service at that property dating back to 2022.



FOX 13 requested those calls and found several people tried alerting authorities to endangered animals at the farm and others reported animals being slaughtered and meat being sold.

Still, that farm continued to operate until our report in July of this year.

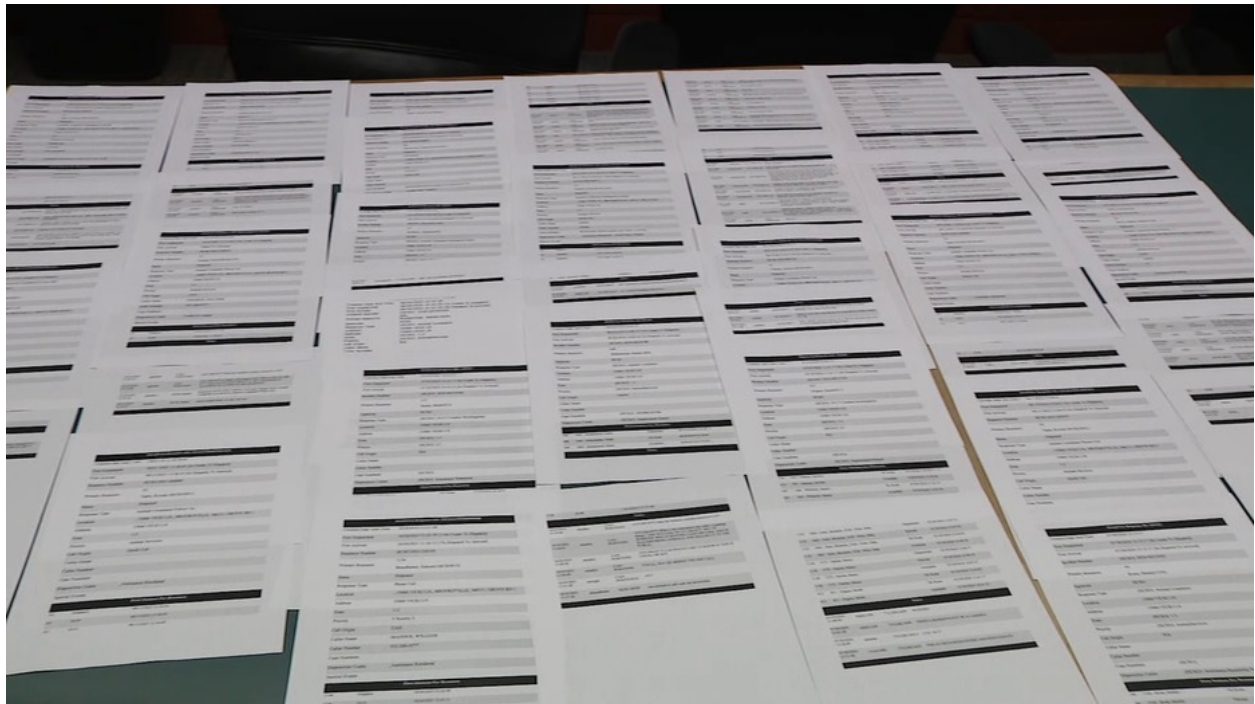
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Diane Moreton is one of the neighbors who was enjoying a day on the Suncoast Trail when she says she saw an animal being killed at the farm on Vicki Lane, right next to the trail.

"It was strung up by its back legs, it was screaming and crying," said Moreton.

She reported that in April 2022.

"Apparently, nothing happened," said Moreton.



Through an open records request, we got copies of more than two dozen other calls about the property deputies responded to over the past two and a half years.

The first report was made in March 2022 by another person on the Suncoast Trail who saw a goat being hung on a hydraulic lift. Deputies responded and closed the case.

Three more people that year made similar complaints about endangered animals and abuse. Each time a deputy responded, but only once, in November 2022, was a citation issued.





Deputies gave the operator, Juan Ortiz, a citation for animal mistreatment after finding dead chickens in a coop without water.

Records show deputies were at the property at least five times in 2022 regarding animal welfare concerns. They went nearly a dozen more times in 2023.

Notably, the owner of the property, who leased the land to Ortiz, reported that Ortiz was "butchering meat on the property and leaving carcasses out." Reports show a deputy issued Ortiz a verbal warning for that.

**PREVIOUS:** [Hernando County residents say alleged illegal slaughterhouse was problem for years: 'I started to scream'](#)

In October 2023, a woman called to report that Ortiz was slaughtering diseased animals. Dispatchers advised her to contact the Department of Agriculture. It's unclear if there was any follow-up.

That same month, the property owner called at least three times to report Ortiz was slaughtering animals and also selling them to the public. Dispatch advised him to call code enforcement.

A deputy went to the property and noted he'd been called to the property "many times," declaring it a "civil issue between landlord and tenant" and said "the animals are cared for."



It was just a month after that visit when the Animal Recovery Mission took undercover video allegedly showing Ortiz shooting a former racehorse named Funny Biz. They sold her meat to the undercover animal rights activist Richard 'Kudo' Couto.

Kudo shared that, along with information about the alleged illegal slaughterhouse, with the sheriff's office in December 2023.

The farm continued to operate until July of this year when our report aired and the Ortiz family fled the property.



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The sheriff's office says the case is still under investigation.

Regarding the numerous reports of abuse and constant visits to the farm, a spokesperson for the sheriff's office told us:

"There was never any record of a horse(s) on the property on Vicki Lane and there were no verifiable calls for service in regard to allegations of horses and/or horse meat being sold there. In the Craigslist ad, there was no mention or indication of animals being slaughtered and/or meat being sold."



The agency also told us:

"The investigation is still very active. Providing specifics during an open investigation could compromise the investigation and/or reduce the possibility of a successful prosecution."

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FOX 13 asked for an interview with Sheriff Al Nienhuis regarding these calls for service. They said he couldn't comment due to the ongoing investigation.

We also asked if there would be a review of policies and procedures. We'll let you know what we find out.

Certainly, there are a lot of animal lovers who are questioning whether this farm could have been shut down sooner, before Funny Biz was killed.