

Animal Recovery Mission Offers \$25,000 Reward Amid Rise in Horse Thefts Four Family Companions Suspected to be Victims of Florida's Black Market Horse Meat Trade



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE. Central Florida – November 14, 2024 – A string of horse thefts across St. Lucie and Okeechobee Counties have raised concerns over new targeted areas of the illicit black market meat trade in Florida. In response, the Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) has announced a \$25,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for these horse thefts and suspected slaughter activities.

The St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office recently began investigating the disappearance of a horse from a ranch in Fort Pierce, where security footage caught on film a trailer entering her property early Friday morning before leaving with the horse.

In a neighboring area, another theft was reported to the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office Friday morning. Overnight, three horses were baited with food, the gate locks clipped and stolen from their field.

"This isn't just theft. It's a tragedy that leaves lifelong heartbreak for these families," said victim Mike Johnson, whose retired horses were viewed as beloved companions.

ARM has uncovered a pattern of stolen horses entering underground networks where they are transported, butchered, and distributed as unregulated horse meat on the black market.

"This illicit trade endangers both the lives of our equine friends and the health of consumers," said Richard Couto, ARM founder. "We hope this reward will encourage community members to come forward with any information that could help dismantle this cruel network and protect our horses."

ARM's recent video documentation of the slaughter of Funny Biz, an off-the-track thoroughbred, and ongoing investigations into the black market horse meat trade underscores the organization's commitment to ending this disturbing practice. ARM continues to work closely with law enforcement and urges residents to report any suspicious activity to local authorities or directly to ARM.

If you have information regarding this case, please contact Animal Recovery Mission, through **ARM's Report a Crime Hotline** <https://animalrecoverymission.org/contact-us/report-animal-abuse/>, then the Sheriff's Offices in Okeechobee and St. Lucie Counties.

Media inquiries should be directed to Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) Founder Richard 'Kudo' Couto at (305) 494 2225 kudo@arminvestigations.org.

About ARM:

The Animal Recovery Mission is a non-profit organization focused on exposing animal cruelty and illegal animal trading. ARM's investigations aim to bring justice to animals and raise awareness for necessary reforms. In 2010, ARM was instrumental in the passing of the Good Horse Slaughter Act, making the buying, selling, transporting, and killing of a horse for human consumption and possessing horse meat a felony in Florida. Perpetrators may face a minimum of one year imprisonment and a \$3,500 fine.