

USA

Fairlife Milk Supplier Dairies Face Animal Cruelty Probe

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The Arizona Department of Agriculture has launched an investigation into two dairies that previously supplied milk to Fairlife, the Coca-Cola-owned dairy brand, over allegations of animal cruelty.

The probe involves Rainbow Valley Dairy and Butterfield Dairy, both named in a report published in February by Florida-based animal rights group Animal Recovery Mission (ARM). The agency confirmed the investigation to The Epoch Times but declined to provide details, citing its ongoing nature.

Fairlife, which styles its name with a lowercase “f,” told The Epoch Times via email that it “has not received milk from [United Dairymen of Arizona’s] Rainbow Valley Dairy and Butterfield Dairy since learning about the animal welfare incident.”

A Fairlife spokesperson emphasized the company’s position: “We are deeply committed to animal welfare and have zero tolerance for abuse; we work closely with our co-op partners to ensure the highest standards of care are consistently upheld across all their member farms that supply milk for Fairlife products.”

The brand, long known for promoting its commitment to humane animal treatment, now faces a class-action lawsuit filed by individual consumers in February. The case was amended and refiled on May 29 in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Plaintiffs say they paid a premium for Fairlife products, believing they met high animal welfare standards — and now seek to recover that difference.

The lawsuit names Fairlife, The Coca-Cola Company, Select Milk Producers (a Fairlife co-founder), and owners Mike and Sue McCloskey as defendants. Coca-Cola and the McCloskeys did not respond to requests for comment.

The legal action builds on claims made by ARM, whose founder Richard Couto said their investigators took photos and videos while working inside the two Arizona dairies. Videos published on ARM’s website and YouTube show alleged mistreatment of animals — including cows beaten with sharp objects, dragged by machinery, and newborn calves being thrown or pulled by their legs.

In one disturbing claim, employees at Rainbow Valley Dairy were reportedly seen breaking cows’ tails intentionally. The lawsuit also accuses workers of attempting to kill cows by shooting them in the neck with a .22-caliber rifle — often resulting in prolonged suffering. It describes the conditions as “systemic widespread egregious animal cruelty, cruel standard practices, and extreme neglect, including at the hands of and with the awareness of management.”

Following the publication of the ARM report, Fairlife and the United Dairymen of Arizona co-oppledged to end business with the dairies involved, the complaint states. United Dairymen of Arizona did not respond to a request for comment.

ARM has previously conducted undercover investigations at other dairies supplying Fairlife in Indiana, Arizona, and New Mexico — some of which are also cited in the amended lawsuit. The suit further claims that despite pledges to cut ties, milk continues to be sourced from dairies with documented abuse. Bobak Bakhtiari, executive director of the Consumer Protection Foundation, said investigators tracked milk shipments from such dairies to facilities that process products for Fairlife.

The three named plaintiffs in the lawsuit — all California residents — argue that they were misled into believing Fairlife upheld high animal welfare standards. They are

seeking damages, restitution, and injunctive relief under claims including false advertising and unfair competition.

Price comparisons cited in the lawsuit show a 1.5-liter bottle of Fairlife milk selling for \$5.15, compared to \$3.95 for a similar product at a Florida Dollar General on June 18.

Until at least March 21, Fairlife's website contained a section titled "Industry Leading Animal Welfare Standards," stating that "all cows and calves are provided with the best care possible." It noted that as a processor — not a farm owner — the company relied on external partners and advisors to ensure high standards.

That webpage has since been removed, but it remains accessible via the internet archive. Consumer concern over animal treatment is not new. A February study in Food Quality and Preference concluded that animal welfare remains a top priority for buyers, who are increasingly willing to pay more for ethically produced dairy products.

A 2018 survey by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) found that 70% of respondents paid attention to food labels indicating animal care practices, and 78% supported the idea of independent third-party certification. On average, consumers said they would pay 32% more for eggs and 48% more for chicken from animals raised under a welfare certification they could trust — reinforcing just how much ethical practices matter to today's consumers.