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Fairlife milk faces class-action lawsuit as Arizona investigates alleged dairy farm abuses

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- Arizona is investigating two Fairlife dairy suppliers after undercover footage revealed severe animal abuse, including beatings, botched euthanasia, and neglect.
- Fairlife faces a class-action lawsuit for allegedly misleading consumers with false claims of humane practices while charging premium prices for its milk.

- Undercover videos show systemic cruelty at Fairlife suppliers, with cows electrocuted, calves left to die, and workers routinely abusing animals.
- Fairlife removed animal welfare pledges from its website amid scrutiny, while critics accuse the brand of greenwashing and recycling fraud due to non-recyclable bottles.
- Despite the scandal, Fairlife sales grew 30% in 2023, raising concerns about corporate accountability and the effectiveness of ethical marketing claims.

Arizona's Department of Agriculture is investigating Rainbow Valley Dairy and Butterfield Dairy, two suppliers for Coca-Cola-owned Fairlife, following damning footage of systemic cruelty, including cows beaten with sharp objects, newborn calves dragged by their legs, and tails intentionally broken by workers. The investigation, triggered by a February report from the Animal Recovery Mission (ARM), has sparked a class-action lawsuit accusing Fairlife of defrauding consumers who paid premium prices for milk falsely marketed as ethically sourced.

Fairlife, a \$1 billion brand, has long touted its "industry-leading animal welfare standards," promising humane treatment while charging nearly 30% more than conventional milk. Yet undercover videos reveal a deeply disturbing reality: cows shot with rifles in botched euthanasia attempts, calves left to die in scorching heat, and workers kicking animals in the head as standard practice. Now, as Arizona authorities scrutinize the dairies, Fairlife has quietly scrubbed its animal welfare pledges from its website in a move critics call an admission of guilt.

Hidden horrors exposed

The ARM investigation, spanning six months at Rainbow Valley and Butterfield dairies, documented what founder Richard Couto

called "near-constant torment and torture." One video shows a manager electrocuting a pregnant cow 70 times during labor. Another captures workers dragging sick cows by tractors and shoving calves into crates with decomposing corpses. "This isn't isolated—it's systemic," Couto told The Epoch Times, noting similar abuses at Fairlife suppliers in Indiana and New Mexico.

The lawsuit, filed in California federal court, alleges Fairlife and its partners, including Dallas-based Select Milk Producers, engaged in "false advertising" by claiming humane practices while sourcing from farms with "egregious cruelty." Plaintiffs argue they were duped into paying premium prices; court documents cite a Fairlife bottle priced at \$5.15 versus \$3.95 for generic milk.

Fairlife claims it severed ties with the accused dairies in February, but ARM investigators allege milk shipments continued. "Fairlife is top-tier, the worst offenders," Couto said, pointing to ARM's 2019 probe of Fair Oaks Farms, a Select Milk operation, which led to a \$21 million settlement but no lasting reform.

Corporate greenwashing and recycling fraud

Beyond animal welfare, the lawsuit accuses Fairlife of "recycling fraud." Its opaque plastic bottles, laced with titanium dioxide, are incompatible with most recycling systems, yet labels urge consumers to "recycle me." Chemical engineer Jan Dell, founder of The Last Beach Cleanup, told The Dallas Morning News the practice poisons the recycling system.

Fairlife's parent company, Coca-Cola, has remained largely silent. Despite the scandal, Fairlife sales grew 30% in 2023, with CEO Tim Doelman boasting of "progress in animal welfare." Critics say the brand's success hinges on deception.

The Arizona Department of Agriculture has yet to release findings, but the case underscores a broader crisis:

agribusinesses evading accountability through hollow PR. While Fairlife pledges "zero tolerance for abuse," its supply chain tells a different story. United Dairymen of Arizona, the co-op supplying Fairlife, called the ARM footage "shocking" but declined further comment.

For consumers, the lesson is clear. As corporations prioritize profits over ethics, watchdog groups like ARM remain the last line of defense. Until regulators enforce transparency, the premium paid for "ethical" milk may fund nothing but cruelty.

The investigation continues, but one truth is undeniable: when profits trump principles, even a billion-dollar brand can't wash away the bloodstains.

Sources for this article include:

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