

In Behalf of Animals

PATRICK J BATTUELLO

Florida's Killing Fields

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In an unincorporated area of Miami-Dade County, a mere 15 minutes from South Beach, horses and other animals are being illegally kept and slaughtered (under the cruelest conditions) with the tacit approval of every relevant agency in South Florida: Miami-Dade Environmental Resource Management, Miami-Dade Building and Neighborhood Compliance, Miami-Dade Animal Services, Miami-Dade Police, and the USDA. Now, though, one man has embarked on a crusade to expose and shutter these brutal killing fields.

With no history of activism, Richard "Kudo" Couto began by rescuing *Freedom's Flight* (relative of Secretariat) while working for the South Florida SPCA. He quickly formed the [Animal Recovery Mission](#): (CNN, 12/28/09) **"Prior to his rescue, I didn't know that illegal slaughter farms existed in the country — let alone under my nose in my own county."** Couto's [videos](#) and [photos](#) are testimonies to mankind's capacity for evil and the apathy that allows it.

Couto estimates that there are 70-100 illegal slaughterhouses in the C-9 basin. The area is marked by dirt roads and thick vegetation (with tarps hung to obstruct vision). Unrepentant and defiant, the owners post signs (in English and Spanish) advertising their wares. Couto: **"I go in acting like a customer. I ask them, 'How much for the pig?' And they'll say 120 dollars. 'How much for the kill?' '20 bucks. We'll slaughter it for you for 20 bucks.' It's that easy."** Cattle, chickens, goats, and pigs can be had, but it was the horse trade (some stolen, some slaughtered where they slept, and some bought as the racing industry's discounted refuse) that brought the media.

Horse meat is popular with Cuban-Americans (Miami-Dade is over 50% Latino), and governmental negligence is perhaps a function of political considerations. The meat can sell for up to \$40/pound: (*horsetalk*, 12/30/09) **"In Miami, a dead horse is much more valuable than a live horse."** Couto says: **"They are virtually tortured. It's barbaric. It's a really nasty, nasty thing going on. The people who are**

running these farms are extremely violent people ... the worst of the worst. I've had my life threatened numerous times."

"Every time we go in there, we have to go in there with the police — and even the police don't want to go in there." So says Charles Danger, director of Miami-Dade Building and Neighborhood Compliance, when interviewed by CNN. A Miami-Dade police detective says that while horse slaughter may be illegal and worthy of their attention, the unlicensed butchering of *other* animals (some while still conscious) is beyond their reach: **"We're not participating in these investigations because we found the most effective way to combat this is with code compliance and animal services."** Except that code compliance does not investigate animal cruelty, and animal services shuns livestock matters. So, the buck shifts and the blood flows.

To those who illegally traffic in animals and animal parts (and the complicit consumers who drive the market), the animals are mere commodities whose suffering is entirely irrelevant. And with no one minding the store, barbarity reigns, and has so for over 30 years. Kudo intends to shame the negligent agencies (and if there is legal ambiguity, the lawmakers too) into action. The animals cry out from his [photos](#), "Enough."