



## **DNA typing urged to thwart Florida horse butcherings**

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**by Denise Steffanus**

Officials working on the recent horse-butcherings cases in South Florida are urging horsemen to have their horses DNA-typed.

Horsemen also are urged to post signs at their farms and stables, in English and in Spanish, stating that DNA will be used to apprehend and convict anyone who steals or harms a horse residing on those premises.

Since January, at least 17 horses in South Florida have been killed and butchered. Their meat was presumably sold on the black market.

On September 16, the Miami-Dade Police Department arrested Luis Miguel Cordero, an 18-year-old Mexican citizen, after receiving a tip from two people he allegedly approached to help him with a slaughter. Police do not know if that was an isolated case or if more people are involved in the butcherings, so they advise horse owners to remain vigilant. Cordero allegedly butchered a horse for its meat on September 9 at Lazy L Ranch.

Richard Couto, lead investigator in the horse slaughters for the South Florida Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said that tissue samples from the more recent equine victims have been DNA-typed and that any horsemeat found in freezers or elsewhere during the course of the investigation will be tested to see if it is a match.

Florida International University's Forensics DNA Profiling Facility in Miami is building an extensive, nonhuman database that it hopes will become a centralized source for law enforcement in identifying animals that are lost, stolen, or the victims of crime.

FIU's DNA typing service is \$35, which is comparable to what most breed registries charge for the service. All horses DNA-typed by FIU will be entered into its database.

If the horse already has been DNA-typed by its respective registry, owners can contact that registry and request that it provide the DNA information to the Profiling Facility, which will then include it in the FIU database at no charge.

