

Last of Loxahatchee nine pleads guilty in animal cruelty case

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WEST PALM BEACH — The last of nine men charged in a probe of animal cruelty at three Loxahatchee farms pleaded guilty to five charges on Wednesday and was sentenced to 90 days in custody.

Monieram Rathibhan, 59, of Loxahatchee, pleaded guilty to one count of aggravated abuse of cattle, two counts of killing animals using a non-humane method and two counts of animal cruelty. He was allowed to remain free while officials determine whether he qualifies for house arrest.

He has until Sept. 6 to outfit his house with proper equipment or begin serving the jail sentence that will be followed by three years of probation. He will be prohibited from possessing any farm animals or allowing any to be butchered on his property. A violation could send him to prison for 35 years, Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Krista Marx said.

A Miami-based animal rights group spurred the October raid by law enforcement, claiming they had videotapes of horses being butchered and sold for human consumption at Medina, Rancho Garcia and G.A. Paso Fino farms. Assistant State Attorney Judith Arco said she found no evidence to back up those claims. Instead, she said, goats and a cow had been butchered inhumanely. Florida law requires that farm animals first be shot in the head so they will feel little pain. Instead, the men slit the throats of the animals and allowed them to bleed to death.

Like Rathibhan, most of the other men struck plea deals. One man, Jorge Luis Garcia, received a one-year jail sentence after a jury found him guilty of four counts of animal cruelty for killing a goat inhumanely.