



An inside look at Animal Recovery Mission investigations

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OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, Fla. - WPTV Newschannel agreed not to disclose the location of Animal Recovery Mission's compound for a unique look at the facility and how they conduct undercover operations

"This is the ARM undercover investigation office, so the people who come through this door, other than you, are strict undercover investigators, so we have codes" said Richard Couto, the founder of ARM. "This building is very high security."

Ricard Couto leads up ARM as the head investigator. It was the organization's undercover investigator who shot the video of the alleged abuse at Larson Dairy Farms, sparking a criminal investigation.

We asked how much training happens before someone gets sent undercover. "A lot. We have to train that worker whether it be slaughter houses or dairy farms, on everything having to do with that industry."

In this case, the undercover milker was trained for four months before going in. At the facility, which spans nearly 100 acres, they trained him on a milk machine, similar to what they use at Larson Dairy.

The site is not on the map. 50 cameras line the property as well as an elaborate invisible alarm.

"It's a black site," he said. "No one knows where we put some of the worst most violent people in prison when they get out they are not happy with us." 300 animals rescued by their operations are in the sanctuary area of the farm. Now they protect the operatives and animals on location.

In a show of symbolism, workers, who are dressed in black, ride the property on ATV's.

"We have such dark sad lives all we deal with is brutality." he said.

There are also privacy fences on the property and every building is painted black for a reason.

"If we shut all the lights at night, it blends into the environment," said Couto. The group, dresses tactical gear, br Couto says that's not for dramatic flair.

"A lot of people look at us and see the clothes and the trucks that we drive ... we are at times militant, the clothes that we wear aid in covert (operations)," he said.

ARM is currently comprised of 15 undercover investigators, recruiting directly from special forces, who are getting out of the military, former law enforcement, and even civilians.

"Your basic housewife will come in and properly trained, at times, she's even the best worker in the field," he said.

I asked him to respond to critics who say they operate as vigilantes.

"We have to conduct investigations without enforcement help, and that's to stay away from entrapment laws. so prosecutors actually love the way we work," said Couto

Regardless of who they are, their mission is the same: to save animals from cruelty and abuse.