



## Animal rights group claims chickens mistreated at Lake Wales farm

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LAKE WALES, Fla. (WFLA) –An animal rights activist group claims a Lake Wales farm has been mistreating chickens.

The Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) has released the results of an undercover investigation of alleged factory farm animal abuse at the Cal-Maine Egg Farm, located in Lake Wales.

An undercover ARM investigator captured what the group calls disturbing surveillance footage of battery caged hens.

“What we found were horrific conditions, some of the dirtiest, filthiest conditions in battery cage farms ever investigated in our country,” Couto said.

ARM says the hens are overcrowded in cages where they are trampled and strangled to death after becoming wedged in the cages. Hens are living amongst dead chickens and die regularly from dehydration, starvation, egg binding and illnesses contracted from forcibly living in unsanitary conditions, according to the group.

“We are talking about animals defecating for years and years that are uncleaned, millions and millions of breeding cockroaches. The walls were literally moving in front of our investigator,” said Couto.

After ARM sent the video to the Polk County Sheriff’s Office, deputies visited the location with two State of Florida Veterinarians who are egg facilities inspectors for the state, but they found no evidence the farm violated state law.

However, deputies did arrest Matthew Faulkner, 38 for animal cruelty due to the video and interviews at the facility. Faulkner is seen in the video hitting the chickens with a pole.



According to ARM, Cal-Maine is a public company and is the largest producer and marketer of shell eggs in the country.

In the following statement released by Cal-Maine, the company called the video “staged”:

Each employee involved in the care and handling of hens is required to review, sign and comply with the Company’s code of conduct regarding the ethical treatment of hens, which also requires employees to report any possible violations. The ARM video was taken by a former employee acting as an undercover activist, and he chose to disregard required farm procedures as part of his intent to misrepresent our efforts to provide proper care for our hens. The employee’s job included identifying and addressing the type of issues shown on the video, and he failed to meet his job requirements. The video depicts another employee deliberately mistreating a hen, and that employee was immediately terminated. Once the video was presented to us, we cooperated with the local sheriff’s department and officials from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in their investigation, and we provided them access to the Lake Wales facility. They reported they did not find comparable conditions to what was shown on the video.”

News Chanel 8 requested permission to visit the facility to verify the conditions inside, but a Cal-Maine spokesperson said the farm restricts access “because of biosecurity.”