



Investigation reveals deplorable conditions, animal abuse at Lake Wales egg farm

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LAKE WALES, Fla. -- Allegations of deplorable conditions and factory farm animal abuse are surfacing against a Lake Wales egg farm.

The Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) held a news conference in Tampa, detailing information about their undercover investigation. They accuse Cal-Maine Corp. of forcing battery caged hens to live, in what they call, a 'house of horror'. According to ARM, Cal-Maine Corp. provides eggs to Walmart and Publix.

"Once these chickens are locked into these systems, they never leave. They are in pitch black darkness for life," Arm Investigations Founder/Investigator Richard Couto said.

Couto said want to stop companies from using battery cage systems for animals.

"There are very few laws, if any at all, to help these animals in these industries and it's sad," Couto said.

Couto hopes they become illegal to use in Florida.

"The alternative is free range chickens that live in a pasture," Couto said.

ARM investigations said Cal-Maine hired one of their undercover agents at the Lake Wales farm.

ARM investigations provided ABC Action News with their video, which they claimed shows horrific conditions.

"The cockroaches were manifesting themselves inside the feather systems of the living of the living birds. They were literally eating them alive," Couto said.

ABC Action News confirmed Polk County Sheriff's detectives visited the site, earlier this month, along with two state veterinarians. ABC Action News contacted the Florida Department of Agriculture. We are waiting for their findings.

The sheriff's office confirmed an employee was charged with one county of animal cruelty for hitting a chicken with a stick. ABC Action News learned the company let go of that employee.

[Cal-Maine provided a statement which can be read here.](#)

During the news conference, ARM Investigations claimed politicians are protecting the use of battery cage systems in the state. One of those senators sent ABC Action News a statement.

Florida State Senator Wilton Simpson released the following statement:

At Simpson Farms, the health and safety of our animals is our first priority. We are completely and totally against the abuse of any animal. If an employee or contractor did this on our property, I would demand they be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Simpson Farms is independently owned and operated contract producer for Cal-Maine Foods. As a farmer for 40+ years, I maintain the highest standards of care for my animals. I don't just own a farm - my family and I live and work at our farm.

The cage systems at our farm are state of the art, and are continuously maintained at the highest standards. Many farmers throughout the country use these systems. The term 'battery' simply refers to the arrangement of the rows and columns of identical cages. We value the health and safety of our animals at Simpson Farms, and use this housing system, as it results in a healthier environment for the hens.

I am all for measures to ensure the health and safety of all animals. The bill referenced in the press conference regarding videotaping was considered by the Legislature

BEFORE I was elected. I was not a member of the Senate at the time and the bill has never been brought since I've been in office.

Walmart issued a statement to our sister station, WPTV:

“We do not tolerate the mistreatment of animals and we’re working with our suppliers to quickly and thoroughly investigate the actions shown in the video and to take the appropriate steps to help ensure this unacceptable behavior cannot continue. We take animal rights seriously and have [strict policies in place](#) to hold our suppliers accountable.”