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Alleged animal abuse, slaughterhouse operations draw rights protesters to east Lee County

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Animal rights protest in east Lee County. Video by Michael Braun



(Photo: Michael Braun/The News-Press)

Protesting what they said was animal abuse and illegal animal slaughtering operations in Lee County, about 200 people lined Buckingham Road in east Lee County on Sunday near the accused sites.

Kayla Leaming, an organizer with Okeechobee Animal Save, Orlando Animal Save and The Save Movement, said the reason for the protest was to bring focus on the alleged slaughter operations.

"We just want to raise awareness of the suffering of the animals," she said. "No matter how you kill them, you're wrong."



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The Save Movement, she said was a peaceful, nonviolent and respectful group.

As they gathered along Buckingham Road and up and down Eastwood Acres, most held signs and waved to passing cars.

The protesters included people from outside the area, Sarasota, Melbourne, Miami, as well as a good number of local residents from Lee, Collier, and Charlotte counties.

"There is footage of extreme abuse to dogs, horses, cows, pigs, goats, and chickens," Leaming said. "The names of the four farms are, Rancho Cabrera, Rancho Santa Barbara, Rancho Anthony and Roman, and Rancho Delicias all located on Eastwood Acres Road."

Trying to stop alleged illegal animal slaughter was on the mind of Donna Meuse of Cape Coral.

"There's a lot of backyard ranches in Lee County," she said. "They say we'll sell you goats and pigs and we'll slaughter them for you. The problem is, where are the regulations? They need to be licensed and inspected."

Nobody from the farms was available for comment with most of the properties seemingly vacant except for a smattering of penned in goats, cows and horses.

Other residents and property owners along Eastwood Acres were sympathetic to the protesters' cause.

"It's my neighbor," said Gilroy Lewis. "Every day I gotta smell this stuff. I want them to stop what they're doing."

Another neighbor, Bob White, who has a fruit stand nearby, concurred. "Every time there's a north wind I smell the hog pens," he said.

A matter of culture is what Zate Monfet, who has a property across from one of the farms in question, linked to the allegations of abuse.

"I'm stuck in the middle," she said. "It's horrible." She also blamed a lack of rules.

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"These guys are just doing this to make a living," she said of the local farms. "They're just letting them do what they're doing. If they did it properly then they could do what they do."

Some of the protesters' signs alleged the state attorney and the Lee County Sheriff's Office were not doing anything to stop the activities.

However, in the wake of a press conference in Fort Myers last week by the Animal Recovery Mission, an animal rights group that highlighted the alleged activities and blamed the sheriff's office, an LCSO agriculture officer said there were problems with those allegations.



Bob White, who operates a fruit stand along Buckingham Road, passed out fruit to some of the 200 animal rights protestors near his stand in Lehigh Acres on Sunday as part of an organized protest against what they said were alleged illegal slaughterhouse operations in the area. (Photo: Michael Braun/The News-Press)

"It's tainted," said Sgt. Randy Hodges, with the Lee County Sheriff's Office Agricultural Unit. "It's what we would call the fruits of the poisonous tree. Right off the bat there were problems with how the evidence was obtained."

Still, those protesting said they would return for more protests in their efforts to get what they said were illegal operations closed.

"I came because I believe that in 2018 all slaughterhouses should be closed," said Jacqueline Woish of Sarasota. "I'm taking this as an opportunity."

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