

## Slaughterhouse investigation details cruel acts



Palm Beach County sheriff's detectives arrested three people on charges they were operating an illegal slaughterhouse in Loxahatchee. (WPEC-CBS12)



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After three men from an illegal slaughterhouse were arrested Thursday in a raid, documents detailing their alleged animal abuses were released Friday.

The owner, Ricardo Cabrera, 57, of Loxahatchee; his son, Chico Allen Cabrera, 29, of Lake Worth; and Roberto Llorente, 65, were charged with multiple counts by the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office.

The 40 criminal counts against Ricardo Cabrera include felony cruelty to animals; conspiracy to commit felony cruelty to animals; killing animals with inhumane methods; conspiracy to commit killing animals with inhumane methods and cruelty to animals.

The younger Cabrera faces 28 counts of similar charges. Llorente faces 44 counts.

The farm, in Loxahatchee Groves, in the 15700 block of 43rd Road North, was shut down and officials are investigating where the meat from the slaughterhouse may have been distributed.

Animal Recovery Mission, the organization that sparked the investigation, told media that they followed meat deliveries from the slaughterhouse to boatyards and restaurants.

ARM, a Miami Beach-based nonprofit that investigates animal cruelty, went to the sheriff's office with video evidence and accounts of cruelty they had collected for the past four months.

The arrest reports describe what the ARM investigator observed and recorded but doesn't detail any subsequent investigation by authorities.

The sheriff's office and state's attorney ran a parallel investigation, PBSO spokeswoman Teri Barbera said.

The county's Animal Care and Control also took 350 chickens, 12 pigeons and seven pigs from the farm during the raid, Barbera said. The chickens will be put up for adoption but the pigs were euthanized out of concern that they may have had an infectious disease.

The slaughterhouse operation, known as Rancho Cabrera, isn't officially listed as a business or with the United States Department of Agriculture as a custom-exempt slaughter farm, meaning it is excused from continuous inspection.

An ARM investigator, who is not a member of law enforcement, posed as a customer and walked onto the property starting in February 2018. There were no gates or signs stopping him from walking to where the slaughtering was taking place, he told deputies.

Llorente told the investigator the slaughterhouse ordered at least 1,500 chickens for \$1 each and overcharged \$13 for slaughtered birds and \$12 for chickens that were alive, an arrest report alleges.

The investigator described to authorities and recorded the men cutting chickens' throats and letting them bleed out in containers while they struggled for minutes, deputies wrote in the arrest reports.

In another video taken in February, Ricardo Cabrera shoots a pig in the head and then stabs it while it "struggles violently kicking its legs and rolling over," according to his arrest report.

In May, the undercover investigator returned and witnessed Chico Cabrera shoot a sheep in the face with a .22 caliber rifle. The sheep didn't immediately die and tried running away, the report alleged. When Cabrera caught up to the sheep, he stabbed it in the throat and hung it while it screamed out and writhed.

The animals slaughtered should be unconscious when killed. Veterinarian Charlotte Dow, hired by ARM, concluded after she watched the videos that that was not the case. The struggling and movements the animals made after they were injured shows they were still conscious when they died, Dow said.

Dow said the pig was shot from 3 feet away when it should have been at a closer range to ensure the bullet entered the brain, the report says.

A judge set the bond for the older Cabrera at \$139,000; \$94,000 for the son; and \$77,000 for Llorente.

It's not the first time ARM has carried out undercover stings in the Loxahatchee area. Its videos led to eight men being arrested in 2015. All eight men arrested in law enforcement raids of three Loxahatchee farms have since had their cases resolved.

And last year, the group released undercover videos from Florida dairy country that drew worldwide outrage. The footage showed images of cows being punched and burned. In that case, six dairy workers were arrested on animal cruelty charges.