



Three cop pleas in Loxahatchee animal cruelty case

LOCAL By Jane Musgrave - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer



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WEST PALM BEACH — Despite claims by a Miami animal rights group that horses were being illegally slaughtered on three farms in Loxahatchee, no evidence was found to back up those claims, an assistant Palm Beach County State Attorney said Friday.

Instead, prosecutor Judith Arco said, eight men who worked on the farms were charged with animal cruelty in connection with the illegal slaughter of goats and one cow.

"There's absolutely not a single video, not any single piece of evidence, that horse slaughter occurred on any of these three farms," she said. Arco was referring to videos provided by members of the group, Animal Recovery Mission, that prompted an investigation — and public uproar — last month.

The videos and a search of the farms also uncovered no evidence that pigs had been boiled alive or any other animals had been abused, she said.

Arco made her comments after three of the men pleaded guilty to animal cruelty charges for using inhumane methods to slaughter a goat at G.A. Paso Fino Farm on Collecting Canal Road this year.

Edgar Bica, 49, was sentenced to five months in the Palm Beach County jail and given credit for the 25 days he had already spent behind bars. Circuit Judge Samantha Schosberg Feuer also ordered him to spend a year on house arrest and another two years on probation.

His 83-year-old father, Edegar Bica, also pleaded guilty to a charge of animal cruelty and killing animals by non-humane methods. Adjudication was withheld and he was placed on probation for 18 months. Rodobaldo Diaz, 47, of West Palm Beach, who also worked at G.A. Paso Fino Farm, pleaded guilty to two counts of animal cruelty, adjudication was withheld and he was placed on probation for three years.

The younger Bica received a harsher punishment because he was on probation, having been convicted of two charges of animal cruelty this year after a Palm Beach County sheriff's deputy discovered he had not treated a hunting dog that had been gored by a hog and was near death. The officer also discovered an emaciated goat on his property, according to court records.



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All fully cooperated after their arrest, Arco said. "They admitted they were wrong," she said. The elder Bica was shocked by the charges, she said. An immigrant, he had used the same method to kill goats in his home country for decades, not realizing the laws were different here.

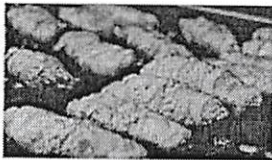
According to Florida law, animals have to be shot or stunned to assure they don't feel any pain when their throats are cut before they are butchered. The men, she said, didn't know that.

The cases against the other men, who worked at nearby Rancho Garcia and Medina Farm, are still pending. One of the men, Rafael Ramirez, 50, is charged with illegal possession of horse meat. But, Arco said, no horse carcasses or other evidence was found to indicate the meat had come from any of the farms, she said.

The other men are also charged with a variety of counts of animal cruelty and killing animals by nonhumane methods, which are felonies.

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