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PRESS RELEASE

Date: May 8, 2018
Case Number: 18ES02329
Case Nature: Animal Complaint (Deceased Cows)

On April 27, 2018, at approximately 1522 hours the Essex Police animal control received a phone call from a third party who had visited a barn [REDACTED] in Essex. As part of his job this employee had been in the barn and had seen and taken pictures of multiple dead cows inside a barn at that location.

Animal control notified the Essex Police Officer in Charge (OIC) who then dispatched a patrol supervisor and a police officer trained in animal investigations to meet with the ACO [REDACTED] to investigate the report of dead cows.

On arrival (at approximately 16:34 hours) investigators met with [REDACTED], son of the property owner [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] provided consent to inspect the barn as part of the report we had received about multiple dead cows inside the barn.

Officers and the ACO went into the barn and verified that there were in fact multiple dead cows (later determined to be 21) and 13 cows that were still alive inside the barn but in very bad condition. Once the officers and ACO verified the report they immediately contacted an investigator from the Chittenden County Humane Society, a Veterinarian and a Deputy States Attorney trained in animal abuse investigations. The other representatives were asked to respond to the scene to assist with the investigation.

On arrival, the Veterinarian and Humane Society investigator all went into the barn to investigate further. The cause of death for the cows appeared to be from lack of adequate food and water over time, and there was no outward signs of any other health issues that could affect the investigators or the public. Unfortunately as part of the initial assessment by the Veterinarian, 2 of the 13 cows found alive were in such poor condition that they had to be put down by the Veterinarian.

For the next several hours, this team worked to get food and water to the cows that were still alive and make them as comfortable as possible. The team started working on finding a farm that could possibly take and care for these cows short term. The team also contacted the Vermont Department of Agriculture to notify them of this investigation and requested assistance in developing a plan of how to dispose of the deceased cows in an approved manner without causing a health hazard.

██████████, the farm owner, agreed to relinquish ownership of the eleven cows that were still alive in the barn to the Essex Police Department so that we could find a farm where the cows could be moved and taken care of. The next day the investigative team found a farm in Westford that agreed to take the eleven cows for care and rehabilitation. Subsequently, the owner of the farm in Westford agreed to take permanent custody of the eleven cows and the Essex Police transferred custody of the cows to the farm owner on May 1, 2018.

That evening the investigative team learned that there were 13 additional cows that were alive outside the barn, in fields owned by ██████████. These cows were checked and it was determined that even though they were thin, they were not in life-threatening danger at this time. ██████████ subsequently agreed to surrender ownership of these 13 additional cows and they were later transferred to the same farm in Westford for new ownership.

In the days following the initial report, investigators worked with the Vermont Department of Agriculture who visited the site and developed an approved plan for the disposal of the deceased cows. All of the deceased cows were disposed under the supervision and approval of the VT Department of Agriculture.

The investigation into the death of the cows has revealed that ██████████, the farm owner, was severely injured in his barn during January of 2018. Due to his injuries, ██████████ was unable to work and his son ██████████ had to take over all daily operations of the farm. When interviewed, ██████████ reported that a combination of financial issues, long severe winter and problems with farm equipment made it so he could not properly take care of the cows after his father's injuries. ██████████ reported that he quickly became overwhelmed, that he could not take care of the cows and they started dying. Interviews with the ██████████ large animal veterinarian revealed that the cows were all alive, thin, but generally in good health during the last visit during February 2018.

This case was reviewed by the Chittenden County State Attorney Office last week. As a result of that review, the Essex Police has cited ██████████ for Cruelty to Animals, a violation of Title 13 VSA 8 section 352(4). ██████████ arraignment date is June 26, 2018.