

Leaders of Pro-Cockfighting Campaign in Oklahoma Are Major Traffickers of Animals for Fighting, Say Animal Groups

Animal Wellness Action and SHARK provide detailed evidence of ongoing gamecock operations built for raising and selling fighting animals

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA, UNITED STATES, March 22, 2023

/EINPresswire.com/ -- [Animal Wellness Action](#) and SHARK [have released a report on the leaders](#) of the so-called

Oklahoma Gamefowl Commission (OGC) detailing their unmistakable involvement in the cockfighting industry, providing footage of their gamecock farms, videos touting their marketing efforts and participation at cockfighting derbies, evidence of shipments of gamecocks through the U.S. mails, gamecock price lists, and more. The OGC is backing HB 2530 and SB 1006 to give them relief from Oklahoma's comprehensive anti-cockfighting law and falsely characterizing their effort as criminal-justice reform effort.

“

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“It is understandable that people committed to breaking the law want to repeal the laws they are breaking,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. “But what is not understandable is why lawmakers would seriously examine legislative ideas from people who exhibit a complete disregard for the law.”

There are no Oklahoma criminal justice reform groups, nor any farming or agriculture groups, that have endorsed

their legislative campaign. “Cockfighters know they cannot convince lawmakers to legalize staged



Jeff (left) and son Blake Pierce, Oklahoma, are breeders of roosters for illegal cockfights. Blake has it "in the blood," proud papa Jeff says.

animal fighting and to overturn a vote of the people,” said Steve Hindi, president of Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK). “They are pretending to be something they are not, and even making George Santos blush with their tall tales.”

SHARK has drone footage of three of the cockfighting farms from the president, vice president and sergeant at arms for the Oklahoma Gamefowl Commission. Animal Wellness also released two videos of other leaders of the OGC appearing in marketing videos made by a Philippines-based cockfighting network.

“The problem is not that our anti-cruelty laws are too harsh,” said Drew Edmondson, former Oklahoma Attorney General (1994-2010) and co-chair of the National Law Enforcement Council for Animal Wellness Action. “Rather it’s that cockfighters are exhibiting knowing and reckless disregard for our laws, and some county sheriffs and district attorneys are failing to uphold the law without fear or favor.”

SHARK and Animal Wellness Action are continuing to conduct ongoing animal-fighting investigations, revealing that Oklahoma, despite a strong law that establishes felony-level penalties for a range of cockfighting crimes, continues to be the “cockfighting capital of the United States.”

From 2004 to 2022, there were only 29 law enforcement actions resulting in the arrest of individuals involved in cockfighting, an average of 1.75 busts a year for 75 of 77 counties in Oklahoma. (Data are not yet available from Oklahoma or Tulsa counties.) There’s not been a single arrest in most of the biggest cockfighting counties in the state, including Atoka, Coal, LeFlore, and McCurtain counties. In fact, there’s not been a single arrest of anyone named in an 87-page dossier assembled by Animal Wellness Action that exposes many of the biggest cockfighters traffickers throughout Oklahoma. The data was assembled by the District Attorneys Council at the request of Oklahoma State Rep. Andy Fugate, D-94, and was obtained by Animal Wellness Action.

The organizations have also investigated the leaders of the Oklahoma Gamefowl Commission, which donated \$41,250 to 34 sitting House members and nine Senators, with the single largest recipient of contributions being Senator Lonnie Paxton, R-21 (\$2,500). Mr. Paxton is the author of SB 1006 to allow counties to cripple penalties in the anti-cockfighting law. Rep. JJ Humphrey has the companion bill, HB 2530, and received \$1,000 from the cockfighters’ PAC.

“Lawmakers should no more take money from illegal cockfighters than they should from dogfighters, the mob, or narco-traffickers wishing to weaken laws that apply to them,” added Thomas Pool, DVM, MPH, DACVPM, the senior veterinarian with the Animal Wellness Action and a native of Lawton and an OSU veterinary college graduate. From 2016 through 2022, Dr. Pool tracked thousands of illegal shipments of fighting birds from Oklahoma cockfighters to Guam, where he served as territorial veterinarian for 17 years. Dr. Pool is a retired Army Colonel who ran the U.S. Army’s Veterinary Command.

A month ago, the Center for a Humane Economy released a [comprehensive 63-page report](#) on the links between cockfighting and avian influenza and virulent Newcastle Disease. There have been 15 introductions of vND into the United States since 1950, 10 of which occurred via the illegal smuggling of game cocks across our southern border from Mexico. (Virulent Newcastle disease is endemic in Mexico and all of Latin America.) Just three of those outbreaks cost the federal government more than \$1 billion.

ABOUT

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies, and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that's why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don't. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Center for a Humane Economy is a non-profit organization that focuses on influencing the conduct of corporations to forge a humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both.

SHARK is a national animal-protection organization focused on documenting and exposing cruelty to animals and holding animal-abusers accountable under the law. With hard-hitting tactics and a fearless approach, along with expert use of technology, SHARK works to document human abuses of animals and show them to the world, with the aim of stopping these abuses once and for all. One of its major campaigns is to "Crush Cockfighting," designed to dismantle the massive network of cockfighting pits and breeders operating clandestinely and even openly throughout the United States.

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